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Influential, but not singular: Social media use during the election 2024 in Sambirejo Village

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Abstract: Public participation is a critical component of elections, which function as indicators of state continuity. This study examines public participation and preferences for social media use during the 2024 general election in Sambirejo village. A qualitative descriptive-exploratory methodology was utilized, with data collected through observation, focus group discussions (FGDs), and interviews. Fifteen informants were purposively selected, representing youth, women, men, the village head and staff, and KPPS officers. The findings indicate that the Sambirejo community actively participated in the election, with nearly all eligible voters exercising their right to vote. This active engagement is attributed to factors such as local community characteristics, the village head's participatory leadership style, and KPPS outreach initiatives. Additionally, social media was identified as a significant source of election information; however, FGDs revealed that it is primarily used as a supplementary reference rather than the sole determinant of political decisions.

Abstrak: Partisipasi masyarakat dalam pemilihan umum sangat penting karena pemilihan umum berfungsi sebagai indikator keberlanjutan negara. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji partisipasi masyarakat serta bagaimana media sosial digunakan sebagai referensi selama pemilihan umum 2024 di Desa Sambirejo. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif-eksploratif. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, diskusi kelompok terfokus (FGD), dan wawancara. Informan dipilih secara purposif, berjumlah 15 orang, termasuk pemuda, perempuan, laki-laki, kepala desa dan stafnya, serta petugas KPPS. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa masyarakat di Sambirejo berpartisipasi aktif dalam pemilu dengan hampir seluruh pemilih yang memenuhi syarat menggunakan hak pilihnya. Partisipasi aktif tersebut tidak dapat dilepaskan dari beberapa faktor, seperti karakteristik masyarakat setempat, gaya kepemimpinan partisipatif kepala desa, serta sosialisasi yang dilakukan oleh KPPS. Penelitian ini juga menemukan bahwa media sosial menjadi sumber informasi pemilu yang penting. Namun, seperti ditunjukkan dalam FGD, informasi tersebut digunakan sebagai referensi tambahan, bukan sebagai faktor penentu dalam pengambilan keputusan politik.

INTRODUCTION

Elections are a space for citizens to express their political will by choosing candidates who align with their conscience, as part of their participation in the political process (Ismail et al., 2024). In accordance with its objectives, elections are expected to be carried out democratically, accountably, and transparently. In a democratic country, one benchmark is active citizen participation, which demonstrates equality, representation, and fairness in the electoral process (Wuyo & Setyowati, 2023). The 2024 elections were held simultaneously in districts/cities and provinces across Indonesia on February 14, 2024. Simultaneous elections bring hope for a democratic celebration of sustainable governance.

In the 2024 election, political dynamics were notably intense and unpredictable, even before the official campaign period (Sumarmi, 2023). Mass media, both conventional and new, became the primary conveyors of information on political issues before, during, and after the campaign. The political dynamics of the 2024 election were highly unpredictable, leading to a wide array of issues extensively covered by the media. The emergence of political dynamics in the 2024 election process was driven by political actors and elites seeking to influence public opinion and gain votes (Retamara et al., 2023; Sumarmi, 2023).

The development of communication and information technology, marked by the presence of new media, has led to greater public access. New media used by the public are expected to foster political communication that enables a more balanced relationship between the state and industry. However, this expectation is not met because new media do not play an optimal role in encouraging balanced communication

(Adiputra et al., 2023). Therefore, it can be said that social media, as a new medium, is unlikely to present information independently. Conversely, people currently use social media more than conventional mass media. Its differences in message delivery, feedback reception, and ability to overcome space and time constraints make social media an attractive means of conveying information, whether for political campaigns or other purposes.

Currently, data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) show that internet users in Indonesia reached 215.63 million in 2022-2023, representing approximately 77% of the Indonesian population, with an average internet usage of about 7 hours per day. The increasing amount of information accessible to the public can provide insights into political participation.

