Can Political Information Media Exposure Affect Young People to Participate?

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ABSTRACT

In a democratic country, participation in general elections can be interpreted as a form of citizens' responsibility towards sustainability for their country. In general, this study examines the effect of political information exposure from media on political participation of young people in the Indonesian presidential election in 2019. The data research was collected by using 2 scales, namely political information exposure, and political participation scale. The research sample was 466 undergraduate students, with ages varied from 18 to 21 years who lived in Yogyakarta. The data were analyzed by using structural model analysis through The Partial Least Square (PLS). The results of the study showed that political information exposure from media contributed directly to the political participation both diffuse support and specific support. In addition, the result of the research also found that age is the important aspect of demographic that influences on political participation of young people. The older the respondents, the more level of their political participation.

Keywords: media exposure, political participation, diffuse support, specifics support, election

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Almond & Verba [1], the important factor influencing community participation is the civic culture. The culture of citizenship is essentially a picture of the growth and development of democratic values in a good society. A political system will run well if it is supported by a political culture that is in harmony with the established political system. Political culture is the attitudes, orientations, and beliefs of citizens towards the political system and their role in the system.

A general election is one of the important political processes for the Indonesian state that adheres to the political system of democracy. The most important issue facing Indonesia's general elections is the low level of participation, especially after political reforms from 1998 to 2018 [2]. The group of voters who are considered vulnerable contributing to the low level of participation in elections is the beginner voters, who have an age range from 17 to 21 years.

In a psychological perspective, beginner voters are in transition from late adolescence to early adulthood. Erik Erikson [3] included age 17-21 years into the developmental stage of "identity versus confusion of identity". At this stage, a teenager faces a lot of questions such as who they are, who they really are and where they will go in their life. Furthermore, at the end of this stage of development, a teenager is expected to have succeeded in having an integrated identity.

This identity needs to answer the demands of social roles at the next stage of development, namely the phase of "intimacy versus isolation". At this stage, adults are expected to be able to establish good working relationships form friendships with other people, and feel the connectedness with their community. A teenager who does not succeed in achieving an identity can fail in building intimacy with others (alienation).

How important is young people's participation in the Indonesian election? Participation in elections can be a reference for their behavior when they become adults, as a form of responsibility and commitment to their social role (intimacy). The election agenda can be a good opportunity for young voters to have an experiment with their roles and personalities in ways that are good and harmony with existing social values (identity). Young voters who do not participate in elections can be said to be irresponsible and not committed citizens to their social roles. The scope of political participation in this study focused on the general election participation of the president and vice president of Indonesia in 2019.

Based on political socialization perspective, media is one of the fundamental agents of political socialization. Exposure to political news from the media can encourage citizens to get political information at a higher level. The effect of political information on increasing voting is influenced by the number of media sources that are accessed [4].

Previous research conducted by Kenski & Stroud [5] provided an overview of the role of internet access and online information exposure about presidential campaigns for political participation in the United States. The results showed that there was a positive contribution from internet access and online information exposure to political participation. The forms of political participation included convincing others how to vote, attending meetings for a candidate, doing work for a candidate, donating money, and using signs or attributes to support a candidate.

Quintelier [6] explored the direct role of the media as an agent of socialization on the political participation of young people in Belgium. The results showed that more often a person gets a variety of news through television, newspapers, the internet, social media has a greater tendency to participate in politics such as wearing badges, signing petitions, participating in demonstrations, boycotting products, forwarding political emails, displaying political messages, and attending political meetings. Another study related to media and political participation conducted by Jung, Zuniga, & Valenzuela [5] find out the role of using digital media for political participation both in offline participation and online participation.

Those previous study explained that generally, there is a positive effect of the media on political participation. However, the results of those studies have not explained several things. First, the role of the media was only revealed based on how often the information accessed, without revealing the type of information obtained. Second, the political participation covered wide scope of activities.

