The Role of the Leader in a Pandemic: Government Communication to Induce a Positive Perspective among the Public concerning the COVID-19 Outbreak

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ABSTRACT: The use of social media in the digital era is driving fundamental changes in the patterns of communication in social life. Government Communication has become an important part in the dissemination of information to the public during a pandemic. Issues relating to information about the COVID-19 pandemic have become trending topics on various social media platforms. As a result, negative information has a high risk of appearing in discussions related to COVID19. Consequently, the Official Accounts of Regional Heads such as Governors hold a significant role in reducing negative information. Anies Baswedan as the Governor of Jakarta has been using his official accounts on social media, particularly his Twitter Account, and mainstream media to spread information to the public. Providing information via social media and mainstream media is a more effective means to induce a positive perspective among the public. Such positive perspective is a vital element to extend public trust in the Government, so that collaboration of all relevant parties can be maintained to resolve the pandemic.

KEYWORDS: Government Communication, Social Media, Pandemic

I.   INTRODUCTION

The use of social media in the digital era is driving fundamental changes in the patterns of communication in social life. Although, on the other hand, the use of social media presents a new challenge for the Government such as disclosure of private information, social inclusion, and issues related to governance (Guerrero-Solé & Lopez-Gonzalez, 2019). This is due to the fact that in the digital era, the level of public response has become more responsive than the previous era. Thus, the function of social media has now shifted to a positive function as a monitoring tool, especially in the implementation of Government policies (Linders, 2012).

However, the shift of social media function, on the other hand, has a negative impact on information objectivity (Saputra, 2015). Disseminating negative information in order to change public perception of the Government is risky (Gofur, 2018). Accordingly, government communication plays a substantial role in providing direct information to the public in order to anticipate the existence of negative information (Khan, Yoon, Kim, & Park, 2014). This certainly has an impact on increasing patterns of interaction between the Government and the public.
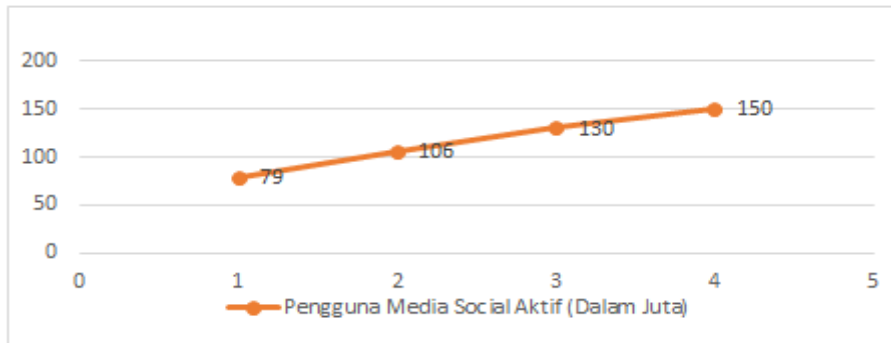
Figure 1. Data of Active Social Media Users (in millions)

Source: Ministry of Communication and Informatics, 2019.

Data from the Ministry of Communication and Informatics of the Republic of Indonesia shows that data of social media users in Indonesia continues to increase year after year. In 2019, the number of social media users in Indonesia reached 150 million active users. That number increased by 20 million active media users compared to 2018. In fact, it had been increasing by almost an average of 20 million users each year. So, with such large number of active social media users in Indonesia, it is not surprising that the public's response is extremely exuberant in various activities and public issues on social media.
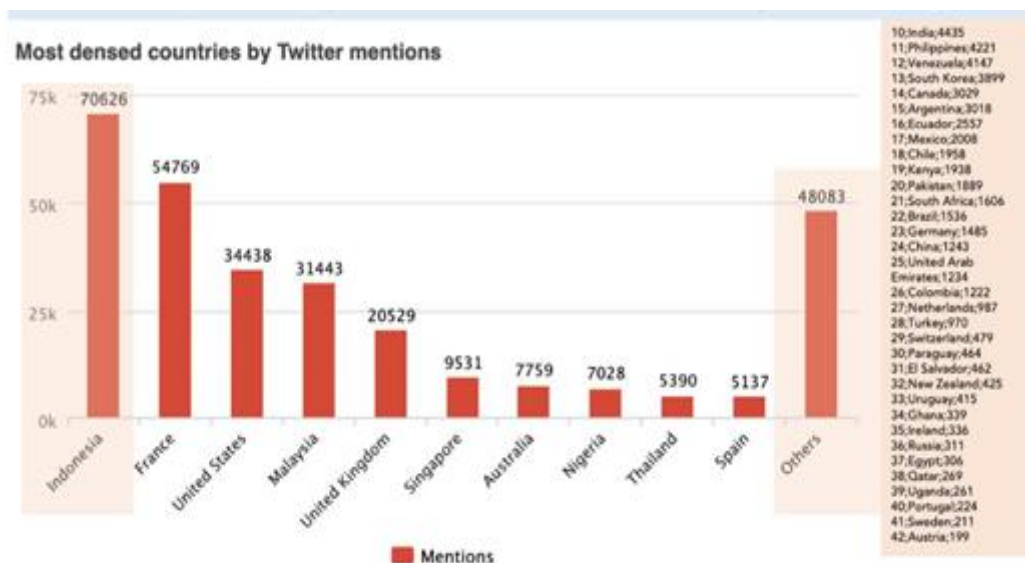

