

The Characteristics of Meme in Social Media: Case Study 2019 Presidential Election in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Technological advances are not only used for personal gain but also as a tool to spread propaganda by political activists. Social media is often used because it is cheap and can spread information quickly to many people. The memes were analyzed from the linguistics point of view on structural morphology and syntax. Both of these approaches are used to see the characteristics of memes. CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) was also used to analyze the selection of diction while showing the ideological context found in memes. This study used descriptive qualitative research methods where researchers truly describe the data that exists without making interference to the data. The source of data in this study were images and photos that contain political memes found in Instagram. After analyzing the data, researcher concluded that the Indonesian political meme, if viewed from the lingual form, consisted of different forms, namely phrases, clauses, and sentences. Furthermore, the selection of diction in memes was done to provide a humorous effect, this also provides another effect, namely the belief in propaganda carried out by political aspirants in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Characteristics meme, Critical discourse analysis of meme, Meme in social media, Meme in presidential elections, Presidential election in Indonesia*

1. INTRODUCTION

In mid-2018 to early 2019, Indonesia entered a roaring political year in preparation to the 2019 General Elections where the people chose, for the first time, both Presidential Candidate and Legislative Bodies in the same day. This resulted in massive news in the mass media about the profile of each candidate. The mass media are crowded by the promotion of each candidate. The promotion did not come only from television and the printed media, but also spread on social media. Various surveys produce data which states that Indonesia is a country that is very close to social media. It was seen when the ownership of social media accounts from year to year continues to increase. The increase in the number of accounts is not separated from the increasingly popular and growing social media such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram* and different kinds of social media anew. It can be seen from the surveys that have been done by APJII collaboration with the centre for

communications research, University of Indonesia, surveying 2,000 internet users from various provinces in Indonesia. The results of this survey mentioned that as much as 87,4% of the total responders love to access social media [1].

The election can be said as the arena of contestation. The process of contestation is done to show the idea and the program of each Presidential and VP candidate. Promotion of the vision and mission are spread in social media because it is one of strategic media according to the results of the survey done by APJII and University of Indonesia. The use of slogans and signs under popular hashtags in social media showed the existence and the support garnered by each candidate. The situation in 2019 election was different compared to the previous elections. There is a new partisan pattern to improve and show the partiality of the community against the opposing candidate. People spread the news about the candidates on social media daily without any control and clear sources. Many of these proved to be a hoax spread to gain the

attention of the community. The reason behind this situation is to cause confusion within the community so it will result in a lot of people changing their voting preference. The same situation happened in the United States 2016 presidential election where the Presidential candidates and the people constantly share contents on social media, like *Facebook* to influence the decision of voters in the country [2].

Hoax on the presidential election process is deployed not to show great support of the supported candidate, but was made instead to attack the opposing candidate. The Hoax is designed and intended to reach the people who have low understanding and media literacy. The content will show information that is not verified properly and includes a pattern of lies that almost can be said to be logical. Hoax on social media can cause some consequences, among others, the disharmony between the supporters of the candidates, insulting each supporter of the candidate, and the saturation in society to follow the development of the contestation in the election.

Based on these consequences, the community began to switch to things that are light, easy to understand, and more entertaining. One form of diversion as a response to the fierce contestation is in the form of memes. Dean emphasized the role of the visual for most citizens involved in politics, where politics is transformed into a visual media such as memes that can be shared widely [3]. Memes usually feature a picture which can drive public opinions [4] by following the pattern of positive public response to the memes presenting negative aspects of each candidate [5].

A Meme can be defined as an idea, behavior, or style that spreads from one person to another. Memes spread by using digitally produced image has grown in number because they can go viral very quickly in social media [6]. Memes on the internet take shape as image, hyperlink, video, website, or hashtag. Memes are a part of the internet culture, which usually contains a joke which can affect the transmission online [7]. A Meme circulates on social networks from one friend to another. Memes become popular because it can be a joke, satire, or any expression of feelings of the user in the virtual world and it is quickly becoming more widespread [8].

A Meme is a complex thought. It becomes an element of cultural transmission that is able to penetrate the mind [6]. Memes regarding the election is shaped in a particular way, different from the general meme that is circulating around. This can be seen when the memes are designed using pictures and entertaining jokes, with indirect persuasive in the form of signs that require additional interpretation. A meme uses icons to explain and disseminate ideas [9]. The study of memes as a phenomenon in the dimension of transmission and the production of culture [10]–[15] was characterized by the use of internet technology that can make users produce and evaluate various content as well as organize available online data [16].