The development of new media, including social media, has had a significant impact on democracy, particularly in political communication, as it serves both to attract public attention and to mobilize the masses. This condition challenges political actors to strategically use social media as an effective, efficient communication channel to reach constituents (Ndavula & Mueni, 2014; Dzisah, 2018). Thus, social media, as a form of new media, is expected to encourage greater public participation in electoral processes.

In a democratic country, elections must accommodate citizens'/society's rights to make political decisions, which constitutes a form of participation. Public participation in elections plays a significant role, as elections indicate the state's sustainability (Islami & Zitr, 2023). Higher public participation in elections indicates greater public political awareness. Conversely, lower public participation, manifested by apathy and a priori attitudes

toward the election process, indicates the state's failure to encourage public political participation and a lack of political awareness. Political participation is defined not only as voting but also as a person's involvement in the electoral process, including monitoring elections and choosing candidates according to one's conscience (Kenski & Jomini, 2006; Halim & Jauhari, 2019).

Elections play an important role in a democratic country. When elections reflect the people's aspirations, the continuity of governance can be ensured. Public aspirations will emerge when citizens receive adequate information about the candidates they will vote for. In today's era, with the growing volume of information conveyed through social media, people can select information according to their needs and interests, which aligns with the uses and gratifications theory. The uses and gratification theory posits that audiences are active participants in fulfilling their needs and desires for information, entertainment, and social interaction. Audiences are aware of their motivations in selecting media, while the gratifications sought and obtained from social media use vary according to individual characteristics.

Several previous studies are related to this article (Bhatiasevi, 2024; Bossen & Kottasz, 2020; Falgoust et al., 2022). The first study aimed to determine the relationship between students' social media use at the University and their selection of the 2024 presidential and vice-presidential candidates. The results of the study showed that social media provides voters with information and political views on presidential and vice-presidential candidates' work programs, vision, and mission (Kurniawan & Mutiah, 2022).

Subsequent studies have focused on the influence of social media on the

political orientation of first-time voters. One such study examined the impact of social media on the orientation of novice voters, and the results showed a significant relationship between first-time voter orientation and social media use (Razaqa et al., 2022). Another study on social media and youth participation in the 2015 Nigerian election campaign found a significant relationship between social media exposure and youth participation. This research employed a quantitative method and used the uses and gratification theory. A study on social media exposure in Ghana revealed that social media contributed to fostering democratic discourse but was not optimal at encouraging political participation in elections (Ndavula & Mueni, 2014). Another related study, similar to the one in Ghana, examined the role of online media in enhancing public political participation during elections. The findings indicated that online media played a role in increasing political participation in both presidential and legislative elections, particularly by raising public awareness to vote (Arpandi, 2023).

These studies show that social media played a role in communicating the vision, mission, and programs of presidential and vice-presidential candidates. The research conducted among university students highlighted how the use of social media during election campaigns influenced the orientation of first-time voters. Both the second and third studies confirmed that social media could influence young people's participation during election campaigns. The following studies, which examined voter participation, demonstrated that social media engagement enhanced electoral participation. In other words, these studies established a link between exposure to online media and voter participation in elections. Altogether, these findings

highlight the role of online media in increasing public political participation in elections.

Overall, these studies suggest that social media serves as an important channel for disseminating candidates' visions, missions, and programs, and has the potential to influence young voters' orientations and participation during election campaigns. Yet, existing research tends to focus on urban contexts or student populations, leaving rural communities relatively underexplored. This gap is significant, as rural communities are often assumed to have limited access to social media information and to rely more heavily on trusted local leaders in making electoral decisions.

Addressing this gap, the present study examines how rural communities engage with social media during the 2024 elections in Sambirejo Village. Grounded in the uses and gratifications theory, the study explores how rural voters selectively use social media according to their informational needs and how such exposure may contribute to their electoral participation.

METHOD

This research was conducted using a qualitative, exploratory descriptive approach. Moleong (2017) argues that descriptive research involves collecting non-numerical explanatory data to provide an overview of an event. Mudjiyanto, citing Given's opinion, states that exploratory research can be an initial step toward formulating a problem whose solution can be pursued through further research (Mudjiyanto, 2018).

