

The Power of a Mayor's Social Media Posts to Create a Support Base of Young Local Citizens: A Case Study

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Abstract. With an active and engaged citizenry, the picturesque city of Bandung, the capital of West Java province, has become a major city in Indonesia. Keeping with the times, Bandung's erstwhile mayor and the current governor of West Java, Ridwan Kamil, has maintained an active social media presence and continues to be a popular figure in social media. During his time as mayor, between 2013 and 2018, Kamil attracted millions of followers on Twitter and Instagram and used social media as a platform to help him manage the city. Kamil would use his Twitter page, @ridwankamil, to actively interact with citizens, and he made it a point to reply to mentions on Twitter. Kamil maintained a more informal tone on Instagram, where he appeared as any other local citizen taking in the sights of the city. In fact, he would ensure that the captions on pictures and contents of his posts were "Instagrammable," knowing fully well that he had a large number of youth followers. This study aims to discover the motivations of social media users in following and in responding to posts from the account of major political influencer's. In light of Kamil's use of social media to help manage the affairs of Bandung, this paper uses a qualitative constructivist approach to uncover the motivations of social media users in following social media posts by politicians and in acting on them. The data used for the research include primary data garnered through in-depth interviews with local youngsters as well as secondary data from traditional and digital literature. It is argued on the basis of the analysis of the aforementioned data that Kamil's conversational tone on social media significantly influenced the youth of Bandung and prompted them to become more aware of the city's issues and more proactive in addressing urban problems. Additionally, the findings of this study also suggest that Kamil's popularity among the youth could prove beneficial for him in future elections. Finally, the study suggests that social media posts are a powerful means to influence young citizens to engage with issues of collective importance and highlights the need for governments to encourage youth participation by increasing the use of social media platforms.

Keywords: *social media, political, influencer*

1 Introduction

People across the world now use social media every day. Many individuals and institutions use such platforms as marketing tools. Thus, in the 21st century social media has succeeded in connecting people across vast distances. Be it self-promotion, brand promotion, or targeted advertising, social media marketing has become such a commonplace phenomenon that it needs no separate introduction thanks to its ability to grab people's attention quickly. To put it simply, social media, be it on the personal, professional, or political front, has become a pervasive feature of 21st century life. The scope of this paper is limited to the exploration of a facet of the political front.

To start with, it should be noted that there are two sides to the advent of social media in this sense. On the one hand, social media creates new channels for young people to engage with civic and political issues outside the confines of traditional public institutions, thereby presenting new opportunities to the youth who were previously excluded from formal channels of political participation. On the other hand, however, these platforms also subject the youth to surveillance, censorship, and other forms of repression (Lee, 2018).

In Southeast Asia, Indonesia is among the countries that have a large amount of active social media users, and it boasts 50 million daily users with the count rising each day. In particular, Indonesians register a strong presence on Twitter and Instagram, with these two apps being used regularly by 65% of the country's social media users. The productivity of Twitter users in Indonesia is largely due to tweets by people below 25 years old (Youth Lab Indonesia, 2017). 87% of the Indonesian tweets are posted using smartphones (We are social, 2017) and 70% of teenagers aged between 15 and 19 years currently own smartphones. The high percentage of

active users proves that social media is the right platform to get people to listen to something, especially if one wants to attract the attention of the youth (Fig.1).

