AUDIENCE CULTURE IN THE RECEPTION OF TEXT: BLACK CAMPAIGNS ON ONLINE MEDIA DURING INDONESIA'S 2014 AND 2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: This study seeks to explore the influence of culture on audiences' responses to online negative campaigns during Indonesia's 2014 and 2019 presidential elections. It shows that voter behavior is not determined entirely by media messages, as voters' decisions are strongly informed by their cultural and family backgrounds.

Methodology: Negative campaign messages conveyed through online mass-media coverage were used as the main object of this study. These messages were analyzed categorically, with a focus on their themes, values, and ideologies. Data inference was made contextually, with a specific focus on cultural context.

Main Findings: Mass media audiences' reception of negative campaigns is not homogenous, but influenced by political ideologies, social statuses, cultures, past experiences, and family characteristics. As such, negative campaigns do not influence the perceptions of mass media audiences, but rather reinforces audiences' existing political preferences. This is because Indonesian audiences are not individual (as common among new media audiences), but rather collective. They are divided into specific groups based on their political ideologies and the socio-cultural values that they learn from their families.

Applications of this study: The findings can be applied to evaluate the media's effectiveness in constructing public knowledge and shaping public decisions.

Novelty/Originality of this study: Although it has long been argued that the media can shape public opinions and decisions, this study shows that it plays a significant role in reinforcing existing political preferences. Audiences use the media to justify values that, owing to their specific family backgrounds and social environments, they have already embraced.

Keywords: audience culture, text reception, black campaign, online media, presidential election, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

The rise of the new media has begun a new chapter in the development of democratization around the globe (Stanyer, 2006; Norris and Curtice, 2008; Candon, 2012; Lowndes, 2013; Gainous, Wagner and Gray, 2016; Larsson, 2016). Barack Obama's use of social media during his campaign in the 2008 United States presidential election remains the most popular example of new media's integration in electoral politics (D'Alessio and Allen, 2000; Larsson and Moe, 2012; Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Enli, 2017; Mihailidis and Viotty, 2017), even though the internet had already been used by previous candidates (Lilleker and Jackson, 2013; Lowndes, 2013; Larsson, 2016). Social media has offered a fundamental transformation in how audiences are positioned within media, giving them greater space for political participation. Unlike during the analog era, today's audiences are given space "… to play active roles in sharing, modifying, and commenting on campaign content" (Freelon, 2017). However, the use of new media has also made the public more heavily involved in a lengthy campaign process, one that begins long before elections and continues until after the results have been tabulated (Vaccari and Valeriani, 2016; Freelon, 2017; Hopp and Vargo, 2017). The public is now directly involved in various campaign issues, using openness and participativeness to sidestep the previous hierarchy of party politics (Vaccari and Valeriani, 2016: 2).

Drawing on experiences from around the world, researchers have examined how social media has transformed political processes and made them rely more heavily on information and communication technology (Gainous, Wagner, and Gray, 2016; Enli, 2017; Freelon, 2017). As politicians have sought to communicate directly with their constituents, the new media has offered a new understanding of how political victory can be achieved. Where previously politicians seeking electoral victory had sought face-to-face meetings with their constituents, today they focus more on various forms of media and communication technology (Lin, Spence and Lachlan, 2016; Arzheimer, Evans and Lewis-Beck, 2017). This transformation has been widely noted, with some writers expressing concern that the reliance on media technology will reduce substantial debate to simple "sound bites" or give charismatic candidates an unfair advantage over more qualified, but less polished, ones. Still others have uneasily noted that power has become increasingly controlled by large corporations (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017: 211).

