

THE DYNAMICS OF REGIONAL HEAD ELECTIONS IN THE DIGITAL ERA IN INDONESIA: THE PERSPECTIVE OF FIRST-TIME VOTERS

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Abstract: Indonesia's Regional Head Elections in 2024 show significant changes in political campaign strategies, especially with the increasing use of social media as the main tool. Social media has become a strategic tool for regional head candidates to convey their vision, mission, and work programs, as well as build their political image. As the dominant platform in the digital era, social media allows for wide, fast, and efficient dissemination of information, especially in reaching young voters who now account for around 60% of the total electorate. Young voters, who are active in using social media, are highly influenced by digital political content from influencers, public figures and peers. The ease of direct

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interaction between candidates and voters is also an added value that makes social media superior to traditional campaign methods. However, on the other hand, the use of social media in political campaigns faces several challenges, including the spread of disinformation, manipulation of opinions by buzzers and influencers, and potential violations of user data privacy. For this reason, increasing digital literacy and political awareness among the public, especially first-time voters, is important so that voters are more critical in filtering the information received. With the right strategy, social media can be an effective and ethical campaign tool, supporting a healthier and more participatory democracy. This research provides recommendations for candidates and stakeholders to maximize social media responsibly to gain voter support.

Keywords: Beginners; Digital; Regional Head Election; Social Media; Voters.

1. Introduction

Regional Head Elections in Indonesia play an important role in the political system because they provide space for the community to channel their political aspirations and elect leaders who are considered capable of advancing their regions (Andrian, Trihastuti, and Puspitasari, 2020). The quality of people's political participation in Regional Head Elections is determined by various factors, including easy access to voting and awareness of the importance of political participation. According to Gaventa and Valderama, political participation is a series of actions in the political realm such as campaign activities involving individuals or groups, usually from political parties or state institutions, with the aim of encouraging increased community involvement in political activities (Andrian et al., 2020). Through Regional Head Elections, the community can play an active role in political activities that are expected to respond to local aspirations, present relevant policies, and ensure sustainable regional welfare and development. Regional Head Elections are also a tangible manifestation of the decentralization of power (Musafir and Fikri, 2022). In the context of local elections, political communication is at the core of electoral dynamics. The political messages that are composed, delivered and received by the public can have a significant impact on the outcome of local elections and, more importantly, on the overall health of democracy (Syauket et al., 2024). The role of the media, both traditional and social, in shaping political narratives, influencing people's perceptions and playing an important role in conveying political information to the public (Rahmadi et al., 2024). Over time, the organization of Regional Head Elections has undergone various changes, especially in terms of campaign strategies used by regional head candidates. One of the most significant changes is the growing use of digital technology, especially social media, as a political campaign tool. In the current digital era, social media has become the main platform for candidates to socialize work programs and influence voter preferences (Abidin, 2023).

In the 2024 Regional Head Elections, the use of social media as a campaign tool for candidates is expected to increase significantly compared to previous elections. This is driven by the growing number of internet users in Indonesia, as well as the wider penetration of social media among the public. According to 2024 data from Databoks Katadata, there are 191 million social media users in Indonesia, with 167 million of them being active users. This figure reflects the high penetration of social media, especially among the productive age group (18-34 years old), which dominates the use of social media with a percentage of 54.1% (Panggabean 2024). In addition, social media users in Indonesia are more dominated by women with a percentage (51.3%) than men with a percentage (48.7%). Some of the most frequently used platforms include YouTube (53.8%), Instagram (47.3%), Facebook (45.9%), WhatsApp (45.2%), and TikTok (34.7%). The presence of these platforms makes it easier for regional head candidates and campaign teams to communicate directly with voters, build an image, and spread political messages quickly and widely (Panggabean, 2024).

In the context of the 2024 Regional Head Elections, candidates no longer rely solely on traditional campaign methods, such as face-to-face meetings, banners, or advertisements in print and television media. Candidates are now starting to use social media as the main means of interacting with voters, conveying their vision, mission and work programs directly. Social media not only allows candidates to reach more voters in a shorter period of time but also provides a space to communicate personally and build emotional closeness with the community. In addition, the cost of campaigning through social media is much cheaper than conventional campaign methods, which often require a large budget.

Social media, which previously only served as a communication platform, is now a strategic tool in political campaigns. The use of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok is increasingly widespread, especially in digital campaigns conducted by regional head candidates to socialize the vision, mission, and work programs of each candidate to the public. In the context of regional head elections, the use of social media is not only an informative campaign tool but also a medium of persuasion and political propaganda (Noorikhshan et al., 2023).

In addition, social media has become a major platform for political information dissemination. It allows direct interaction between prospective leaders and voters while supporting wider and faster campaign dissemination. The impact is particularly pronounced on first-time voters, who are generally active users of social media (Ritonga, 2024).