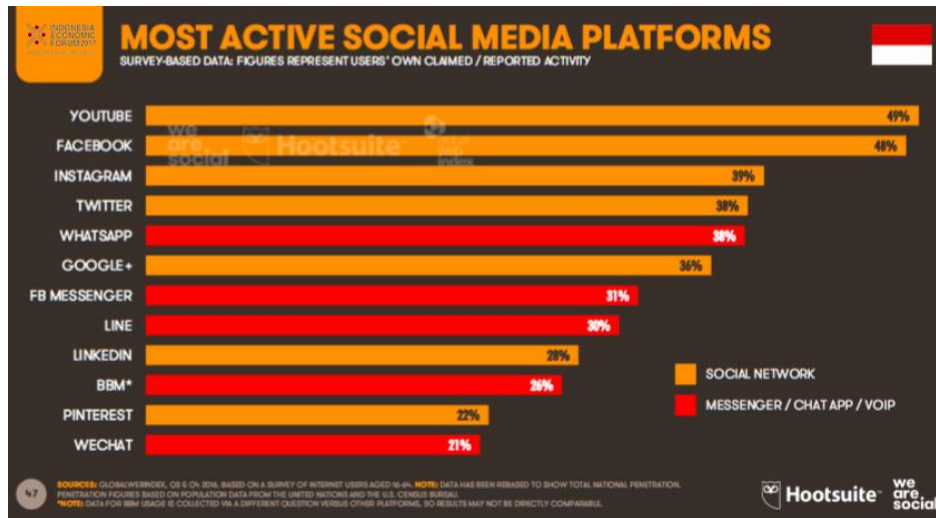


Fig 1. Most Active Social Media Platforms in Indonesia

(Source: <http://www.indonesiaeconomicforum.com/article/infographic/most-active-social-media-platforms-in-indonesia-1>, retrieved: April 26, 2018, 13.06)

Before going into the significance of this aspect, it should be noted that ensuring youth participation in civic activities and politics is a difficult task, even in the case of consequential events such as elections. The election commission of Indonesia has tried to establish numerous programs to involve the youth. One such scheme is a competition to enter an application to get to know the candidates and to learn how to vote. This plan is meant to reach young voters aged 17 and above to make them aware of their right to cast their votes. Political participation is an activity intended to influence people about decision-making, whether by legal, conventional, peaceful, or compelling methods (Bolgherini, 2010).

Currently, however, social media has become a major channel for online interactive participation, and local governments are seizing this opportunity to enhance citizen engagement in political and social affairs (Haro-de-Rosario, Sáez-Martín, & del Carmen Caba-Pérez, 2018). Given the importance of citizen engagement, or the participation of citizens in political and social affairs, research has shown that productive use of social media by government agencies can enhance citizen engagement and confidence in the government. In this regard, administrators of governmental social media channels are well placed to increase participation and information dissemination (Bertot, Jaeger, & Hansen, 2012; Bonsón *et al.*, 2012).

The Internet has been heralded since its inception for the promise of its ability to level the playing field, to flatten power relationships, and to increase democratic participation. Increasingly, this promise appears to be coming close to a partial realization. Today, digital media is arguably creating new and alternate public spheres and is reshaping how the youth participate in civics and politics every day. Much of what we know about the everyday activism and participation of the youth in the civic and political realms stems from studies of young people in advanced democracies (Cohen & Kahne, 2012; Jenkins *et al.*, 2016). At the same time, there is growing literature on youth activism and networked public spheres in non-democratic countries in Southeast and East Asia (Epstein, 2015; Shah, Sneha, & Chattapadhyay, 2015; Wallis, 2011).

Driven primarily by citizen engagement and open government initiatives, local administrations are increasingly using social media for purposes such as the dissemination of information, community outreach, the enhancement of public service efficiencies, the reduction of costs, and the amelioration of inter-agency exchange. Such pervasive use of social media represents the interactive tendency of a government that embraces the myriad benefits of social media. However, it also carries potential risks (Gao & Lee, 2017).

In democratic societies, people's political positions are highly dependent on the likelihood of being persuaded. Most people do not form their political ideas independently of the world around them, and citizens are often influenced by messages that are filtered to them through news media, or by the social context of their peer groups, or both. Most social media users turn to these platforms to socialize, to receive updates from friends in their network, to get emotional support, or to browse photos and videos (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). Although nearly half the social media users never discuss politics on these sites, and only a third find this mode of communication important for political debate, recent studies have indicated that non-political discussions and social interactions on social media can serve as catalysts for political expression and participation (Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014; Diehl, Weeks, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2016).

Social influence is the change in behavior caused in others by a person (or a group of persons). The results of social influence can be seen in how changed (or “influenced”) people perceive themselves in relation to the influencer, to other people, and to society in general (2018a). The indicators of social influence are often conformity, compliance, and obedience, regardless of whether or not they were brought about intentionally. Conformity involves changes in an individual’s behavior so that it fits with the behavior of other people in general or a group of people in particular. It also determines a person’s sense of belonging and esteem, aspects that run very deep into the beliefs and values of individuals. Politicians, in this sense, can exert social influence by using campaign blogs and social media accounts to call supporters to polls, to influence supporters to attend rallies and to state their agendas in a clear manner for the public to see (Momoc, 2013).