Figure 2. Top 10 Highest Countries in Coronavirus Discussions

Source: Drone Emprit Academic, 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on global life. Issues relating to information about the coronavirus have become trending topics on various social media platforms the world over. Indonesia has become the number one country with the increasing trend related to the issue of coronavirus publics. In fact, the trend of coronavirus-related discussions outperformed countries such as China, which is the endemic country of the coronavirus. Thus, negative information has a high risk of appearing in coronavirus-related discussions. This issue

is inseparable from political buzzers, who will cook up negative issues so that the perception of public confidence towards the Government decreases both in local and national contacts.
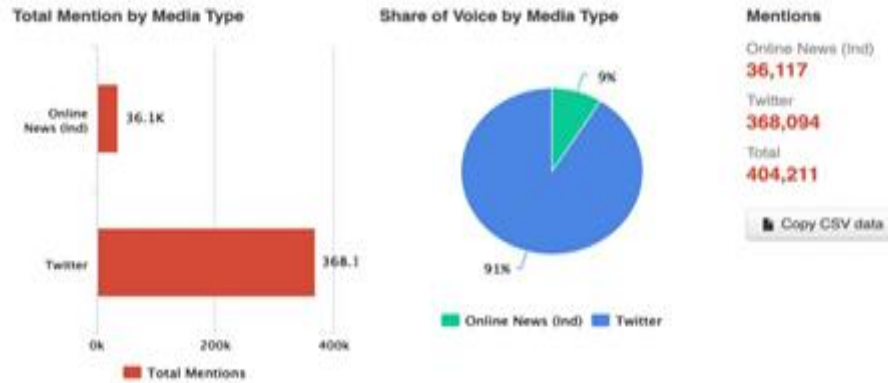

Figure 3. Volume of Conversations on Public Issues

Source: Drone Emprit Academic, 2020.

It is undeniable that information movement of on social media occurs at a highly rapid pace in the context of public issues (Dumitrica & Felt, 2019). Public response is very high on the coronavirus issue, even higher than the public's response to online news. This is not considered that social media is web 2.0, making it possible for its users to collaborate and exchange information (Bailey, 2018). Increased public response compels the Government at both local and national levels to be more responsive in providing coronavirus-related information. Tremendous successive amount of communication from the public leads to numerous new perspectives that create a social movement that is known as hashtags. The hashtag movement #aniestanggapcorona (#aniescoronaresponse) has become a trend to date which indicates positive support for the handling of these national problems. The role of the official twitter account of each regional leader is very useful to be used in disseminating various information.

This certainly indicates that the provision of information on social media is considered more effective in maintaining the perception of public confidence in the performance of the Government, especially on a public issue (Gagliardi, Misuraca, Niglia, & Pasi, 2019). Accordingly, the vital role of the Government is emphasized to be able to maintain the perception of public trust, so as not to cause new rifts between the Government and the people concerning public issues (Zeitzoff, 2017). The use of social media is no longer seen only as a tool to interact, but rather to provide opportunities for the public to be able to interact at a distance from Government function. Thus, social media currently has a large role to reform relations between the community and the Government. It is not only limited to the relationship between policy makers and policy implementers, but it also concerns more on new interactions wherein mutual benefits are gained from the use of social media.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Media Web 2.0

The rapid development of technology in the current era is changing our way of life from the traditional era to a new one This new era is maximized by the advent of E-Government, which subsequently allows all government affairs to be connected to the Internet (Belkahla Driss, Mellouli, & Trabelsi, 2019). The use of social media as a derivative of the web 2.0 concept has also changed as a new form of transforming e-government (Hsieh, Hsieh, & Vu, 2019). Web 2.0 undoubtedly makes it possible for users to collaborate and exchange content (Nahed Eltantawy, 2011). The function of social media today is no longer seen only as a tool to speak, but it also provides an opportunity for the public to be able to assist in government affairs from a distance (de Vreede, Antunes,

Vassileva, Gerosa, & Wu, 2016). Indeed, social media is currently providing great benefits for reforming relations between society and government (Boulianne, 2015).