First-time voters are an interesting group to observe, as they are individuals who are exercising their voting rights for the first time. Based on General Election Commission Regulation No. 11/2018, citizens who have reached the age of 17 or are

married have the right to vote. Young people who have just turned 17 years old and are eligible to exercise their voting rights, both in general elections and regional head elections, are included in the category of first-time voters (Arifin et al., 2024). The participation of young people as first-time voters reflects an active contribution to building democracy.

However, most beginner voters have a dynamic political orientation and tend to be tentative. This orientation is influenced by various factors such as environment, education, and socio-culture. Therefore, regional head candidates and political parties often make novice voters the main target to gain vote support. However, if these novice voters do not have sufficient political insight, they are at risk of being easily influenced.

Related to this, social media has an important role in shaping the political preferences of novice voters. Social media not only offers information but also influences perceptions through easily accessible content, such as visual messages, videos and news disseminated in real-time. This creates a new dynamic in local elections, where first-time voters who may not have fixed political preferences can be influenced by opinions and trends emerging on digital platforms (Laorensa, Wulan Suri, and Dani, 2024).

There are several factors that make social media an effective tool in influencing political choices, especially among first-time voters. First, social media allows for rapid and widespread dissemination of campaign information. Second, interactive features such as comments and direct messages create direct communication between candidates and voters, strengthening emotional connections. Third, with algorithms and user data, candidates can personalize campaign messages to make them more relevant to certain groups, so that messages are more targeted (Sutisna, 2024).

However, while social media offers many advantages, there are serious challenges such as the spread of disinformation that can mislead voters. The speed of information dissemination on social media is often used by certain parties to spread hoaxes to damage the image of opponents. In addition, regulations on digital campaigns are still limited in Indonesia, opening up loopholes for violations such as opinion manipulation through bots or non-transparent political advertisements (Syamsidar et al., 2023).

To overcome this challenge, it is necessary to increase digital literacy so that people can be more critical in filtering information. In addition, stricter law enforcement by the Election Supervisory Agency and the General Election Commission is needed in overseeing digital campaigns. The government also needs to improve monitoring of provocative or misleading content on social media. In this context, regional head candidates must utilize social media effectively, because proper management will be

very influential in gaining the support of novice voters and determining success in Regional Head Elections (Tjenreng, 2020).

As in previous research conducted by Dimaz Oktama Andriyendi, Nurman S., and Susi Fitria Dewi with the title "Social Media and its influence on the Political Participation of novice voters in the Regional Head Election". This article provides an in-depth analysis of the influence of social media on the political participation of novice voters in East Tanjung Jabung Regency in the 2020 Regional Head Election. Through a quantitative approach with an Ex-post Facto research type, this study found that social media has a significant influence on the political participation of novice voters, with an Adjusted R Square of 31%. This means that 31% of the novice voter political participation variable is explained by the use of social media. The strength of this study lies in the strong empirical data showing a significant relationship between social media and political participation, as well as the reliable presentation of quantitative results. This is an important contribution to the understanding of how social media can act as a tool to drive political participation, especially for younger generations who are more familiar with information technology. However, the article has some weaknesses, mainly because it focuses too much on statistical data and therefore does not explore the social dimension of individuals' interactions with social media. This limited approach does not adequately describe the subjective experiences of first-time voters who receive political influence through social media, such as how their preferences or views on prospective candidates are formed and changed. In addition, this study did not make comparisons between different regions or elections, which might have enriched the analysis with a comparative perspective. Nonetheless, this article brings novelty to the field by showing that social media is not only an information tool, but also an important tool in raising political awareness and political participation of young people in Regional Head Elections, especially in a local context such as Tanjung Jabung Timur (Andriyendi, S, and Dewi, 2023).

Meanwhile, as in other previous research conducted by Dewi Putri Sitompul, Yulita Sitorus, Eugenia Gracia Br Sibuea, and Sutri Destemi Elsi, with the title "The Role of Social Media in Influencing the Behavior of Young Voters". This article aims to examine the role of social media in influencing the political behavior of young voters in Indonesia, with a focus on increasing young voters' political participation and interaction through campaigns on digital platforms. In this study, researchers used a qualitative-descriptive method to understand how social media became a direct platform for candidates to communicate with voters, disseminate information, and garner political support. One of the main strengths of this article is its emphasis on the importance of media and political literacy for first-time voters to be able to filter information critically. It also provides a unique perspective on how social media can

shape the political orientation of young voters, who are dynamic and easily influenced by the evolving media environment. However, this article also has some shortcomings, such as the lack of statistical data that can strengthen the research conclusions, making the results of the analysis less representative. This descriptive approach, while providing a detailed picture, does not quantitatively measure how much influence social media has. In addition, the negative aspects of social media such as misinformation and opinion polarization do not receive an in-depth discussion, even though these phenomena are often a challenge in digital politics. The novelty presented by this article is the emphasis on the need for media literacy training for young voters as a provision for consuming increasingly diverse and complex political content in the digital era. This research shows that with the right understanding, young voters are not only consumers of political information, but also have the potential to become active participants in shaping a more democratic political future in Indonesia (Sitompul et al., 2024).