2. METHOD

The Method used in this research is the descriptive qualitative method. In this research, qualitative method is

used to completely describe the data in the form of meme for what it is without any interference. This is done because one of the variables used in this research is an arena of political contestation. The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used to analyze the data in this study. Meme as data source is analyzed linguistically by looking at the vocabulary and analyzing the meaning of the text semantically while the image used is seen as a form of visual sign.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the data collection, this study chose five forms of memes that are sourced from Instagram accounts. The five memes taken from Instagram are presented as follows.

3.1. Data 1



In data 1, the visual sign consists of six images structured in the form of serial panels, while the language as verbal sign appears in the context of the fifth image. In data 1, a compound sentence appears as the verbal sign in the form of two clauses. The structure of the verbal sign is as follows:

“Sudah jangan menatap terlalu lama, jadi nggak enak nih ama tetangga sebelah”.

(Please don't stare too long, this is not comfortable)

The language used in this meme is a form of informal language, indicated by the use of the word *nggak* (no), *nih* (this), and *ama* (with) as a vocabulary commonly found in daily conversations. The vocabulary was selected to bring up the value of the humor that shaped a satire on this

meme. The context of verbal sign on this meme is related to the visual signs presented. Coherence, cohesive, and linearity between each of the signs are required so as to produce unity of discourse and meaning.

On the first to the fifth image, presidential candidate number 1 was pictured standing side by side with a young and beautiful woman, while in the sixth image, presidential candidate number 2 was pictured sitting side by side with a political figure, Ratna Sarumpaet who was involved in a hoax case. Using this meme, the creator tried to herd the consciousness of the electorates through subtle political discourse. The political discourse was shaped by the frequency of the visual signs which shows the presidential candidate number 1 a lot more than the presidential candidate number 2. The process of herding the consciousness was raised at the time of viewing by the visual signs showing the woman standing side by side with each candidate. The sixth image creates supposition by interconnecting the presidential candidate number 2 with a woman who was involved in a hoax case.

Indirectly, the creator expects the electorates to be conscious of, interested in, confident, and motivated to choose and decide the presidential candidate number 1 as a better choice. The creator deliberately chooses positive visual signs for the presidential candidate number 1, while choosing the negative sign for the presidential candidate number 2. In addition, the creator did not bring up the context on each of the images, so that new context arises and diverts the context of each of the visual signs. A new context is reinforced by verbal sign that is insinuating.

3.2. Data 2



Data 2 shows meme with verbal sign that reads as follows:

Mr. Prabowo:

the earth and water and natural riches contained therein controlled by the state and used for the maximum prosperity of the people but our land is precisely controlled by the elite.

Mr. Jokowi: I know Mr. Prabowo has a vast land in East Kalimantan amounting to 220,000 hectares also in Central Aceh of 128,000 hectares.

Animation: Oo, so it turns out you are the elites, tuman (slapped).

The meme consists of three pictures with their own verbal sign. The first and the second image formed a series of information, replicating the crowded discussion after the session of presidential debate between the two candidates. The third picture is the icon accompanied by the use of popular language that are trending in social media at that time, namely the use of the word *tuman*, refer to a bad habit. The use of the word *tuman* devoted to things or deeds that are less preferred by the community. It means that the association of the word *tuman* refers to a negative thing. Thus, this meme is an allusion to Mr. Prabowo about the ownership of large tracts of land in some areas. In addition, this meme shows the alignments of creator toward their preferences in the presidential contestation. Allusions are made with the pattern of comedy, so that the impact can be appreciated as an entertainment by the connoisseurs of social media. A new pattern of support such as this meme is widely used in the 2019 Presidential Election.

3.3. Data 3



Data 3 shows a visual sign of the two presidential candidates hugging someone in the middle. The context behind this visual refers to the moment when Pencak Silat athlete from Indonesia succeeded to get gold medal at the

Asian Games 2018. In the Indonesian context, when two or more people doing a group hugs, it means that they have a close relationship and are not mutually hostile. The verbal sign here was formed of compound sentence by chaining two clauses without the use of conjunctions as connecting idea. The verbal language reads as follows:

In the world of politics, we compete, in the real world we love each other.

The political discourse that appears from this verbal sign represent neutrality. The discourse formed through visual and verbal signs does not try to take sides or degrade one of the candidates. There are two concepts embedded in the verbal sign to be understood by the reader of the meme. The sign tries to differentiate the political world and the real world as two totally different concepts. The creator shows the difference in attitude displayed by the candidates by saying that they compete in the world of politics while being friendly in the real world. The humor in Data 3 was shown using the caricature visual style that accentuate both of the candidates. The creator might expect that people would drop their hostility towards each other just because they support different candidate. The hostility caused by the contestation in presidential election take forms in online insults, hoax spreading, and even started to argue on social issues based on religion, race, and ethnicity to smear the opposing camps.