Although, on the other hand, it is undeniable that the exchange of information on social media occurs at an extremely rapid pace (Kim & Xu, 2019). This is inseparable from the mainstream media, which in this case produces various kinds of information on social media. The mainstream media in this case has a huge role in influencing public issues and getting these issues into public discourses on social media (Dumitrica & Felt, 2019). In fact, in the context of the current digital era, social media users themselves are also able to produce various information according to the public's objectives, this is often referred to as civil journalism (Sikorski & Matthes, 2020). The use of social media as a derivative of web 2.0 is able to have a large impact on the pattern of further interaction not only limited to the relationship between policy makers and policy implementers (Rowbotham, McKinnon, Marks, & Hawe, 2019). It is undeniable that the implementation of ICT in the current era is theoretically capable of making new constructions in relations between the Government and the community (Lestari & Moon, 2014).

2.2 Social Media on Government Communication

The impact of social media is currently providing new communication patterns in various aspects of social life (Linders, 2012). Even now it is not only organizations within the Government that use social media as a tool to absorb public aspirations, but also organizations in the private sector (Gagliardi et al., 2019). Although, there are differences in the orientation of using social media, wherein Government organizations tend to use social media to capture public aspirations for policy making and implementation (Bertot, Jaeger, & Hansen, 2012). Hence, the use of social media in the context of the government is that there are indeed different approaches that are aligned with the objectives intended by the government (Guerrero-Solé & Lopez-Gonzalez, 2019). Meanwhile, private sector organizations tend to use social media to coordinate and understand the needs and desires of their consumers (Baum & Potter, 2019).

The use of social media within the Government is indeed capable of having an impact on improving communication patterns with the public (Belkahla Driss et al., 2019). Improvements in communication patterns will subsequently encourage the positive growth in community participation. Hence, the current use of social media can reduce existing gaps in the policies made by the Government (Heiss & Matthes, 2019). This is inseparable from the concept of social media which has a very positive impact on building more relations between the government and its citizens. This concept is called G2C (Government to Citizen) where social media becomes a supporter in the relationship of the concept (Pardo, Nam, & Burke, 2012). In fact, social media can also be employed as a communication tool within the organization to improve its performance (Gagliardi et al., 2019). Although, ultimately, the use of social media presents new challenges to the Government, especially on several issues such as privacy, social inclusion, governance issues, and accessibility (de Vreede et al., 2016). This cannot be left unattended due to the increasing role because of the increasing role of social media, which has the potential to become a new tool for the public to monitor the Government, making issues of governance, privacy, and social inclusion very much in the spotlight (Montalvan Castilla & Pursiainen, 2019). In addition, the level of public response in the social media era is also much more responsive, and there is greater awareness of decline in programs and non-compliance with existing procedures in line with the improvement in services performed by the Government (Lim, 2017).

III.   RESEARCH METHOD

In order to gain an understanding about government communication for disseminating vital information about the COVID-19 issue from January to March of 2020, we examined the official Twitter account of Anies Baswedan, the Governor of Jakarta. We collected data correlating to keywords such as #aniestanggapdarurat. The Twitter contents included the English version and the Indonesian version. We used social network analysis method to examine the communication patterns between the Government and the public. Node XL was used to collect data from Twitter Account Network. Node XL was also used to examine the frequency in which 'important' words were used in the social media, allowing the identification of the patterns of the use of relevant words over a given period of time.
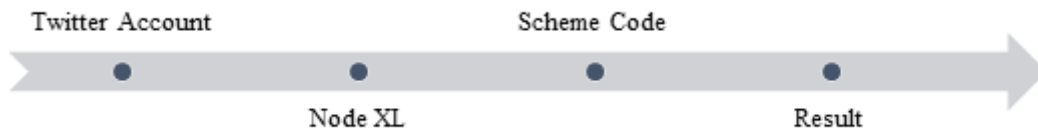
FIGURE 4. PROCESS ANALYSIS DATA

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Main Role of Government Communication in Extending Public Perspective

The topic of coronavirus became a headline on some social media in early 2020. The virus had spread very quickly all over the world, consequently making it into a global issue. This became the trending topic mainstream media such as Google, Twitter, and other social media platforms. Everyone searched about the coronavirus and shared information about the virus as well. Almost all mainstream media highlighted coronavirus-related issues, such as policy decisions made to prevent virus outbreak. Numerous social media platforms highlighted the issue and it resulted in various perspectives among the public. These various perspectives subsequently led to public discussion networks.