Based on the background, the purpose of this study is to examine the effects of media exposure on political participation by considering the type of information and media form. While, the political participation will be focused on activities related to presidential elections based on Easton's framework, namely diffuse support and specifics support.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Political Participation

Political participation is an activity that has an intention or impact on influencing government actions, both direct influence in making and implementing public policies or indirectly in the selection of people who make these policies [8]. According to David Easton, political participation can be seen from the concept of support for political systems, namely diffuse support and specific support, which in concrete manifestations, it shows different objects of support [9]. Diffuse support is more directed to the fundamental aspects of the political system, such as the constitutional order and political institutions in general. Whereas specific support is more directed at supporting political authority holders or related to the performance or output produced.

Huntington & Nelson [10] divided forms of political participation into; a) electoral activities, namely activities that include voting, contributing to campaigns, playing a role in electoral activities, mobilizing support for presidential and vice-presidential couples and any activities that intend to influence the results of the election; b) lobbying, as an attempt by individuals or groups to meet government officials or political leaders in order to influence decision making; c) organizational activities, namely efforts carried out as members or managers of organizations to influence government decision making; d) contacting, namely the efforts of individuals or groups in building networks with government officials to influence their decisions; d) violence - that is individual or group actions to influence government

decisions by creating physical or human property losses, including here are riots, terror, coups, assassination, revolution and rebellion.

There are differences in the measurement of political participation used by researchers, for example, Mcleod et al. [11] measuring political participation by combining voting activities, contacting public officials, and talking about local issues in public forums; while Yang & Dehart [12] use online political participation. Participation that reveals election activities is based on a single activity, namely voting. Therefore, in this study, the scope of early voter participation in elections will be discussed using the framework from David Easton, where political activity can be divided into diffuse support and specific support [9].

2.2. Antecedent of Political Participation

There are various theoretical perspectives to explain the factors that influence political participation. In this study will use the perspective of political socialization. According to Almond & Verba [1], political culture is developed and influenced by the interaction of values in society. Community members experience, absorb, and live the political values around them. These processes are called political socialization. The growth and development of political culture is the result (output) of political socialization.

Herbert Hyman explained political socialization is a process in which institutions instill political values to be maintained from generation to generation so as to create political system stability [13]. Political socialization also can be defined as the development of mental processes where adolescents acquire cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors related to their political environment said Atkin & Gantz [14].

An important period in the developmental stage between the ages of children and adults is a period of formation of political attitudes and behavior as citizens [15]. Political learning is influenced by various socialization agents such as family, peer, school, mass media, and political situations [15], [16]. This study will focus on the role of media as an agent of political socialization for young voters.

The media as a channel to convey things that have been known and done by the previous generation to the new generation. Young people interact directly with messages that have been constructed by the media. News and commentary from newspapers, magazines, television. Through watching television and reading newspaper news about the world of politics, young people become more acquainted with political figures and develop political knowledge and attitudes [11], [17].

According to Yamamoto, Kushin, & Dalisay [18], social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs give the users an opportunity to obtain political information and interact with political experiences. Users get political information through comments on blogs, videos, audio, and photos uploaded by other users. Consumption of political information and political expression online is related to the formation of cognitive aspects, attitudes, and political behavior.

2.3. Media Exposure

Understanding the meaning of media, the Oxford Dictionary describes it as the main channels where many people receive information and entertainment, i.e. through television, radio, newspapers, and internet [19]. According to McLuhan [20], media is a tool for self-expansion. Media is basically empty until we perceive some form of content which is interpreted as a message. Further explained, a mass media is a kind of media that can be seen as a meeting between mass communication, culture, and technology. In this case, television, newspapers and magazines are included.

Based on the information processing research in the field of psychology, the special characteristics of media content will not be able to directly shape the recipient's understanding of an event because the individual will actively separate and rearrange the information into something meaningful to the individual. It was further explained that factual knowledge is not sufficient for action in politics because it cannot explain political events and does not reveal anything about the capacity of individuals to use knowledge intelligently [21].