The research location is Sambirejo Village, Prambanan, Sleman, Yogyakarta Special Region. This area was chosen because it has quite attractive social and economic characteristics. As a popular tourist destination frequented by both

domestic and international tourists, this village's community tends to be open to newcomers, showing concern and active participation in the village apparatus. This concern and participation arose from the village's rather effective policy to establish it as a tourist village. The shift in livelihood from initially working as stone miners at Tebing Breksi to tourism-related work was well facilitated by the village, leading the community to gain confidence in the village government's policies.

Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and FGDs. Data on social media elections were collected through observation and interviews, and several informants were selected to conduct FGDs on social media choices and the references they used to vote in the election. The selection of informants was carried out by choosing people involved in the election, including KPPS officers, village officials, PKK women representatives, and youth representatives from the Youth Organization, for a total of 15. Observation was carried out by observing their activities by accessing social media, the social media accessed, and the election socialization and vote-counting processes in several places in Sambirejo Village. The steps of exploratory descriptive research include creating interview guidelines and FGD schemes, followed by conducting interviews and FGDs. This is followed by verifying data from interviews, observations, and FGDs, analyzing and interpreting it, and drawing conclusions. The data analysis in this research was carried out through three simultaneous activities: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification. Miles and Huberman state that qualitative data analysis is conducted as a continuous, iterative process (Sugiyono, 2016). The stages of data reduction, data presentation,

and conclusion are part of an analysis process that is repeated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Motives and Audience Satisfaction in Choosing Media

Technological developments have shifted the way conventional mass media present information to the public. Currently, people prefer to obtain information and entertainment online, with social media as one of the primary platforms. The role of social media as both an information provider and an influencer of public choice of presidential candidates has been evident since the 2019 election, when candidates used it as a strategic tool to influence voters. Research conducted for the 2019 election found that social media influenced voter preferences and voter participation, particularly among first-time voters (Putra & Nurcholis, 2020).

The use of social media in political communication campaigns is widespread across almost all countries (Dimitrova & Mattes, 2018). Information conveyed through social media can encourage people to vote by presenting a large amount of information, distributed throughout the entire campaign period, and edited to appeal to the target group. For example, through videos, live broadcasts, or other visuals, feedback, the ability to share and comment, and social support become tools people use to interpret political messages (Messing & Westwood, 2012; Ohme et al., 2020).

The 2024 election was full of surprises and appeared heated both during the campaign period and from voting day to vote counting. The political dynamics in the presidential nomination process for the 2024 election were driven by indicators of actions taken to achieve the set goals (Retamara et al., 2023; Sumarmi, 2023). The heated atmosphere on social media began even before the 2024 election. The

presence of buzzers appeared neater and more organized, and the issues raised became "hot topics" on social media. This inevitably meant that social media audiences (netizens) had to read and see this information, potentially being influenced by it, which could then be used as reference material in determining their choices (Yulianto, 2023).

Mass media exposure is the process of conveying information or news to the public. Mass media exposure can influence society by shaping public opinion, which in turn affects issues circulating in the community. The power of mass media is quite significant; messages conveyed by mass media can attract audience attention and also provide insight and experience (Mustika & Anggraini, 2019). According to De Fleur and Ball-Rokeach, mass media exposure does not affect all individuals equally; rather, factors such as individual differences, social categories, and social relationships influence their impact (Rakhmat, 2008).

The development of communication technology towards digital has given rise to new media, namely digital media, including social media. Among the people of Sambirejo Village, social media is primarily used for entertainment and for information that is going viral at the time, while its use for election-related information is more about strengthening their choices. The use of media by individuals is not uniform; as noted in the theory of uses and gratifications, developed by Katz et al., (1973) the audience is considered active in choosing the media consumed to meet individual needs (Defleur & Ball-Rokeach, 2003; Humaizi, 2018). In this theory, a person consciously chooses the medium based on their needs and goals. The basic assumption of this theory, according to Katz, Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch (Elihu Katz et al., 1973; Humaizi, 2018), is that audiences play an

active, free role and consciously choose media to meet their needs, while the impact of media use varies depending on individual characteristics. According to the uses and gratifications theory, a person's tendency to consume mass media is based on their information needs at the time.