Overall, these two studies have their own advantages and disadvantages. The research conducted by Dimaz Oktama Andriyendi, Nurman S., and Susi Fitria Dewi has the advantage of presenting strong quantitative data on the influence of social media on the political participation of novice voters. However, the empirical and practical aspects are not accommodated. Meanwhile, research conducted by Dewi Putri Sitompul, Yulita Sitorus, Eugenia Gracia Br Sibuea, and Sutri Destemi Elsi presents an in-depth qualitative analysis of the role of social media in shaping the political behavior of young voters and the importance of media literacy but is less supported by statistical data. These two studies are the basis for the author to refine this research by collaborating between the two studies.

This situation raises the need to understand how social media influences the preferences of first-time voters and how strategic efforts can be made to maximize the use of social media in a responsible and ethical manner. This journal aims to analyze the role of social media in the 2024 Regional Head Elections, particularly in shaping the political preferences of first-time voters. Specifically, it will explore the background of the use of social media as a means of candidate socialization, identify the factors that influence the preferences of first-time voters through social media, and examine the problems and solutions associated with the use of social media in this context. With an in-depth understanding of these dynamics, it is hoped that this journal can provide recommendations for candidates, political parties, and other stakeholders to utilize social media effectively and ethically in supporting healthy and democratic political participation among first-time voters.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Background

This research is based on a combination of literature reviews on Regional Head Elections, novice voter behavior, and the influence of social media, which are based on the following relevant theories.

2.1 Elections and Local Democracy in Indonesia

Regional Head Elections are part of the local democracy system that provides an opportunity for the community to directly elect regional leaders, as regulated in Law Number 10/2016. Previous research identifies that the success of Regional Head Elections is influenced by social, economic, cultural factors, as well as technological developments. In this context, the Political Participation Theory explains that the participation of voters, including groups of novice voters, is a form of citizen participation to influence the political process (Mulyadi et al., 2024).

2.2 Characteristics of Novice Voters in Regional Head Elections

First-time voters, who have just obtained the right to vote for the first time, are characterized by an interest in populist issues and a reliance on social media as the main source of information. Digital Generation Theory illustrates that the majority of first-time voters from the digital generation tend to utilize technology to obtain political information, so their preferences are shaped by the dynamics of digital trends (Almuntasor et al., 2022).

2.3 Social Media in Digital Political Dynamics

The development of the digital era has significantly changed the pattern of political campaigns. Social media, such as Instagram, TikTok and Facebook, have become the main platforms for reaching voters. Based on New Media Theory, social media functions as a personalized and interactive interaction space, allowing direct communication between politicians and the public. This is also reinforced by Political Communication Theory, which emphasizes the role of media in delivering political messages effectively to audiences (Makarawung, Wulandari, and Himawan, 2024).

2.4 The Influence of Social Media on Voter Preferences

Social media not only functions as a campaign tool but also has an important role in shaping voter preferences. Agenda-setting theory becomes relevant to analyze how social media can influence people's perceptions of certain issues that are considered important, especially for first-time voters. Politicians can utilize this platform to highlight certain issues to shape public opinion (Putri and Lexianingrum, 2024).

2.5 Changes in the Political Behavior of Novice Voters

The political behavior of first-time voters shows dynamics that are influenced by easy access to information and interaction through social media. Political Communication Theory and Political Participation Theory highlight that social

media allows first-time voters to actively participate in political discussions and build preferences based on information received directly (Tamrin et al., 2024).

3. Methodology and Case Study or Legislation Data

The research method used is a quantitative method with the topic of the role of social media in influencing the preferences of novice voters in the 2024 Regional Head Election.

3.1 Survey of Young Voters' Preferences on Social Media

This research collected data through a survey using Google Forms involving 105 respondents, the majority of whom were first-time voters from the younger generation (Gen Z). The purpose of the survey was to understand how social media influences the political preferences of first-time voters.

3.2 Dominant Social Media Platforms

The survey highlighted the social media platforms most frequently used by respondents to find information related to the elections, such as Instagram, Twitter/X, and TikTok, which are the main sources for young voters to access political information.

3.3 Trust in Political Information on Social Media

Respondents were asked to rate their level of trust in political information found on social media. The data collected helps in analyzing how this trust affects the political preferences of first-time voters.

3.4 Information Factors Influencing Voter Preferences

The survey also explored the types of information most sought after by respondents, such as candidate debates, general political news, and candidate work programs. This provides insight into the factors that influence first-time voters in making their choices.

3.5 Challenges of Social Media Use

The research identified various challenges arising from the use of social media in political campaigns, including the spread of disinformation, political polarization, manipulation of public opinion through buzzers and influencers, and risks to user data privacy.

3.6 Improving Digital Literacy

The results recommend increasing digital and political literacy as a solution so that young voters are more critical in filtering information found on social media so that they can make wiser political choices.