Mass media, both conventional and modern, provide a lot of information to the public, including political information. Many political parties have used mass media and social media as a means to convey messages. Based on the view of social learning theory [22] the information about political activities delivered through media can be the object of observation for adolescents. When adolescents make imitation then get reinforcement from the environment, the more and more new political behavior is formed. The imitation process without the coercion attitude can be a powerful force of socialization.

Socialization by giving examples will look more important than socialization in other ways [23]. The results of studies conducted by Kim & Chen [24] show that there is a direct role of political information from the internet (blogs, social networks) on the political participation of young voters in the United States.

2.4. Media Exposure and Political Participation

Media is one of the important agents in political socialization [13], [25]. Mass media can be a very important political socialization tool because young people can get political information directly without going through family and school, so that it can influence political values, opinions and attitudes [26], [27]. This process can be explained through the concept of observational learning.

The theory of social cognition [28] provides an explanation of how behavior can be formed through observation of the models that appear in the mass media. Observers see the consequences of the behavior displayed by the model, whether getting reward or punishment. In addition, the observer can also learn from observing others who imitate the behavior of the model, whether it can imitate (efficacy) and what effects it has [29]. In the context of elections, young people get various information from the media regarding election-related news.

Media system dependency theory stated by Ball-Rokeach [29] explained that there are three parties, namely: the media, the audience, and the community that are interdependent. Achievement of objectives, on the one hand, depends on the availability of the resources of the other party. At present, the media has an important role in overseeing the democratic process. On the one hand, media has the resources to present actual and objective information related to the activities of holding elections, and on the other hand, the audience is very in need of information from the media to understand the ongoing political realities, as well as the social (community) system which has an electoral agenda that can be achieved if the media and the voters support it.

The internet also provides new and cheaper ways in which an individual can participate in politics, for example sending aspirations via e-mail to the presidential and vice-presidential spouses or contributing to campaigns. Based on the description above, it can be concluded that political information obtained through media (conventional & internet) and social media can increase political participation. Therefore, we advance the following hypotheses.

1) *Hypothesis 1:* political information from media will affect political participation diffuse support
2) *Hypothesis 2:* political information from media will affect political participation specifics support

3. METHODS

The research variables involved in this study were political information exposure and political participation. The research subjects were beginner voters who had the right to give political rights and reside in Yogyakarta. The number of research subjects was 466 students aged 18-21 years who come from various regions in Indonesia.

Political participation was measured in the different form of political participation, namely diffuse support activities and specific support activities. The diffuse support activity was measured by the scale of political participation-diffuse support that consists of 8 questions (alpha = 0.86), while the specific support activities was measured by the scale of political participation-specific support which consists 9 questions (alpha = 0.92). The examples of the questions such as: "How often do you remind others to use their vote; attend a presidential campaign".

The scale of exposure to political media information is measured using questions based on the concept of [30] namely: obtaining political information (about the presidential and vice-presidential pair and party, election administration) from television, newspapers, radio, news media internet, and social media. It consists of 15 questions (alpha = 0.89). PLS (Partial Least Square) program to test the predictive model of political participation.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The test results of the predictive model of political participation are shown in the following figure 1`:
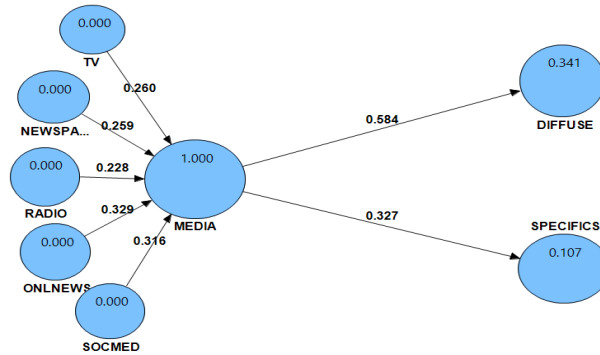
Figure 1 Media exposure – political participation model.