Although political space has become increasingly open with the use of social media in campaigning, there remains the question of whether audiences' ability to participate means that they have freedom in elections. In other words, does the media influence audiences' votes, or do audiences have the freedom to make their own decisions? The question of audience

freedom is particularly important within the socio-political context of Indonesia, where the media has taken an increasingly important role since democratization began following the fall of the New Order regime (Gaffar, 1999; Sari, 2018). The use of online mass media and social media in the mechanisms of political contestation. The new media have become widely used by political candidates, who see the new media as an effective means of collecting votes (Stromer-Galley, 2014). The use of new media has become increasingly significant as black campaigning, i.e. the use of misinformation, lies, and unprovable accusations to besmirch one's, political opponents. Such negative messages may be targeted at opponents' visions, their opinions, or their behaviors (Asante, 2007; Lowndes, 2013; Hopp and Vargo, 2017; Amazeen, Vargo and Hopp, 2019). During Indonesia's 2014 and 2019 presidential elections, black campaigning was widely used—in electronic, print, and social media—to shape public opinion regarding candidates.

The widespread use of black campaigning in Indonesia shows that the candidates in the country's 2014 and 2019 elections assumed that the media is an effective means of gathering voter support. Backing their view that the new media has a significant effect on the public is an assumption that audiences are passive and merely believe what they are told (Abiocca, 2016; Sari, 2018). This study applies a different argument, not only by positioning audiences as active but also by showing that local cultural and family contexts significantly affect audiences' ability to avoid the influence of the media. More specifically, this article seeks to analyze the dynamic link between the media's constructed values and audiences' cultural values within the context of Indonesian politics and elections.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies of audience perspectives have developed since the emergence of the media, particularly the electronic media. For example, in the early 1940s, Lazarsfeld and Stanton produced a series of books and studies focusing on audiences' active use of media to understand and organize their lives and their experiences (Kwak, 2012; Bal *et al.*, 2015). With the rise of the new media, audiences have been granted greater space to produce meaning within the political process, thereby ensuring their aspirations and ideas can be more influential (Wright, 2012). The recent debate in audience studies has involved Stuart Hall, David Morley, and Ien Ang.

David Morley examined English audiences' reception of news stories broadcast by the program *Nationwide* using Hall's encoding-decoding model (Morley, 2003; Kim, 2004; Brunsdon, 2014). Morley spent several weeks living with a number of English households, observing families' responses to the programs that they watched. Morley's study found, among other things, that there was a significant difference between the "ideal reader" of the structuralist model and the actual everyday behavior of audiences. Morley showed that audiences are not passive beings who can be deceived by televised discourses and who respond to messages in predictable ways. Audiences are not homogenous but rather shaped by their diverse subjectivities, which are influenced by their genders and by their culturally defined values. Morley's study must be recognized as an important milestone in audience studies, as it offered a heterogeneous perspective that challenged the homogenous one that dominated contemporary media studies.

A similar spirit is found in Ien Ang's study of Dutch viewers of the soap opera *Dallas*, which applied asymptomatic analysis to discover the attitudes behind the text (Ang, 2013). Ang began by exploring the tensions between active audiences' ideas and the text's potential structuring of meaning. Her second argument was that viewers of *Dallas* were actively involved in the production of meaning and pleasure, which was manifested in various forms that could not be reduced merely to textual structure or ideological effect.

In the early stages of her study, Ang published an advertisement in the Dutch women's magazine *Viva*. The advertisement read: "I like to watch the series *Dallas*, but often get some weird reactions. Could you write to me and tell me why you like to watch this program, or why don't? I'd like to talk about these reactions in my thesis. Please write…" (Ang, 2013: 10). Ang received responses from 42 viewers of *Dallas* (39 of whom were women), both those who enjoyed the soap opera and those who did not. It was these letters that served as the basis for Ang's symptomatic analysis, in which she linked the question of enjoyment (or lack thereof) with realism. In other words, she argued that the pleasure audiences found in *Dallas* were positively related to the degree of realism they found in the series. Where audiences considered the story realistic, they would respond positively to it; however, where audiences considered the story unrealistic, they would respond negatively. As such, these television audiences were (to some extent) critical of the broadcasts they saw. Ang thus argued that *Dallas* offered its viewers emotional realism at two levels, namely denotative and connotative.