When this is applied to the people of Sambirejo Village, even under current conditions, there is almost no significant difference from the urban community, given the many changes and shifts in interaction patterns in the village community caused by advances in communication technology that have become part of daily life.

For the people of Sambirejo Village, information from social media is limited to adding details and providing references for their chosen candidates. So, social media does not have a significant role in influencing public choice. Social media can shape public perception, strengthening support, but candidates have difficulty regulating it because public awareness may have increased, or people may have their own choices. According to Wahyono's research, in the current era, often called the post-truth era, the public consumes political information on social media not to seek information but to justify it (Wahyono et al., 2020; Wirasti & Wahyono, 2024).

The people of Sambirejo Village widely use social media, but some residents stated that they chose a particular presidential candidate based on their personal beliefs. However, information shared on social media can sometimes influence voters, not based on a candidate's vision and mission, but on other factors. As the head of the KPPS stated, many voters chose presidential candidate number 2 because the candidate had never held office, and his vice president was young. This echoes the statement of an informant who stated:

I chose presidential candidate number 02 because I often watch YouTube and felt sorry for him, who had run three times but hadn't been elected. The information I got from social media was about the KKN narrative, alleging nepotism in Gibran's candidacy.

This means that social media also influences people's choices, even though their ability to discern important information for making informed choices hasn't fully developed. Simple factors, such as pity, repeated narratives about nepotism, and so on, serve as guides to choice and can elicit public sympathy.

Individuals sometimes access information and entertainment on social media, but only for entertainment. As one informant explained: "I access TikTok, but my choices are not based on the information I get from TikTok." TikTok is among the most widely accessed social media platforms, even in Sambirejo. Although social media is extensively used, the information disseminated through it does not serve as a basis for voting, as articulated by Mr. Wahyu: "Social media for our village people is used more for entertainment or shopping."

Some informants thought the media was too noisy due to the large volume of election-related information, which led to election fatigue, even though they still voted.

I didn't really follow the election this year. I really didn't feel like it because it was like what, I was already tired of taking care of this and that, oh my, what is it, it's so toxic in my opinion, like that, and there are too many comments, so I was reluctant.

Each individual's decision to vote is based on different reasons. If you look at the phenomenon of young people's participation in voting, it is a fact that many young people are very enthusiastic about choosing candidate number 02 because they want a new leader. One of the informants, Nardi, stated:

I think these young people are interested in new leaders, dreaming of new leaders. So, those who have never voted before, when they vote today, don't want to miss out on participating in the election. They're enthusiastic about participating.

The use of social media among teenagers as first-time voters is quite high, but they do not rely on it as their primary source for participating in the 2024 elections. First-time voters do not use social media to seek election information; rather, social media has become an important part of Generation Z's lives. Information presented on social media is not the primary reference for Generation Z in choosing candidates in the election because their understanding of politics is not yet mature. However, the urge to vote among Generation Z is quite high, as shown by voter data from Sambirejo Village, which recorded 4,494 people, 24% of whom are first-time voters.

Essentially, media organizations use media to convey information, and audiences seek it. This allows the audience to access the same information across various media, even when it is presented from different perspectives. In this position, the audience can decide which media to access according to their needs. The audience's access to media will influence how they respond to media content. This audience response is heavily influenced by the audience's social and psychological factors. As stated by Nurudin

in Harris et al. (2012), each individual has the freedom to assess and use media. In other words, each audience member has the right to decide what to do with the media. Ultimately, an individual's use of media will influence the form of its impact on them.