These are multiple effects of public issues involving all social elements (Verma, Fleischmann, & Koltai, 2017). The unique feature of social media is that it enables various users to connect and share information amongst one another, which consequently makes it easier to obtain information on social media. In terms of the pandemic, the government holds an essential role to provide clear information to the public. Due to the fact that information spreads very quickly on social media, social media can be a solution to disseminate information directly under the current state of pandemic (Zeitzoff, 2017).

The official account of the Jakarta Governor takes advantage of social media to provide more information about issues relating to the pandemic. The benefit of social media, which is its capacity to improve communication, became the reason for the official account of the Governor of Jakarta to disseminate information to the public via the social media platform Twitter. In a pandemic, public trust in the government has to be maintained. The reason for this is to minimize the emergence of new social conflicts in the society. It is an important task for the Government to manage and control public situation.
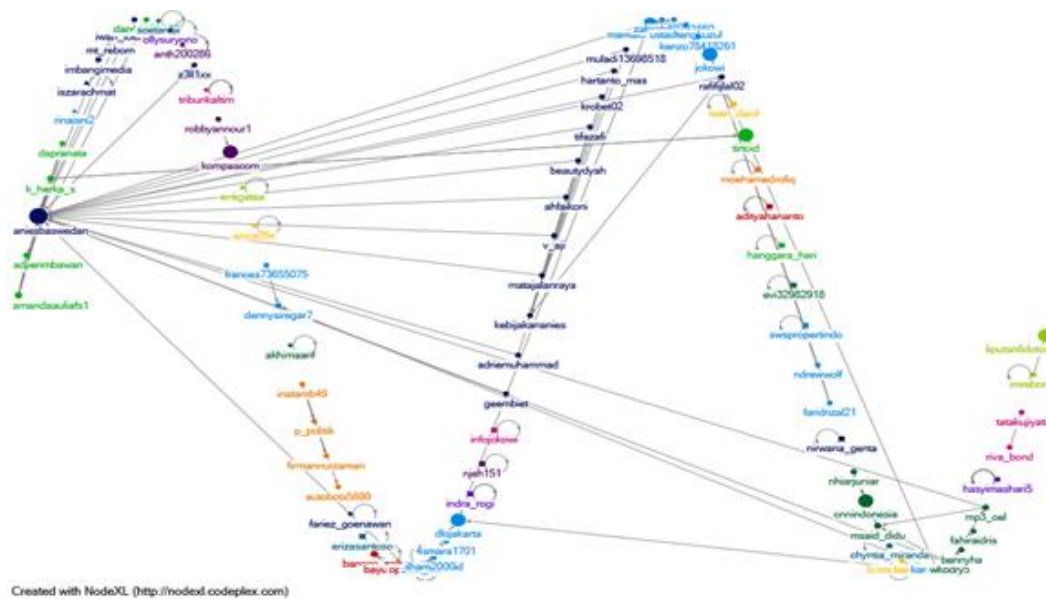

Created with NodeXL (http://nodexl.codeplex.com)

Figure 1. Social Network of Official Account @aniesbaswedan

In social network analysis, the main actor becomes apparent based on the size significance presented in the network. **In figure 1** the official account of the Jakarta governor is shown to be the central actor in the social network. The betweenness centrality of the governor of Jakarta's official account reached 1.987.000. The value of betweenness centrality indicates that the governor intends to lessen the spread of hoaxes by providing information directly to the public. The efforts made by the governor resulted in a multiplier effect in extending public support for the Government. Efforts to extend public trust is clearly observed in the network communication of the Official Account @aniesbaswedan. We can see the official account @aniesbaswedan spreading information to mainstream media such as kompas.com, tirto.id, cnnindonesia, and liputan6dotcom.