Another study, conducted by Barker, investigated young Asian audiences of soap operas in the United Kingdom. Barker found that these audiences are actively involved in the reproduction of understandings of family, relationships, and gender. Active audiences are required for audience involvement and the reproduction of ideology, despite such active audiences potentially rejecting the ideological formations offered. Viewers' activities, thus, can become an arena for ideological struggles (Baker, 2008: 290).

In Indonesia, a reception study using critical discourse analysis was conducted by Asep Abdul Sahid. Sahid analyzed political practices in virtual space using the political moment of the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial election. In this study, it was found that discourse in online comments reflected readers' knowledge of the candidates; showing the influence of the power of cyber-vulgarity, as well as "likes" and "dislikes". Good gubernatorial candidates were represented through vocabulary, experience, anti-racism policies, cleanliness, and willingness to accept defeat, while bad gubernatorial candidates were

represented the concepts of status quo, pro-racism politics, and corruption. This study concluded that cyber democracy constitutes "nothing democracy", i.e. a democracy that is de-deliberative, de-ethic, de-humanized, and controlled. Nevertheless, Sahid's work did not consider audience perspectives, as it was focused on texts produced by online media.

Studies of active audiences have shown that media audiences are not culturally dumb, but rather active producers of meaning with their own cultural contexts. The active audience paradigm has developed in response to various studies that have positioned audiences as passively accepting the constructed meanings and televised messages they receive. Supporters of the active audience perspective argue that to think otherwise is to take a fundamentally wrong approach to understand television audiences (Baker, 2008: 288).

Within Indonesia's cultural and political context, the tradition of active audience research is relatively limited. This can be attributed, in part, to the authoritarianism of the once-ruling New Order government. At the time, research focused more on the effects of media, as the media was positioned as conveying government messages and socializing the development agenda (Hill, 2011). In politics, meanwhile, polling was only rarely done to learn audiences' views and opinions, as such research was seen as potentially endangering the stability of the regime. Only after the fall of the New Order government, when Indonesia began its transition to democracy, did studies of active audiences become more common. The rise of the new media has offered more space for active audience studies.

As a field, active audience studies have emerged as a result of dissatisfaction with the argument that audiences are passive, particularly after electronic media, particularly television, spread its influence worldwide. Previously, scholars had argued that audiences were passive, being shaped by the structure and system, having been influenced by the structural-functionalism that was mainstream in sociology at the time. The active audience argument also emerged in response to dissatisfaction with the classical theory promoted by the Frankfurt School. Criticizing the commercialization and commodification of the media and culture industry, it argued against the Frankfurt School's view that audiences are the victims of the system. It argued instead that the activeness of audiences is apparent in the pleasure they derive from watching television as well as their making of meaning. Audiences are producers of text and technology, and as such television is a space for cultural democracy, rather than cultural subjugation (Ang, 2013: 8).

As argued by Hall, audiences do not interact with social events directly, but rather through discursive translations of them. If something is 'meaningful' for the audience, it will certainly draw audiences' interpretations and discursive understandings. If nothing of 'meaning' is found, then 'consumption' may not occur; similarly, if the meaning is not articulated in practice, there will be no effect (Hall, 1981: 128). More specifically, Hall explains that meanings and messages are not simply transmitted but produced, first by an actor who encodes the message from the raw materials of everyday life and second by audiences within the context of other discourses. Every moment is a moment and condition of production. Furthermore, as shown by Hall, the processes of encoding and decoding cannot be truly symmetrical; what is intended and what is understood may be different. Even though media professionals may desire the results of decoding to be the same as encoding, they cannot guarantee it. Encoding and decoding are open to transformation, as determined by their different conditions; this makes misunderstandings possible.

In the context of television, Hall understands the process of encoding as encompassing the articulation of moments of production, circulation, distribution, and reproduction. All of these differ, but remain linked, and involve specific practices that do not guarantee subsequent moments. Although meaning is found at every level, it is not simply reproduced in the subsequent moment. That meaning is produced does not guarantee that it will be understood as desired by the coder, as televised messages are polysemic, having been constructed as systems of signs that have different emphases. Televised messages, in other words, contain various meanings that can be interpreted in various ways. This is not to say that all meanings have an equal standing; however, texts are 'structured in dominance' leading to a 'desired meaning', the meaning intended by the coder (Baker, 2008: 288).