In Indonesia, the successful use of social media to increase citizen engagement through social influence can be seen in the case of Ridwan Kamil, the former mayor of Bandung. With several million Twitter and Instagram followers, the mayor, during his tenure, used social media as a platform to help manage the city (Fig 2 and Fig 3).

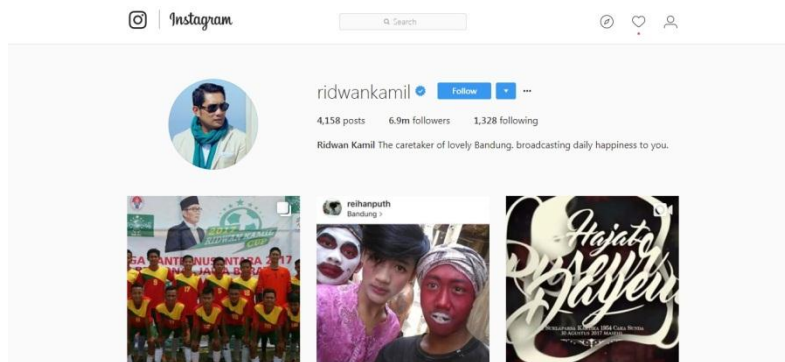


Fig 2. Ridwan Kamil’s Instagram Page



Fig 3. Ridwan Kamil’s Twitter Page

As may be seen in figure 3, Kamil can be observed interacting with the people on his Twitter page by replying to people's mentions to him. Twitter’s real-time dynamics are apt for interactive communication online, and Ridwan Kamil's timeline evinces a lot of tweets by him replying to the people. He encouraged everyone in his mayoral team to use social media platforms to get quick reports from Bandung citizens whenever there required.

Conversely, Ridwan Kamil's posts on the Instagram page (figure 2) are more relaxed, and Kamil primarily used this social media platform as a personal virtual diary. His posts here resemble the profile of an ordinary local citizen posting selfies and photographs of the phenomena that surround him. Knowing that he has a lot of young Indonesian followers, Kamil ensures that the content of his posts and the captions on each picture are “Instagrammable.” Sometimes, he jokes around too and likes to program people's pictures of him or the ones that are tagged to him. His use of social media helped him win the 6th Annual Shorty Award as Social Media’s Best Government. Ridwan Kamil uses social media platforms not just as an electronic instrument to help him produce, publish, control, critique, rank, and interact with others online but also as an avenue he can use to shape public perception of his personality.

Studies on how social media applications have been utilized by local governments demonstrate that state administrations use social media tools as a supplementary way of disseminating public information, and in some cases, they also tend to engage citizens in interactive conversations and actions (Hofmann, Beverungen, Räckers, & Becker, 2013; Mergel, 2013; Zheng & Zheng, 2014). The growing phenomenon of social media usage by government machinery requires better informed and more complex studies that begin with a clearer

understanding of extant scholarly research. Drawing on a comprehensive review of extant research on government social media use in e-governance, Information Systems, and public administration (PA), this study maps research already conducted on government social media use into six focus categories of context, user characteristics, user behavior, platform properties, management, and effects (Medaglia & Zheng, 2017).

The relationship between politicians and citizens (voters) can be described as an agency relationship: the politician is the agent and the citizen is the principal. Both politicians and citizens (voters) are assumed to be acting in self-interest. Authors such as Bertot et al. (2010) have shown that social media offer governments new tools through which to create transparency (Guillamón, Ríos, Gesuele, & Metallo, 2016).

New digital media technology can influence power relations in politics in several and sometimes contrary ways. For instance, digital media have been said to increase centralization processes, with the increasing transfer of control of the campaign strategy to a nodal authority (Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016). Given these facts, this aims to identify and describe the motivations of the people who followed Ridwan Kamil on Twitter and Instagram during his tenure as Bandung's mayor and who were influenced by his posts. The study specifically tackles three research questions:

RQ1: Did the mayor's posts make the youth more aware of him?