4. Empirical Results and Comments Regarding The Case Study and/or Legislation

4.1 Background of Social Media Utilization in Candidate Socialization in the 2024 Regional Head Election

Indonesia, as the world's third-largest democracy, has a rich and diverse cultural heritage and political history. Since the reform era, the country has demonstrated a strong commitment to a transparent and inclusive democratic system. In a democratic system, political communication and the role of the media are crucial, especially in the context of elections (Astriani, Shafar, and Kurniati, 2024). General elections, also known as elections, are the main form of the democratic party. Both at the national and regional levels, elections are an important pillar in the democratic process, where every citizen has the right to determine the future of the nation through political participation (Fadilla and Nurussa'adah, 2022). In addition, at the regional level, there are Regional Head Elections, which serve as a means of electing local leaders, including Governors, Regents and Mayors and their representatives (Abidin, 2023).

In this year's Regional Head Elections, the development of information technology has brought significant changes in various aspects of life, including in the dynamics of politics and Regional Head Elections in Indonesia. The 2024 Regional Head Election is a concrete example of how social media plays an important role in shaping voter preferences. As another example, the use of social media in the socialization of regional head candidates in the 2024 Regional Head Elections is based on technological developments that have changed the way people interact and obtain information (Alamudi, Situmorang, and Fauzan, 2024).

In recent decades, the digital revolution has affected almost all aspects of life, including politics. In Indonesia, the increase in the number of internet and smartphone users has led to the use of social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube becoming very popular, especially among urban dwellers (Fadilla, Agustina, and Syafikarani, 2024). In 2023, the number of social media users in Indonesia reached 167 million people, and is expected to increase to 191 million by 2024 (Panggabean, 2024; Widi, 2023). This condition provides a great opportunity for regional head candidates to utilize social media as the main means of socializing themselves, programs, and visions and missions to the public.

In line with the increasing use of social media, the permanent voter data released by the West Java General Election Commission also shows great potential in the number of voters. In the 2024 Regional Head Election in West Java, the number of permanent voters reached 35,925,960 people, spread across 73,862 polling stations in 27 districts/cities in West Java. Of this total, there are 18,040,853 male voters and 17,885,107 female voters. With such a large number of voters, social media is a very

effective means of disseminating information to the public widely and quickly, while reaching various groups of voters in West Java (Putranto, 2024; Syafei and Rusiana, 2024).

Social media now plays an important role in various aspects of life, including politics. In the political system, social media not only functions as a means of communication but also becomes the main platform for political activities. This condition provides a great opportunity for candidate pairs to gain support, especially from the younger generation, most of whom are first-time voters. In addition, the existence of social media as a new space for political activity expands public opinion competition. Thus, candidate pairs need to utilize social media effectively to attract attention and gain support from novice voters who are active on these platforms (Andriyendi et al., 2023). With the ability to reach voters in various locations without having to be physically present compared to traditional campaign methods that require in-person meetings or advertisements in print media.

This is particularly important in the context of regional elections in Indonesia, where geographical challenges often hamper information distribution. Social media allows for more efficient information dissemination, including to remote areas, so that regional head candidates can reach a wider range of voters (Sutisna, 2024). In addition to its wide reach, social media also enables two-way interaction between candidates and voters. If previously voters only received information passively, now voters can actively participate, provide feedback, or ask questions directly to candidates through digital platforms. This interaction creates a more personalized and dynamic relationship, where candidates can respond to issues faced by the community in real time (Hidayat, 2023).

Social media also provides a variety of interesting content formats such as videos, images, and texts that make it easier for candidates to convey political messages more creatively and effectively, so as to build a positive image in the eyes of voters (Sutisna, 2024).

The younger generation, known as digital natives, is also expected to play an important role in the 2024 Regional Head Elections. This generation is generally more critical of information and more active in online discussions, rather than engaging in more passive, conventional campaign methods. Therefore, candidates should tailor their campaign strategies with content that is relevant to the issues of interest to this generation as well as using a more casual and accessible communication style. Platforms such as TikTok, which are very popular among youth, provide an opportunity for candidates to deliver political messages through short videos that are informative and entertaining (Putricia et al., 2024).

However, the use of social media in political campaigns is not free from challenges, one of which is the spread of false information or hoaxes. In an increasingly heated political climate, fake news can damage a candidate's image or negatively affect

public perception. Therefore, regional head candidates must be careful in managing their digital reputation and ensuring that the information disseminated is valid and accountable. In addition, social media can also trigger polarization in society, where voters tend to only accept information that supports certain political views, reducing the space for healthy dialogue (Sefyanto et al., 2024).

Social media also provides advantages in terms of targeting voters more specifically through advertising features that are segmented based on demographics, location, interests, and user behavior. Thus, candidates can develop more efficient and targeted campaigns, delivering relevant messages to different groups of voters (Sutisna, 2024). For example, candidates can target young voters in urban areas or community groups with a particular interest in certain issues such as education or the environment.