METHODS

This study follows Jankowski's reception method in its processual media analysis, focusing on the collection, analysis, and interpretation of acceptance data (Jankowski, 2010). Two online media that covered the presidential campaigns in the 2014 and 2019 elections, okezone.com and detik.com, were used as sources. We identified the messages of the black campaigns and the central topics that received widespread coverage in the lead-up to the elections, namely May–June 2014 and March–April 2019. Discourse analysis was employed to examine intersubjective meanings and interpret the patterns of disagreement found in media coverage.

In this article, audiences are understood as individuals who are socially positioned, and whose understandings are structured by shared cultural meanings and practices. If audiences have shared cultural code with producers/coders, they will decode these messages within a similar framework. However, when audiences are positioned differently (for example, by class and gender) and have different cultural resources, they may use alternative approaches to coding. Hall, following Parkin, argues for a model that recognizes decoding as having three positions, hypothesized as follows (Hall, 2003): (1) Dominant/hegemonic encoding/decoding, which has a 'desired meaning'; (2) Negotiated coding, which abstractly recognizes the legitimacy of the hegemonic code, but uses its own rules to adapt to specific situations; and (3) Oppositional coding, in which people recognize the coding desired by the producer but choose to decode the message in another way.

Hall's theory of encoding and decoding serves as the framework of this study, which seeks to understand how producers and consumers can respond to texts differently. Media producers can encode specific messages, which are rooted in their understandings and social contexts, within the texts they produce. However, when these texts are consumed, a process of decoding occurs. This underscores the importance of understanding the meanings and interpretation of the main actors, be they media producers (journalists, writers, producers, editors) or receivers (audiences); this also includes those involved in media distribution (media executives, marketers, broadcasters, distributors, and regulators).

Data for the current analysis of encoding and decoding was collected from online media coverage, particularly from the websites *detik.com* and *okezone.com*, both of which played important roles in public communications during the election campaign. Data collected included the trends, themes, issues, actors, agencies, and ideologies behind the coverage of the elections on these media.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The lead-up to Indonesia's last two presidential elections, in 2014 and 2019, both showed a strong tendency towards *politik aliran* ('political streams') in their political campaigning and public debates. In other words, the socio-political processes that occurred in the five years between the elections were incapable of transforming public attitudes and maturity. Primordialism continued to be reproduced, as evidenced by political actors' continued reference to religious and ethnic issues as well as the specter of communism. This will be discussed below.

Black Campaigning in the 2014 Presidential Election

Looking back on Indonesia's 2014 presidential election, several discourses about the candidates were widely reproduced by the online media *detik.com* and *okezone.com*. The most widely reproduced discourses regarding the first presidential candidate, Prabowo Subiyanto, were (a) Prabowo's human rights violations and kidnapping of students in 1998; (b) the deployment of Bintara Pembina Desa (Babinsa, Village Guidance Troops), as accused by the Joko Widodo team; and (c) rumors that the New Order would return under Prabowo, son-in-law of former President Suharto. The second candidate, Joko Widodo (popularly known as Jokowi), was similarly targeted by rumors (a) that Jokowi would bring back communism, as his proclamation of a mental revolution was considered reminiscent of that political movement, (b) that Jokowi is a Chinese Christian from Singapore; and (c) that Jokowi is a puppet of his party.

The most widely reproduced black campaign targeted at Prabowo dealt with his involvement in human rights violations that occurred in 1998. At the time, Prabowo— then serving as the Strategic Command Officer—was accused of having kidnapped student activists. This ultimately led to Prabowo's dishonorable discharge, as disclosed to the media by Prabowo's former superior, Wiranto. On behalf of the students kidnapped in 1998, a number of people continually covered Prabowo's actions. Initially, Prabowo was unwilling to respond to these charges. As he said during a press conference at the Sultan Mahmud Badruddin II Airport in Palembang, "That was sixteen years ago. This is my third election. I used to be Megawati's vice-presidential candidate, without any questions. Why is it being questioned today? You mustn't just try to win at all costs" (*detik.com*, 12 June 2014).