RQ2: Did the mayor's posts make the youth more aware of the city's governance?

RQ3: Did the mayor's posts make the youngsters like him and tend to vote for him?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Media

Social media is understood as the collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing, and collaboration. Websites and applications dedicated to forums, microblogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social curation, and wikis are among the different types of social media. Social media is able to achieve high levels of efficiency at relatively low costs, and this attribute makes it suitable for a wide range of firms. Firms face a challenge where it has to find a way to use social media profitably. Understanding what social media is and what it is not can help firms deal with the challenge. Kaplan and Heinlein (2010) classified social media by social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure. According to their classification, there are six types of social media: collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds. (Kaplan and Heinlein, 2009)

Given the pervasive nature of social media in current times, social media can greatly benefit companies. As explained by Bashar et al. (2012), social media marketing involves the understanding of the way technology is making it easier for people to connect with their social networks and how a business can profit from that understanding. However, from their findings, it is also evident that social media marketing can be effective only if the companies present on social media platforms provide timely information needed by consumers. Further, their research has also shown the efficacy of social media in the political arena, where it can serve as a potent tool to gain the trust and goodwill of the youth (Bashar, Ahmad, & Wasiq, 2011).

A person can share sophisticated creations on social media at very little cost and can instantly reach millions of users (Fournier & Avery, 2011). Companies that desire to market themselves visually can project themselves through their surroundings and illustrations via Instagram. Additionally, it is an effective and widely used tool for the purpose of communicating a brand (Yan, 2011). Social media is a part of everyday life for many people, and the number of users of digital social platforms is constantly increasing (Yan, 2011). Also, as the world has become more and more connected, there are various approaches to the communication of a brand through social media marketing. The American Marketing Association (marketingdictionary.org, 2014) describes a brand as one or a combination of these attributes; design, symbol, sign, term or name. A brand helps to identify and differentiate a product or service from its competitors. (Andersson *et al.*, 2015).

Social media has been applauded for revolutionizing the life of consumers (Kaplan & Heinlein, 2009; Mangold & Faulds, 2009), for influencing the formation of general opinions and attitudes, and for exerting a dramatic influence on its users at every stage of the consumer decision-making process including information acquisition, brand awareness, purchase behavior, and post-purchase communication and evaluation (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

2.2. Influencers

The study asserts that a social media influencer is someone who can affect or change the behavior of other people. Too often, the definition of an influencer is misconstrued as an individual's reach and popularity on social media. In actual fact, the recognition of an individual on social media platforms should actually be

considered a bonus that accrues because of that person's social media influence. Travel brands should analyze the types of effect influencers wield on their audiences before asking people to work with them (Dan Peltier). The survey cites recent Nielson data to reveal that 92 percent consumers trust recommendations from people they know, and 70 percent users trust peer experiences posted online.

According to this survey, influence is defined as the ability to cause effect or change behavior. TapInfluence claims that "This common misinterpretation between popularity and influence has led influencer marketing to confuse the principles of traditional celebrity endorsements with the promise of social capital in digital networks". Influencers are usually novel information contributors who can affect the behavior and attitudes of others (Li, Lin, & Lai, 2010).

As an important social concept, trust plays a critical role in individual decision-making, especially when participants are anonymous and do not engage in direct face-to-face interactions (Al-Oufi, Kim, & El Saddik, 2012). Users in an Online Social Network expand their trust relationships with peers who exhibit similar interests and preferences or with whom they have good interactions, and a user trust network is thus formed (Kim & Tran, 2013).

In such a configuration, social media influencers (SMIs) represent a new type of independent third-party endorsers who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media. However, some scholars appear to view SMIs as competing, possibly hostile voices (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009). Ridwan Kamil indirectly became an influencer for his personal brand and his political motives.

2.3. Motivation

The process of motivation comes into play because needs, desires, and expectations that are not met create a certain kind of tension (Jeffrey et al., 1996). According to others, such as Schiffman and Kanuk (2007), motivation can be described as a driving force that arises within individuals because of unmet needs/wants and that forces them to act. In a different sense, Supranto (2007) suggests that motivation indicates a reason for a behavior. Motivation is an energetic force that drives behavior and provides the goals and direction of behavior (Meenaghan & Shipley, 1999).