In addition, there are several factors that make social media a very effective tool in influencing voters. First, social media allows for rapid and large-scale dissemination of information. Within seconds, campaign messages can reach thousands, even millions of users. This speed of information dissemination is very important in dynamic political contestation, where each candidate seeks to attract voters' attention quickly (Syamsidar et al., 2023).

Second, social media provides an interactive space for candidates to communicate directly with voters. Features such as comments, direct messages and polls allow voters to provide instant feedback, while candidates can respond quickly. This kind of interaction creates a more personalized relationship between candidates and voters, which can ultimately influence voters' decisions at the voting booth (Arpandi, 2023).

Third, social media allows candidates to personalize their campaign messages. Using the data available on social media platforms, candidates can devise more targeted campaign strategies, tailoring messages to the needs and characteristics of specific voters. For example, a candidate can direct a health or education campaign to certain groups of voters who are more concerned about the issue. The utilization of social media algorithms also allows candidates to be more targeted in delivering messages to potential voter groups (Faradis A, Al Fauzah, and Al Anshori, 2023).

Overall, the use of social media in the 2024 Regional Head Elections reflects a significant change in political campaign strategies in Indonesia. Social media not only allows regional head candidates to reach a wider audience but also creates more personalized interactions with voters. Despite challenges such as hoaxes and polarization, with the right strategy, social media can be a very effective tool to win voter support in the digital era. The 2024 Regional Head Elections will be a testament to how digital technology, particularly social media, is changing the way political

campaigns are conducted in Indonesia, and candidates who successfully utilize it well will have a competitive advantage in the race for regional leadership seats.

4.2 The Influence of Social Media on the Preferences of Young Voters in 2024

Regional Head Election In the ever-evolving digital era, there are various factors that can influence people's way of thinking and lifestyle. One of them is in the context of the 2024 Regional Head Elections, where many campaign strategies utilize social media. The following are some of the social media factors that influence voter preferences in the 2024 Regional Head Elections, among others:

a. Fast and Broad Access to Information

Through social media, political information about candidates, programs and important issues can be disseminated quickly and reach a wide audience. Viral content, such as videos or candidate statements, can influence public opinion immediately, even before voting day. Within social media too, there is often space for people to discuss the candidates.

b. Campaign with a Creative Strategy

Many candidates and political parties use innovative digital strategies such as microtargeting, using influencers, political buzzers, and creative content such as memes, narrative videos, use of music and signature dances to appeal to voters, especially young voters. These strategies help deliver political messages in a way that is engaging and easily understood by a wide range of people.

c. Influence on Young Voters

Young voters, who are expected to make up 60% of the total electorate in the 2024 Regional Head Elections, show significant influence from social media. This group tends to be responsive to issues conveyed through these platforms, so young voters' political preferences are often formed based on content encountered online (Rizal Dani, 2024).

d. Influence of Public Opinion and Influential Figures

Social media is often used by influencers, celebrities, or public figures to express their support for certain candidates. This endorsement can influence followers' views of the candidate (Musticho et al., 2023).

e. Social Sentiment Influence

Trending topics or conversations on social media can shape public opinion and create social pressure to support certain candidates, especially when certain issues go viral and become the center of public attention. (Fernandes et al., 2024).

In addition to influencing voter preferences in the 2024 regional head elections, the existence of social media makes it an easy solution for candidates to carry out promotional and campaign activities. Likewise with the community, in modern times, people do not need to bother to look for various information including information about regional head elections.

4.3 Problems and Efforts in Using Social Media to Influence the Preferences of Young Voters in the 2024 Regional Head Election

The author provides research that has been filled in by 105 respondents with a variety of opinions regarding the activeness of the community, especially the younger generation on social media in seeking information on regional head elections.

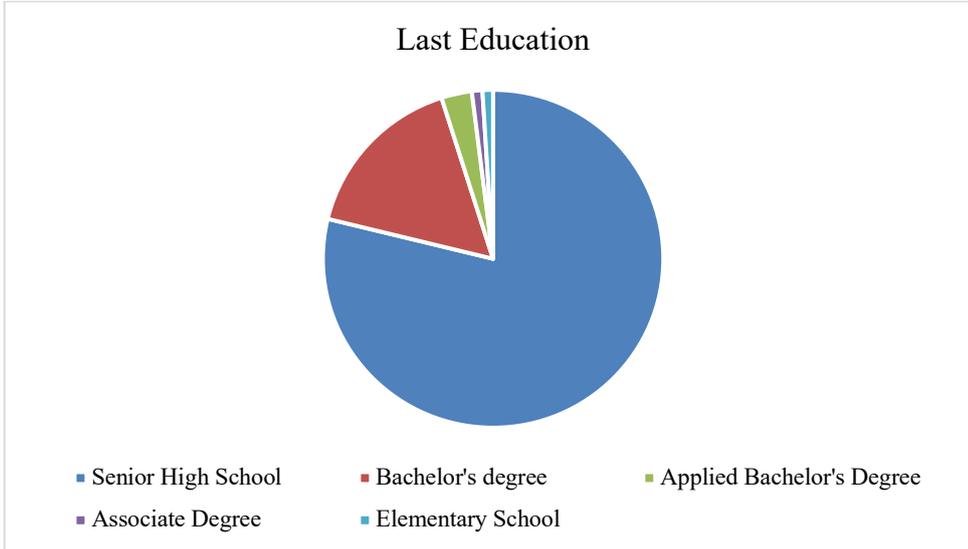


Figure 1. Last education

Source: This research was conducted personally using Google Forms with 105 respondents.