One member of Prabowo's campaign team, Marwah Daud Ibrahim, stated that the claim that Prabowo had been dishonorably discharged from the Indonesian military was untrue. "Based on Decree of the President of the Republic of Indonesia number 62/ABRI/1998, issued November 20, Prabowo was discharged from the Indonesian armed forces in late November 1998. Pursuant to this decree, Prabowo had the right to a pension. In addition, according to Letter of the Secretary of State number B-597/M.Sesneg/09/1999 sent to the National Committee on Human Rights on September 13, 1999, there was not enough evidence to positively identify Prabowo as involved in the May 1998 riots. From this country's documents, it can be seen that Prabowo Subianto is not guilty of the alleged charges. In 2004, Prabowo also joined the Golkar Party caucus without any constraints. In 2009, Prabowo was allowed to run as a vice-presidential candidate, and now he has been permitted by the election commission to run in the current presidential election as a candidate" (*okezone.com*, June 20, 2014).

Prabowo's campaign team also argued, "the election commission's decision has belied all of the false accusations leveled at Prabowo. So it is clear that Prabowo has only been slandered as a perpetrator of human rights violations and as having dual citizenship." According to Suryo, a member of Prabowo's campaign team, the claim that Prabowo had violated human rights had been deliberately spread by Prabowo's former superiors. "It's the rest of the competition. Some retired generals still think that Prabowo poses a threat. Thus, the issue of human rights has been raised. He thinks that people are easily provoked. A big one is that Prabowo perpetrated human rights violations. Actually, Prabowo is not a perpetrator of human rights violations, but a victim of human rights violations" (*okezone.com*, June 2, 2014).

Accusations that Prabowo had violated human rights during his time in the military were more widely voiced after Wiranto gave testimony in response to an answer Prabowo had given Jusuf Kalla, former Vice President of Indonesia and Joko Widodo's running mate in the 2014 election, regarding his involvement in the 1998 kidnappings. Prabowo had said, "I understand the question, Sir. It's okay. I am here as a former soldier who performed his duties as well as possible. For judgment, I submit to my leaders" (okezone.com, June 9, 2014). Wiranto felt that he needed to reply to this answer, showing a letter of recommendation produced by the Honorary Board of Military Officers and stating that Prabowo had been involved in the kidnappings and had been dishonorably discharged in response. A document alleged to have been Prabowo's letter of

dismissal had previously spread on Twitter and Facebook. According to this document, Prabowo was dishonorably discharged from the Indonesian military for behavior unbefitting a soldier. Seven reasons were given for Prabowo's dismissal, the last of which reads: "[he] has undertaken the following criminal acts: (a) disobedience (Article 103 of the military criminal code); and (b) ordering Group-4/Sandha Kopassus members to limit individuals' freedom (Article 55(1) juncto Article 333 of the criminal code) and kidnap civilians (Article 55(1)–(2) juncto Article 328 of the criminal code) (okezone.com, June 11, 2014).

Wiranto's statement received loud protests from Prabowo's campaign team. Fadli Zon, the Deputy Chairman of the Gerindra Party, flatly denied the charge that Prabowo had been dishonorably discharged. "Once again, Prabowo was never fired. According to Presidential Decree No. 62/ABRI/1998, Prabowo received an honorable discharge and was given a pension. This means that he was never dishonorably discharged" (okezone.com, June 10, 2014). Wiranto's statement about Prabowo's involvement boomeranged on him, as Wiranto was seen as having attacked Prabowo through black propaganda. During a later press conference, Wiranto stated, "I want to clear up this situation. In the cases of shooting, rioting, and kidnapping, there were indeed certain parties involved and responsible. As the commander of the military then, I was automatically not the mastermind. But this does not mean that the person previously indicated did not act as charged. The shooting was done on the orders of the Commander, and there were hundreds of victims" (okezone.com, June 19, 2014).