Meanwhile, the McClelland's Motivation Theory states that human beings have three basic needs that can motivate them to behave in a particular manner: 1) the need for power, 2) the need for affiliation, and 3) the need for achievement. The need for power concerns how far an individual wants to control and influence other people and objects that exist in an environment. Individuals who have high-power motives are more strongly driven to direct and change others or to regulate and influence events occurring in their surroundings. The need for affiliation is the individual's need to feel warmth and to establish closer relationships with others. Individuals with high-affiliation motives tend to be more expressive in articulating their emotions and feelings to others, and are likely to work with others, to make friends, and to engage in social situations. The need for achievement is self-explanatory and reflects the human desire to accomplish the best possible outcomes pertaining to reputation, career, and so on.

3. Methodology

This study uses the constructivist theory that describes human ideas in terms of different kinds of mental constructions based on social experience. The term constructivism is generally used interchangeably with the interpretive paradigm, which examines the individual understanding of a person's social world as expressed through languages, voices, pictures, personal traits, and social rituals (Daymon & Holloway, 2002).

In utilizing the constructivist theory, the present investigation applies a qualitative approach which, according to Poerwandari (1998), creates more chances of obtaining in-depth results (Poerwandari, 1998). Since this paper aims to study the motivations of Ridwan Kamil's social media followers, adopting a qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of respondents' opinions.

Primary data for the study were collected through in-depth interviews of Kamil's social media followers. Poerwandari (1998) stated that every interview is a conversation where questions and answers between the interviewer and the respondent are intended to achieve a specific goal. (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007) This study used the semi-structured type of interview, which is a common type used by researchers because it enables them to stay on track during the interview process (Strauss & Corbin, 1984). Using the constructivist paradigm with a qualitative approach, the in-depth interview method permitted the interviewer to attain more intensive information about whether Kamil's social media followers were influenced by his posts.

Apart from the in-depth interviews, the researcher also utilized secondary data through the observation of Ridwan Kamil's Twitter page, his posts, and the online responses of his followers.

Active university students in Bandung who followed both Ridwan Kamil's Twitter and his Instagram accounts formed the units of analysis for the present project, and the method of judgmental sampling was used.

This type of sampling can help researchers in determining the right informant from whom to obtain accurate information and answers (Lahey & Benjamin, 2007). To be even more specific, this study uses the purposive technique to determine and to obtain informants according to certain criteria: an informant was required to (1) be an active university student in Bandung aged between 17 and 24 years, (2) have a Twitter or Facebook or Instagram account, and (3) follow Ridwan Kamil's social media pages.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

Grounded theory was used to analyze the obtained data. This theory tethers the data to systematically collated classifications before developing and analyzing them through the use of inductive reasoning (Dunn Butterfoss, 2007). Common methods used in grounded theory include participant observation, interviews, and the collection of artifacts and texts.

During the analysis accomplished for the present study, the data were coded into three separate types. The first type was open coding. In this phase, the researcher approached a segment or grouping for information about Ridwan Kamil based on whether or not the respondents were following his social media pages. Subsequently, respondents were asked what they thought of Kamil's use of social media. After interviews with all the respondents were accomplished, it was found that they were all active social media users who used social media platform at least once every couple of hours and were present not just on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, but also on other platforms such as Snapchat and Pinterest. The students were found to use Twitter as a medium to communicate with their friends and to get the latest updates about the world. They usually post about their daily lives and about topics such as the promotion of campus events. Twitter and Instagram were not very different from them; both social media platforms provided the students the opportunity to view how their friends were doing and to attain inspiration from the world.

The second type was axial coding. The answers offered by the informants during the interviews were grouped into categories based on themes, allowing for new ways of seeing and understanding the data (2018b). Les Robinson's theory of social media marketing, The Seven Door Approach, asserts that one of the main aspects of social marketing is that it aims to change people's views

"I think Ridwan Kamil is a great mayor. Maybe it's because he can show that he is just like everybody else. Call himself the caretaker of Bandung right? I somehow feel that isn't his job, but all of us should be as determined as him?"—Gyazi Sumawinata's answer.