105 respondents have filled out the research that has been provided, the data states that the last education of the respondents is High School 78.8%, S1 16.3%, D4 2.9%, D3 1%, and Elementary School 1%.

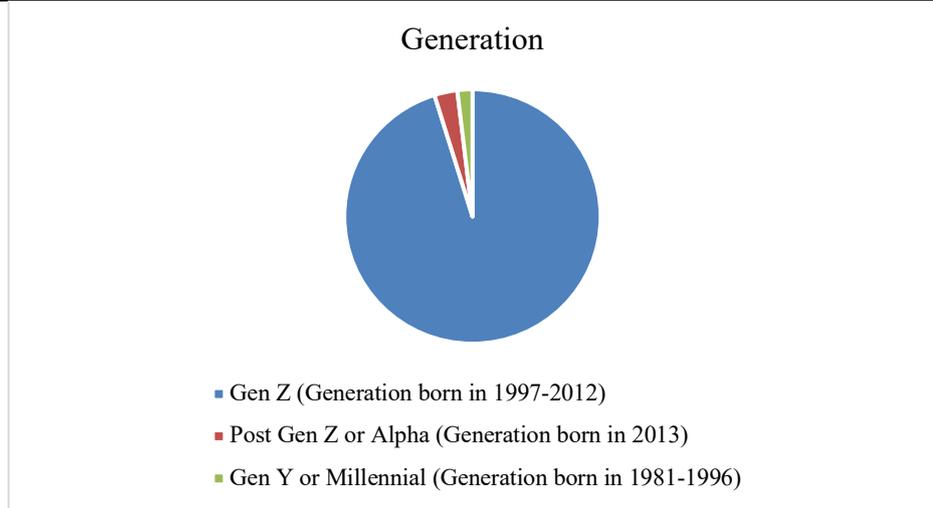


Figure 2. Generation

Source: This research was conducted personally using Google Forms with 105 respondents.

The research data shows that the generation of research fillers or respondents varies. However, the majority of respondents are Young Generation or Gen Z with 95.2%, Post Gen Z or Gen Alpha 2.9%, and Gen Y 1.9%.

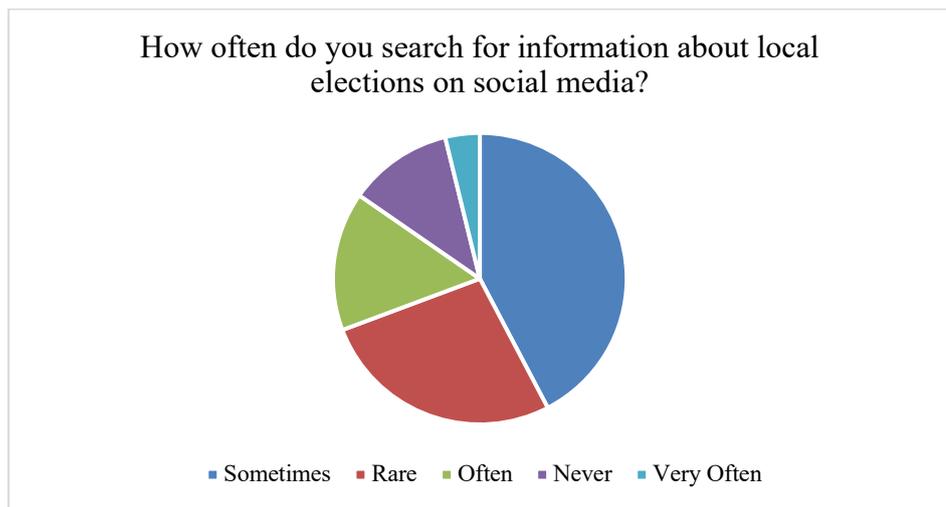


Figure. 3. How often do you search for information about local elections on social media?

Source: This research was conducted personally using Google Forms with 105 respondents.

Research results are stating that as many as 42.3% of respondents sometimes seek information about regional head elections on social media, 26.9% of respondents stated that Rarely seek information about regional head elections on social media, 15.4% of respondents stated that Often seek information about regional head elections on social media, 11.5% of respondents stated that Never seek information about regional head elections on social media, and 3.8% of respondents stated that Very Often seek information about regional head elections on social media.