Where Prabowo was accused of involvement in human rights violations, Jokowi faced religiously and racially charged rumors. These were seen, for example, in the tabloid *Obor Rakyat* ('Torch of the People') that was distributed in mosques and Islamic boarding schools. In the first edition of this tabloid, dated May 5–11, 2014, *Obor Rakyat* included fourteen lengthy news stories focused on Jokowi. Headlines included, "The Puppet Candidate who Breaks his Promises", "Taken Hostage by Brokers and Missionaries", "From Solo to Jakarta: De-Islamicization a la Jokowi", "The Maneuvering of Jacob Soetojo", "The Brokers behind Jokowi", "The Party of the Cross backing Jokowi", and "Jokowi, a Failed Savior". Other, smaller stories were given such titles as "They Rejected Jokowi", "Jokowi Betrays the Legendary Betawi Figure", "The New Jakarta Community Coalition Reject's Jokowi's Candidacy", "ITB Students Reject Jokowi", and "71.2 Percent of Jakartan Citizens Reject Jokowi's Candidacy". The tabloid also featured an interview with the cleric Kholil Ridwan, a member of the Indonesian Council of Ulamas, which discussed Jokowi's perceived preference for hiring non-Muslims; this interview was titled "Jokowi Always Gives Offices to Non-Muslims". On its last page, *Obor Rakyat* published a caricature of Jokowi with a long nose like Pinocchio, titled "The Liar: Do You Want to be Lied to Again?".

Attacks against Jokowi also branded him a communist and a Christian and said that his father had been born in Singapore. The allegation that Jokowi was a communist was rooted in his "mental revolution" platform, which his opponents linked to the socialist and communist thought of Karl Max. As stated by Fadli Zon, "Karl Marx used the term 'mental revolution' in 1869, in his *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*. 'Mental revolution' was also the purpose of the May Fourth Movement in China, initiated by Chen Duxiu [the founder of the Communist Party of China] in 1919" (detik.com, June 27, 2014).

Similarly, Habib Alatas—a researcher at the Center for Political Islam and Pancasila—argued that the term 'mental revolution' had its roots in socialist-communist thought. The phrase had long been used by socialist and communist movements in Europe to challenge religious teachings. As Alatas said, "religious dogmatism was held to inhibit the progress of civilization. A mental revolution was needed to liberate the people. Karl Marx himself regarded religion as the opium of the masses" (okezone.com, June 27, 2014). The essence of liberty, he argued, was the promotion of rational thought in order to prevent people from becoming co-opted by religious dogma. Deeper discussion of mental revolution did not occur, because—as seen in various comments on the subject—the term was mostly seen as mere political jargon rather than a path to progress.

Habib Alatas held that the term mental revolution had previously been used by the founder of the Communist Party of China, Chen Duxiu, and his colleague Li Dazhao to brainwash laborers and farmers in opposition to the Emperor of China. "In Indonesia itself, the term began to be used by Ahmad Aidit, the younger son of Abdullah Aidit, who changed his name to Dipa Nusantara Aidit (DN Aidit)", "he said. "Conceptually, a mental revolution ala Jokowi is nothing compared to the mental revolution of very ideological communism". Jokowi's mental revolution was seen as shallow and unclear as it had no roots in a systematic or rigid mental framework. "There is no ontological basis; it's nothing but jargon" (okezone.com, June 27, 2014).

Claims that Jokowi was communist were not only rooted in his concept of 'mental revolution'. Prabowo's campaign team considered Jokowi to have applied methods that were similar to those of Marxists. "They are using the approach of the Communist Party, using any means to seize power. In Semarang, there are indications that efforts to mobilize civil servants have been presented as declarations. In fact, in a bookstore in Semarang, the sale of books about Prabowo seems to be banned. When I asked the clerk, she even tried to get me to buy books about the other candidate. If we let this be, it might bring back the 'all means are justified' approach, a favorite of the [communist] party in the 1960s" (*okezone.com*, June 17, 2014).