One of the real impacts of social media use in the context of elections is evident in the level of individual political participation among voters. The theory of uses and gratifications emphasizes that the audience is an active participant who understands their needs and consciously chooses media that are considered capable of fulfilling them. Thus, media consumption patterns are not just passive habits but an initiative by the audience to connect the needs they want to meet with their media choices. Individuals who actively seek political information through the web tend to have higher levels of interest in politics, which in turn increases their likelihood of participating in elections (Kaye & Johnson, 2004). The characteristics of each platform lead to differences in its use for political participation. TikTok, according to its characteristics, is more used for entertainment and social relations, but it turns out that this application has the potential to build community and channel self-expression (Vaterlaus et al., 2025; Vaterlaus & Winter, 2025). Based on its characteristics, Facebook significantly increases political self-efficacy and situational political involvement among young women (Rasul & Shin, 2026).

Among election participants in Sambirejo Village, social media has not yet become the primary source of information. For Generation Z, who have extensive access to TikTok, media is used primarily for entertainment and relationship-building. Still, it is not used as a source of election information and does not encourage Generation Z to participate in

elections. Facebook users are not too dominant, so it is also not a medium that encourages increased public involvement in elections.

Participation of the Sambirejo Community in the 2024 Election

Participation in elections is a form of political participation. Ramlan Subakti defines political participation as the active involvement of citizens in determining decisions that affect their lives (Subakti, 2010; Novita, 2020). Miriam Budiarmo echoes this sentiment, defining political participation as the active engagement of citizens in political life, including the election of national leaders (Budiarmo, 1998; Novita, 2020). A broader concept is presented by McClosky, who defines political participation as a voluntary form of community participation in the structure of ruler selection, either directly or indirectly, and involvement in the policy-making process (Rizqiana et al., 2024).

Political participation is a crucial aspect of democratic life, as it strengthens the legitimacy of democratic government. The higher the political participation, the stronger the government, owing to the broad and conscious sovereignty of the people (Asgar, 2023). Political participation in elections is reflected in higher voter turnout, indicating greater active public engagement in political life. There is also a conducive electoral climate, which implies cooperation among all parties to ensure the voting process takes place.

As a democratic country, active public participation is necessary. The purpose of participation is to elect leaders who reflect the will of the people, thereby improving the quality and effectiveness of public and development policies. These policies are expected to address the needs and expectations of the community and encourage the creation of a more

democratic country and more equitable prosperity for all people (Harris et al., 2012; Riyanto & Kovalenko, 2023). Public participation plays a significant role amidst the complex social, political, and economic issues facing the country today. With active public involvement, government policies can be more open, accountable, transparent, and participatory, resulting in policies that are more favorable to and beneficial for the community. Furthermore, public participation helps strengthen social bonds and community cohesion and supports the community's potential to solve shared problems (Masango, 2002; Riyanto & Kovalenko, 2023).

The 2024 election in Sambirejo Village can be considered a success, marked by an increase in voter turnout compared to 2019 and a smooth election process with no polling stations requiring re-voting. Voter turnout in the 2024 election reached 92%, a 4% increase from the 2019 election, which was 88%. This increase was supported by a 24% share of first-time voters. Several factors contributed to the increase in voter turnout in the 2024 election, namely: 1) the village head and staff's commitment to encourage all community members to vote; 2) intensive socialization by the KPSS using various media; 3) community characteristics that influenced voter integrity.

The village head and village officials of Sambirejo have been actively encouraging villagers to exercise their right to vote. One example of this support is the village head's openness to all legislative candidates campaigning in the village. According to the Sambirejo Village Head, campaigning is not prohibited as long as it complies with existing regulations and does not disrupt public order. As village head, he has never influenced the

community's choices, as Wahyu, the Village Head of Sambirejo, stated:

I never intervene in the people's choices because I must be neutral. Community groups hold many discussions. I also allow the installation of billboards for legislative candidates and parties. I don't prohibit it, but I don't approve it either. However, the results are good enough for one round.

In addition to the support from the village head and his staff, the KPPS officials routinely worked hard to publicize the 2024 Election to the community. This was carried out through face-to-face visits to hamlets and by actively utilizing social media, specifically Instagram, to convey information about voting procedures, requirements, and rules for the 2024 Election. Socialization efforts targeted various community groups, such as mothers through PKK groups, and young people through *Karang Taruna* or social gatherings in each RT. Socialization is quite important in encouraging voter participation, as these activities can raise public awareness and prevent apathy in elections (Gleko et al., 2017).