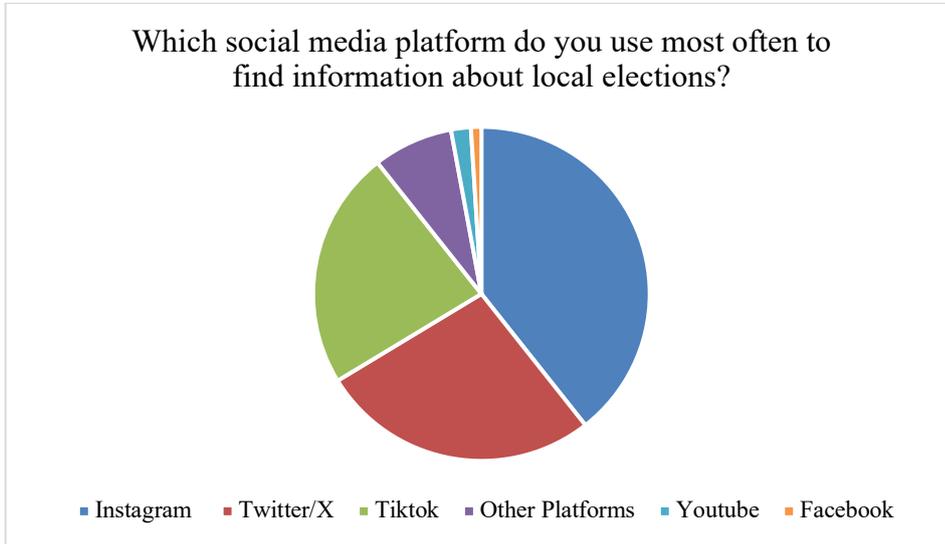


Figure. 4. Which social media platform do you use most often to find information about local elections?

Source: This research was conducted personally using Google Forms with 105 respondents.

There are 39.4% of respondents who use the Instagram platform to find information about regional head elections, 26.9% of respondents use the Twitter / X platform to find information about regional head elections, 23.1% of respondents who use the Tiktok platform to find information about regional head elections, 7.7% of respondents seek information about regional head elections through other platforms, 1.9% of respondents use the Youtube platform to find information about regional head elections, and 1% of respondents who use the Facebook platform to find information about regional head elections.

What type of political information do you most often search for on social media (For example, candidates' work programs, candidate debates, political news)?

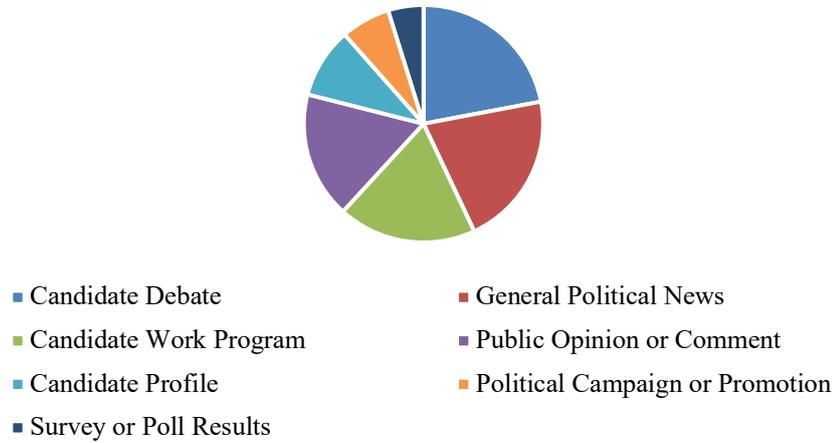


Figure. 5. What type of political information do you most often search for on social media?

Source: This research was conducted personally using Google Forms with 105 respondents.

Respondents stated what types of information were most sought after by respondents on social media, 22.1% about Candidate Debates, 21.2% about General Political News, 18.3% about Candidates' Work Programs, 17.3% about Public Opinions or Comments, 9.6% about Candidate Profiles, 6.7% about Political Campaigns or promotions, and 4.8% about Survey Results or Polls of regional head elections.

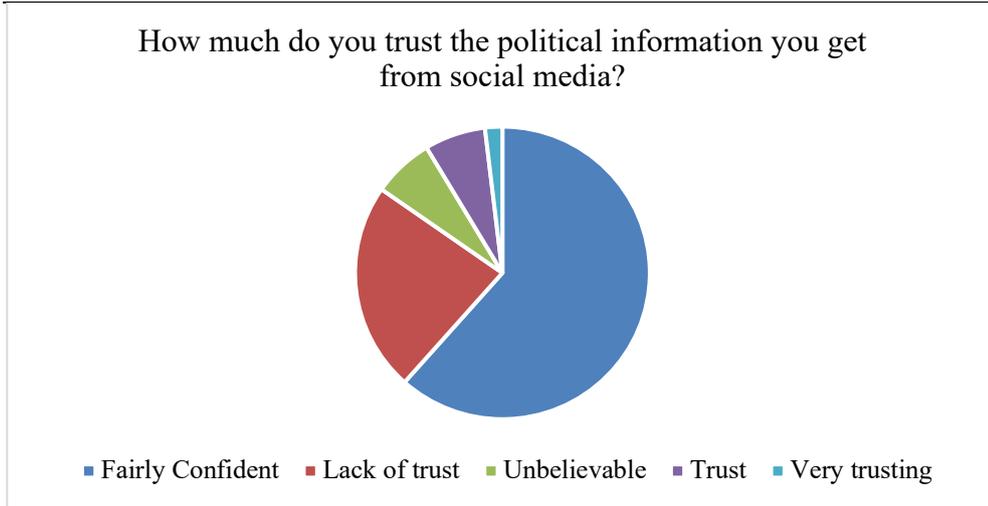


Figure. 6. How much do you trust the political information you get from social media?
 Source: This research was conducted personally using Google Forms with 105 respondents.