Table 1. The closeness centrality value

Name of Account	Closeness centrality
Kompas.com	1
Liputan6dotcom	1
Tirto.id	0,005
Cnnindonesia	0,004

Source: Taken from some websites, 2020

The four-official account of mainstream media became supporters of the Jakarta governor in disseminating information. This can be seen from the value of closeness centrality. In social network analysis, closeness centrality indicates closeness between the central account and other accounts. As shown in the results, the four mainstream media have a high closeness centrality value among other accounts in the network. Even the official account of the Jakarta governor has a closeness centrality value of 1 with kompas.com and liputan6dotcom, which indicates mainstream media's closeness with the governor's official account.

The mainstream media can serve as another factor that facilitates the Government in rapid information dissemination to address the pandemic (Belkahla Driss et al., 2019). Providing information to the public about preventive measures is an effective means to call upon the public to comply with policies made to fight against the pandemic. The impact that social media currently has is the introduction of a new communication pattern that can provide easy access to the public (Linders, 2012). Improvements in communication patterns will encourage increased public participation to carry out checks and balances on the Government (Boulianne, 2015). However, the vital role of providing direct information has resulted in a positive view of the Government. The positive perspective shared between the public and the Government becomes a vital part during the pandemic as collaboration of all elements in the country must be maintained (López et al., 2020).
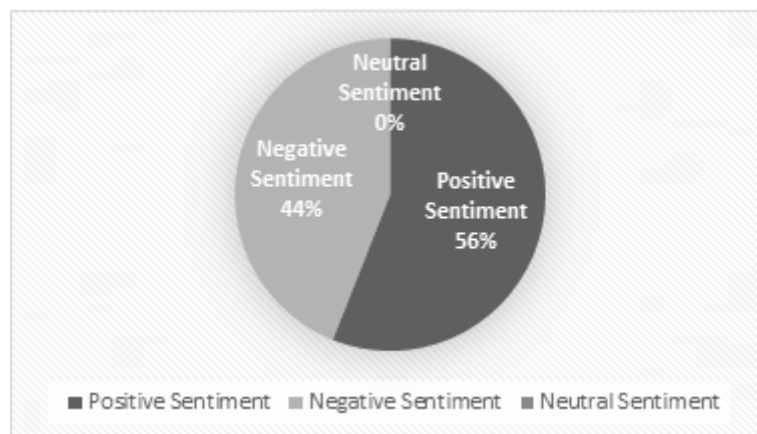

Figure 2. The Value of Sentiment on Network

Source: Result of NVivo 12 Plus Analysis

In social network analysis, the structure of public perspective is explained by using sentiment matrix. The sentiment matrix is classified into negative perspective, positive perspective, and neutral perspective. In social network analysis, the negative perspective indicates that the public is unsupportive of policies implemented to address the pandemic. Meanwhile, the positive perspective indicates that the public is supportive of policies implemented to address the pandemic. Figure 2 shows the value of positive sentiment matrix being higher than the negative. The value of positive sentiment reached 56%, while the negative reached 44%. The high value of positive sentiment indicates that providing information directly to the public is an effective measure to appease public panic.

Providing information directly to the public has multiple impacts in shaping public perspective (Baum & Potter, 2019). The public is able to gain clear information about government policies for addressing the pandemic. Providing information directly to the public is crucial in the pandemic context to reduce the spread of hoaxes. During a pandemic, hoaxes can be a whole new problem for the Government (Gofur, 2017), because hoaxes can lead to new social conflicts in the society (Freelon, Lopez, Clark, & Jackson, 2018).

V.   CONCLUSION

Government communication plays a crucial role in a pandemic. Providing information directly to the public is essential in the pandemic context to reduce the spread of hoaxes. The governor as the leader of the province must play a vital role in this situation. The official account of the governor can be used to reduce the spread of hoaxes by providing information directly to the public. The governor has to extend public support to the Government. Anies Baswedan as the Governor of Jakarta has been taking advantage of social media to extend public trust. It is clearly visible in the network communication of the governor's official account @aniesbaswedan. The governor's official account @aniesbaswedan has even been disseminating information to the mainstream media platforms such as kompas.com, tirto.id, cnnindonesia, and liputan6dotcom. Providing information directly to the public and using mainstream media to disseminate information consequently result in a higher positive public perspective of the Government than a negative one. The positive perspective reached 56%, which indicates that the official account of the Jakarta governor on social media is more effective in a pandemic to appease public panic and extend public trust in the Government. And ultimately, collaboration of all relevant parties can be maintained to resolve the pandemic.

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