With regard to behavioral changes, the respondents said that Ridwan Kamil's postings had motivated them to become better citizens of Bandung. The majority of the respondents, who were not actually Bandung citizens, claimed that they felt they had played a part in making Bandung a better city through small initiatives like keeping the city litter free.

Finally, the third type is selective coding. After grouping and organizing the respondents' answers into the specified categories, the researcher articulated a matching understanding point at this juncture. After asking a few questions about how social media can change people's view, the informants realized that Ridwan Kamil's social media page was a marketing tool seeking to change their opinions. (Les Robinson on The Seven Door Approach). A lot of youngsters are not very aware of politics. Even though they do not show much interest in politics, at some point, politics are discussed everywhere. Research conducted by the author of this paper has revealed that the youth are very intimate with their peer group, which exerts a significant influence on an individual. Thus, it does not matter if someone does not personally like politics; young people must obtain knowledge about politicians merely to keep on track with their peer groups.

"I don't follow much about politics, I know it's full of dramas. But sometimes, when my friends and I hang out, we like to discuss what is going on rather about our personal life for once. I remember once we talked about Ridwan Kamil's Instagram, and how interesting his posts are. So, I checked it out, and it was quite amusing. So I started to follow the not so old mayor on Instagram"—Putri Kasturi, 19, Student to ITB Management

While it is difficult to get youngsters involved in politics, the social marketing accomplished by Ridwan Kamil proves that it can gain people's attention, and can lead young people to support him and to cast their votes for him.

“Yes, I will vote for him next. But to be honest, I would rather see him in a greater and higher role. Ridwan Kamil has a lot of ideas, and he should share it not just to Bandung”– Irshadi Bagas, 20, Student to Universitas Padjajaran, Library Studies

The axial coding effected for the present study revealed that Ridwan Kamil's social media page was able to appeal to the youth and claim its attention to the extent of casting a vote for him.

4.2. Discussion and Conclusion

To conclude, this paper has demonstrated the influence of social media through a particular case study: it is able to capture the attention of young, social media savvy Indonesians who check their phones every couple of hours, and it is capable of increasing the participation of the youth on the civic and political fronts. The interviewed teenagers, ranging from high schoolers to university students, admitted the importance of social media to them. One of social media's major roles is to enable people to interact with one and another. This function accords politicians the opportunity to operate their own social media pages and to use social media marketing techniques to try and influence people's behaviors and decisions in a peaceful manner (Bolgherini, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, conformity is an indicator of effective social influence. It involves the amendment behavior by an individual to fit the social or group norm. In this case, Ridwan Kamil's posts were able to make the people who viewed his posts to feel the sense of belonging toward the city of Bandung. Thus, the postings on Ridwan Kamil's social media pages unconsciously caused the active students of Bandung to become more aware of their city and of the fact that being young voters, their political participation mattered.

Given these findings, the present study allows the following suggestions to be posited for politicians who want to use social media to gain more support:

1. It is vital to know what the citizens want and understand their characteristics such as their preferred social media channels and the proximity of users to one another. For example, if a politician desires to grab the attention and the support of the citizens of Bandung, especially the youth, they should learn to project themselves as citizens of Bandung.
2. Public political figures should understand how social media works and learn to use it effectively. For example, if a politician wants to promote an issue or offer a clarification that requires the use of more than 140 characters the person must use a different platform. Thus, the person must be able to use the features of particular social media channels to their benefit. Politicians must display their mastery over the technology.
3. If the mayor wants to create an online campaign, it must be planned and structured on the basis of the techniques of social media marketing.
4. Finally, it is vital for posts on social media to be interactive because this dimension can make people feel and think that they are communicating directly with the politician.

If political figures desire to gain more votes from a specific target audience such as the youth, they must be able to manage and control social media channels, because these platforms represent the lifestyles and daily routines of young citizens. Most of the politicians who are popular among the youth use social media substantially, just like the President of Indonesia, Mr. Joko Widodo with his famous video blog (vlog).

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