Jokowi was further challenged by claims that he was a Christian. As stated by Muhammad Iskandar, the Chairman of the National Awakening Party, "for a year, Jokowi has topped all of the surveys. Because of his strength, his opponents feared

him, and this is why he was attacked with slander. He was vilified as Christian, Chinese, etc. But after searching and conducting an in-depth study, we found that his father is a hajji and his mother is a hajjah, and he is an active member of the Nahdlatul Ulama congregation. To borrow from Gus Dur [i.e. Abdurrahman Wahid, a religious scholar who became Indonesia's fourth president], 'they often call others unbelievers, but *lali kafire dewe* (forget their own unbelief)'" (*detik.com*, June 5, 2014).

There were also claims that the initial "H" in Jokowi's name stood for the baptismal name Herbertus. "They said that the H in front of my name stood for Herbertus. I didn't want to respond, but so many people have expressed doubts. Fine. I'll show a picture… what's in the picture is what is" (detik.com, June 12, 2014), Jokowi said. He and his campaign team then showed a photograph of Jokowi during his minor pilgrimage to Mecca (*umroh*). The team evidently considered it necessary to respond to doubts about the candidate's religiosity by showing Jokowi's piety and religious practice. No less than the chairmen of the National Democrats and National Awakening Party, as well as Jusuf Kala, gave testimony regarding Jokowi's faith.

Another rumor, linked to ethnicity, held that Jokowi was of Singaporean Chinese descent. This was directly contradicted by Jokowi: "My mother's from Ngemplak… look at that [very Javanese] name, Ngemplak. My father is from Karanganyar. The name of the district is Gudang Redjo. From the name alone, it is already clear that it is not Singapore" (*detik.com*, June 3, 2014). Elsewhere, Jokowi stated, "They say that I'm of Singaporean descent… look at this provincial face. That's a bit much to believe!" (detik.com, June 7, 2014). Jokowi also faced claims that he is Chinese, which were reproduced in various leaflets and social media stories that "proved" Jokowi was not of Javanese heritage. This discourse was dangerous, as it gave emphasis to being Chinese in Indonesia and how such a heritage is considered problematic. Such media constructs pose a significant risk to the stability and harmony of the social system.

Active Audiences' Reception of Indonesia's 2019 Presidential Elections

The primordial issues that dominated Indonesia's 2014 presidential election remained unchanged in the 2019 election. These included attacks against Jokowi, who was again accused of being non-Muslim, of being of Chinese heritage, and of being a communist. These attacks were spread predominantly by Islamic political groups that sought a more officially religious state. In responding to rumor that Jokowi was Christian, audiences more ideologically Islamist audiences (such as members of the Prosperous Justice Party and the National Mandate Party) were highly sensitive to the piety of the candidates. The same was true for audiences with backgrounds in such organizations as Muhammadiyah, Islamic Defenders Front, Hizbut Tahrir, and the Muslim Students' Association. When doubts about Jokowi's faith were expressed, they expressed stronger opposition to the candidate. Such groups were also highly sensitive to rumors that he was communist and of Chinese heritage.

For Islamists, candidates' commitment to Islam is very important. Of particular importance for them is the representation of Muslims, who are quantitatively the religious majority in Indonesia. These groups fear that Indonesia, which is 90 percent Muslim, would experience increased conversion under a leader who is non-Muslim or whose faith is lacking. As such, this group was easily targeted by such rumors, which they believed sincerely. As such, they rejected him and his candidacy, or—at the very least—they doubted his commitment to Islam despite the campaign's attempts to mitigate the rumors' effects. Audiences affiliated with Islamic organizations were very sensitive to the potential for Christianization, and the Universal Islam taught in institutions such as schools and families further underscored this opposition. Jokowi, as well as the party that backed him, were widely perceived as being close to Christians, and Islamists feared that they would be exploited by Christians for the sake of spreading their religion.