According to research on the 1996 US presidential election, political web users are politically active and effective audiences who use online media to increase political knowledge and participation. This reinforces the view that the internet can expand the space for democratic participation by allowing direct access to political information and interaction among users without traditional media intermediaries (Kaye & Johnson, 2010). In Sambirejo, associated with the 2024 Presidential election, election socialization has been carried out through social media, which can increase political participation, especially among first-time voters.

Election awareness campaigns are also conducted using social media, particularly Instagram. Social media is essential for engaging first-time voters and serves as a means of political education for the younger generation. According to the Head of KPPS, Instagram is widely used because of its popularity among young people, especially first-time voters. The power of social media, particularly Instagram, can encourage voters to vote due to the appeal of photos, hashtags, memes, emojis, profile photos, comments, and other features, all of which contribute to the creation of a more equal online community (Gibbs et al., 2015; Adi et al., 2018).

According to Lilleker and Koc-Michalska (2016), political participation in the digital age is more influenced by social recognition or group conformity than by ideological awareness or personal responsibility. So, socialization carried out through social media is expected to expand participation in voting, even though it is encouraged to gain social recognition rather than because of personal responsibility or ideological awareness.

The third factor supporting participation is the Sambirejo community's openness to newcomers. Because the Sambirejo area is a tourist destination, the village community is relatively open to newcomers and more receptive to information. An open society prioritizes freedom while remaining within the bounds of law and ethics. An open society is also closely linked to democracy, which upholds individual freedom while remaining governed by the law (Azifambayunasti, 2022). The openness of the Sambirejo community is a crucial factor in building political participation in the 2024 elections.

Every political process requires public participation, as participation in the political process means the public is

fighting for its interests. For example, Herbert McClosky's theory of participatory democracy emphasizes the importance of public participation in public decision-making, thus allowing the public to play an active role in governance. Furthermore, John Locke's theory of power emphasizes how the public fights for its interests within a complex system of power (Feenstra, 2015; Riyanto & Kovalenko, 2023).

Three models can be seen as factors in voting behavior: the sociological, psychological, and rational or economic models (Yustiningrum & Ichwanuddin, 2015). The sociological model considers aspects such as religion, education, residence, age, gender, and economic level that can influence choices. Meanwhile, the psychological model is closely related to an individual's or society's identification with a political party. This identification process can be influenced by those closest to them, such as parents and other family members. Furthermore, psychological factors also include an individual's interest in discussing political issues. The economic or rational model is influenced by an individual's evaluation of their own, their family's, and their national economic situation. These three models influence individual and community political participation, particularly in the selection of leaders and government officials. The three factors mentioned above—psychological, rational, and sociological—were used to assess the political participation of the Sambirejo Village community. Based on the researchers' data, rational and sociological factors were more prominent than psychological factors. The high level of community participation in voting at the polling stations (TPS) was attributed to a desire or hopes to change their fate, thus constituting a rational choice. Meanwhile,

sociological factors, namely education and religion, were quite prominent in driving the community to the polling stations in the 2024 election.

CONCLUSION

The 2024 election in Sambirejo Village, Prambanan, Sleman, showed high community participation at 92%. The 2024 election was quite conducive, with no disruptions to the process. This high level of community participation was strongly influenced by local characteristics, including improved education and a more open society. Furthermore, participation was driven by the Sambirejo Village Head's participatory leadership style and KPPS's intensive outreach to the community.

In accordance with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, social media use in the context of elections can be examined through the lens of individuals' political participation as voters. Media consumption patterns are an audience initiative to connect the needs they want to meet with their media choices. The public widely uses social media for entertainment, viral content, and business-related information. In the context of the 2024 election, the public does not widely use social media to get information about the candidates. The people of Sambirejo Village access election information only through social media as an additional reference, not as the primary source for making choices.

This research is a study in the village area, namely Sambirejo. The next research is recommended to be able to conduct a comparative study between regions, for example, between villages and cities, to understand how local culture, digital literacy, and socio-political context affect voter behavior.

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