61.5% of respondents stated that they Fairly Trust the political information that respondents get on social media, 23.1% of respondents stated that they Distrust the political information that respondents get on social media, 6.7% of respondents stated that they Distrust the political information they get on social media, 6.7% of respondents Trust the political information they get on social media, and 1.9% of respondents stated that they Strongly Trust the political information they get on social media.

The research can explain that social media can influence voter preferences in the 2024 regional head elections. However, this cannot be separated from the complex problems that occur in the 2024 regional head elections. Problems with the use of social media that can influence voter preferences in the 2024 regional head elections include:

- a. The spread of disinformation or hoaxes: The existence of disinformation on social media is the biggest problem in local elections. This can confuse the public as voters, people will be easily influenced by invalid information about candidates or other political issues (Musticho et al., 2023). This problem is evidenced by the monitoring results of the Research and Development Committee of the Indonesian Anti-slander Society (Mafindo) which shows a significant increase in the number of hoaxes circulating on social media. From January to June 2024, there were 2,119 hoaxes, almost double the number from the beginning of 2023, which reached 1,185. In the hoax news, 48.9% of the hoaxes were politically themed, the spike was

triggered by hoaxes surrounding the 2024 Presidential and Vice Presidential Elections and ahead of the 2024 Regional Head Elections which are prone to disinformation (Fikyansyah, 2024).

b. Political polarization: Social media often reinforces political polarization, especially with the presentation of content that matches users' preferences. This can lead to people as voters only being exposed to information or views that align with their personal preferences, and can lead to social divisions as there is no room to view other information.

c. There is a game of information manipulation through political influencers and buzzers: The use of buzzers and influencers in political campaigns on social media can lead to manipulation of public opinion. The public as voters will be influenced by information conveyed unobjectively by people they trust on social media.

d. Issues in data security and privacy: The increased use of social media as a means of political campaigning or promotion raises concerns about data security or privacy of the public as voters. People's personal data on social media can be misused for illegal or irresponsible political purposes, which can undermine public trust in the electoral process (Rizal Dani, 2024).

In addition to problems, it should be noted that there are efforts to minimize problems in influencing preferences for regional head elections in 2024, namely, there needs to be an increase in digital and political literacy of the community / young generation on social media regarding regional head elections in 2024 to be able to assess and sort out all existing information (Kolil et al., 2024).

5. Conclusions

The dynamics of the 2024 Regional Head Elections in Indonesia show significant changes in political campaign strategies, especially with the increasing utilization of social media. As the dominant platform, social media plays an important role in shaping voters' preferences, especially first-time voters. In the background of the use of social media, it can be seen that technological advances have made it possible to disseminate information widely, quickly and efficiently, even to remote areas. This provides a great opportunity for candidates to reach out to the younger generation who dominate the electorate through creative and relevant content.

The influence of social media on young voters' preferences also includes aspects such as interactive access to information, more personalized campaigns, and the presence of opinions from influential figures. Young voters show a significant response to digital content, making social media a strategic tool to strengthen the relationship between candidates and voters. However, challenges such as disinformation, opinion manipulation, and threats to data privacy are also obstacles that must be overcome.

For this reason, efforts to increase digital and political literacy are important to minimize the negative impact of social media. With the right strategy, social media can be utilized as an effective, ethical campaign tool and support a more participatory democracy, especially in increasing the involvement of first-time voters in the 2024 Regional Head Elections.

This journal has strengths due to the relevance of the topic to contemporary issues, the focus on first-time voters who are an important group in election demographics, and the use of empirical data from surveys to support the conclusions presented. In addition, the practical recommendations offered, such as improving digital and political literacy, provide guidance for candidates, political parties and other stakeholders to utilize social media more effectively and ethically. The multidimensional approach that includes benefits, challenges and solutions provides a comprehensive picture of this phenomenon.

Future research could be more in-depth by exploring the subjective experiences of first-time voters in processing information on social media, comparisons of social media influence between regions, and the impact of algorithms on the formation of political preferences. In addition, studies on the effectiveness of video-based campaigns, data security in digital politics, and longitudinal analysis of the development of political behavior of first-time voters can also make broader contributions. With the right strategy, social media can be utilized as an effective, ethical campaign tool and support a more participatory democracy, especially in increasing the involvement of first-time voters in the 2024 Regional Head Elections.

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