3.4. Data 4



Data 4 describes a political situation that took place in the 2019 presidential election. The meme shows photos of Mr. Joko Widodo with Mr. Prabowo sitting side by side, even though they compete in the race for Presidential Election. This shows that they can be harmonious outside of the competition. However, the supporters of the two camps remained hostile towards each other. The second

Photos suggests that the supporters of both camps are arguing physically and throwing insults to each other inciting acts of violence. The visual signs are accompanied by the verbal sign that reads as follows:

The presidential election was held only once every 5 years, but the sins on spreading slander, hoax, curse, and insults will haunt until death. Be a supporter who know the rules and ethics.

The sentence formed over two clause each correlated between the information at the first clause and the second. It tries to appeal to the supporters of both candidates to stop the hostile attitude and negative deed they've done. The content of the sentence is an advice to the supporters to stop doing slander, hoax, curse, and insult. In addition to the appeal, the sentence is a reminder to the supporters that their actions will not vanish after the political campaigns ended, but the action will be recorded as their own sins that they will be held responsible in the hereafter.

Political contestation is always synonymous with a disagreement happened between the supporters, so the meme creator inserted an advice to the supporters to honor the rules and ethics. The advice is an appeal to the public to become a wiser man in dealing with politics. Based on this sign, it can also be interpreted that every supporter needs to promote social and cultural unity, as displayed in the wisdom of the people of Indonesia. This interpretation is supported by the visual sign showing Mr. Joko Widodo and Prabowo sitting side by side smiling despite being in a competition.

3.5. Data 5



In the last data, Data 5 shows the pattern of a meme different from the previous four. Here, the verbal sign used is not related to the political discourse, rather, it was seen as like daily conversations. It's just that the speakers are the two figures who are competing in a presidential election. The language used also tend to be more relaxed.

The verbal sign was arranged as if Mr. Joko Widodo and Mr. Prabowo are having a conversation. The verbal sign reads as follows:

Jokowi : How tough are you?
 Prabowo : Yesterday I bought **tempe**,
 Jokowi : Then..
 Prabowo : Anger **temperamental** management.
 Jokowi : Now it's my turn, how tough are you?
 Jokowi : Alright, yesterday I was given a weight gain medicine
 Prabowo : Then..
 Jokowi : I give the medicine to you.
 Together : Don't be angry, we are brothers.

The interconnected verbal signs are presented like a Batavian comedy, with quips and jabs spoken by both sides laden with humor. For example, Mr. Prabowo who was known with his passion and overflowing emotion, delivered the joke starting with him buying *tempe* (Indonesian special food) which then revealed as anger temperamental management. Mr. Joko Widodo who was known with his thin body then said that he was given a weight gain medicine before revealing that the medicine was given to Mr. Prabowo that has a large physique. The humor here is that Mr. Joko Widodo stayed skinny because the medicine was given to Mr. Prabowo, hence his large physique.

This meme is more entertaining because it does not feature political context in its verbal sign. The language uses daily conversation in a relaxed manner. However, this meme was concluded with an important advice, namely both (Mr. Joko Widodo and Mr. Prabowo) displayed close togetherness by showing them embracing each other. The verbal sign at the end also shows an appropriate advice regarding the hostile situation behind 2019 presidential election which has been filled with arguments, splitting the society into two camps. In fact, even though the society was split into two, we are still indeed brothers of one nation, Indonesia.

4. CONCLUSION

Political competition always brings a heated discussion in many media, becoming the talks in the community. It shows that people's enthusiasm is high in the holding of 2019 General Elections since it especially revolved around both the presidential race and legislature representatives. This enthusiasm was shown in many ways, one of them is by using memes on social media. This way of interaction seems to be more effective to quell the hostile situation between supporters. A meme presents support with new style, with funny pictures, entertaining jokes, and moral advice. The rise of the use of meme is the impact brought by the saturation of political news and hoax in public sphere and social media. It also shows positive attitude expected by the people in response to the political issues political churned between both candidates' camps.

Based on the five data displayed, the meme has a diverse function and purpose. Data 1 and 2 show the creator's support to one of the presidential candidates.

Such support is an effort to garner public opinion to vote for one preferred candidate. Data 2 was made by using comedic style and display the data visually as well as using numbers as factual support. Data 3 and 4 show an intention to support both presidential candidates. Data 4 was made to provide advice to the proponents. The context of the advice that was made refers to social norms and religion. This shows the creativity of the meme creators in giving support to both presidential candidates. The last meme which is data 5 is made with an informal style that is not politically charged. The flow of the verbal language displayed the creativity of the community in using social media to deliver entertaining content amidst the political discourse.

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