The path coefficient of relationships between variables can be seen in the following table 1 :

Table 1 Table Path Coefficients

Variables	Original sample (β)	T-Statistics*
Media exposure → Diffuse support	0,586	17,496
Media exposure → Specific support	0,327	8,662
Television → Media exposure	0,260	20,065
Newspaper → Media exposure	0,259	19,290
Radio → Media exposure	0,228	10,884
Online news → Media exposure	0,329	21,507
Social media → Media exposure	0,316	19,437

*T-Statistic significant > 1,96

From table 1, it is shown that the relationship between media exposure and diffuse support is significant with a T-statistic of 17.496 (> 1.96). The original sample estimate value is positive which is equal to 0.586 which indicates that the direction of the relationship between media exposure and diffuse support is positive. Thus, hypothesis 1 of this study which states that media exposure affects diffuse support participation, is accepted.

In table 1, it is shown that the relationship between media exposure and specifics support participation is significant with T-statistic of 8.662 (> 1.96). The original sample estimate value is positive which is equal to 0.327 which indicates that the direction of the relationship between media exposure and specifics support activities is positive. Thus, hypothesis 2 in this study is accepted.

Table 1 above also shows that the relationship between television and media exposure is significant with a T-statistic of 20.068 (> 1.96). The original sample estimate value is positive which is equal to 0.260 which indicates that the direction of the relationship is positive. In the same way, the newspaper, radio, online news, and social media have contributed significantly to media exposure with T-statistics > 1.96. In addition, the relationship between the age and diffuse support activities is β = 0,173 (T-statistics >1.96), while the relationship the age and specifics support is β = 0,160 (T-statistics > 196).

In terms of the general effects of media exposure, our results demonstrate that all of different media form has significant effects on political participation both political activity diffuse support (for examples, attending meetings in the community, reading political news, inviting discussion about political issues) and specific support (for example, attending

a presidential candidate campaign, volunteering for candidate supporters).

Our study results show some support for the notion that receiving political information from television leads to increase political participation among beginner voters. After getting information about presidential candidate profile, general election information, and political advertising then the youth will share these information to other people, remind others to vote, and looking for more information related to the general election. In the same way, information exposure from the radio also was associated with political participation. Our finding is consistent with recent studies on the effects of media on political participation [6], [30], [31]. In our study also explained that the newspaper is still being important media for the youth to get political information. Higher frequency of reading newspaper will lead to higher levels of political participation. Newspaper readers are more informed than those who rely on television. Likewise people with high cognitive skills are more likely to learn about political issues from newspapers, in contrast to people with average or low cognitive skills [32].

Further findings in this study explain that political information received by young people through online news sites has a significant contribution to political participation in both diffuse support and specific support. These results are in line with Linaa Jensen's view [33] that the internet has evolved from the information era to the era of communication and networking, so it has the potential to contribute to democracy and civic engagement. Furthermore, Benjamin Barber [33] said that the internet is a new public area that can replace traditional channels for

participation in political activities, such as newspapers, television, radio, and meeting on a political campaign.

The results of this study also showed that the age factor was positively correlated with the political participation of beginner voters. This finding is in line with the results of research conducted by Quintelier [6] which shows that young voters tend to be low in voting behavior, and will increase with age into adulthood, and decrease in old age as they begin to move away from social life.

5. CONCLUSION

All of the hypotheses were proven by the data from the research field. The media exposure has a positive effect on political participation. All of the media form i.e. television, radio, newspaper, online news, and social media, have contributed significantly to media exposure. In addition, the age affects political participation both diffuse support and specifics support. The older they are, the higher the level of political participation.

Based on this study results, it can be concluded that television, radio, newspaper, online news, and social media are important tools for delivering political information to young people to increase political participation in a presidential election.

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