Similarly, rumors that Jokowi was of Chinese heritage disturbed many Islamists, and it further strengthened their opposition to Jokowi's candidacy. This was particularly true among members of Muhammadiyah, one of Indonesia's largest Islamic organizations. Muhammadiyah members saw the ethnic Chinese as having dominated the economic sector, thereby limiting their own economic opportunities. Muslims affiliated with such organizations are often engaged in trade activities, referring to the hadith that "out of ten blessings, nine lie in business". As such, the group has had an intense rivalry with the ethnic Chinese, who are also engaged in trade. When rumors spread that Jokowi was of Chinese heritage, members of Muslim groups rejected his candidacy or at least believed arguments that "proved" Jokowi's Chinese heritage.

The process through which audiences understood and responded to such rumors was influenced by their family backgrounds. Family, it appears, remains a strong filter in understanding and responding to the negative information that was spread online, both in Indonesia's 2014 and 2019 elections. For example, in understanding claims that Jokowi was a communist, netizens referred to the values that had been instilled in them by their families (Persadha, Abdullah and Wahyono, 2017). Persons from Islamist or military family backgrounds were very sensitive to rumors of communism. One informant stated that his father had ordered him to choose Prabowo because he comes from a family of soldiers; this indicates that, where Jokowi was identified as a communist, military families tended to increase their opposition. In these cases, the values conveyed by audiences' families heavily informed their voting behavior and allowed the negative information they read on the internet to reinforce their existing beliefs. Informants from Muslim families also indicated that they referred primarily to their family values in responding to rumors that Jokowi was a communist. This underscores the importance of family in understanding such black campaigning; in some cases, audiences' family backgrounds, as well as their prior negative experiences, reduced their ability to critically consider campaign messages.

CONCLUSION

This study has made several findings. *First,* online mass media audiences' acceptance of black campaigns is not homogeneous but differs depending on audiences' political ideologies, social statuses, cultural backgrounds, past experiences, and family characteristics. *Second*, the extent to which audiences believe the messages conveyed in black campaigns vary. Although some may believe the rumors and other negative information that is spread, others will not; this is influenced by their socio-cultural backgrounds as well as their political preferences. *Third*, negative information conveyed through new media tend not to influence audience perceptions, but rather reinforce their existing political preferences. *Fourth*, in receiving campaign messages through online mass media, audiences act not as individuals, but as collectives who are united by shared political ideologies and socio-cultural values.

Observing the results of this research, several arguments can be explored. Morley's thesis that there is a significant difference between the ideal reader proposed by the structuralist model and the actual everyday behaviors of audiences is reflected, at least to a degree, in audiences' response to the negative information spread through online media. According to Morley, audiences are not merely passive subjects who are easily fooled by media discourses and respond to them as desired by media actors. Rather, mass media audiences have the capacity to select which messages they accept, even when opposite messages are conveyed by different actors. All informants recognized that the messages conveyed by the election campaigns were not neutral, but were intended to shape the opinions of their audiences.

The assumption that media producers can control audiences is not shown, as online media audiences have the critical capacity to reduce the influence of media by choosing information to accept and to reject. Black campaign messages are confirmed or denied through ideological values, cultural values, family agreements, and existing knowledge. As such, the audiences of online mass media tend to actively respond to such messages. Online mass media audiences also produce polysemic meaning, which is a logical consequence of the interactions between the values socialized by their families, the ideological orientations of their political parties, and other discourses. In other words, no individual audience member can entirely represent him or herself; all audience members are shaped by the values that have been historically and sociologically embedded in them.

LIMITATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER STUDY

As a research product, and recognizing the complexity of the political facts linked to audience response, this academic document retains considerable limitations. These shortcomings may serve as the basis for further research, investigating such topics as the gender dimensions of audience response as well as how various social parameters influence audiences' reception of black campaigns that use online media.

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