

Rhetoric in Polarization by Public Relations on Social Media

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Abstract: *Public relations uses social media to be able to do issue management. However, many issues created by Public Relations are polarized, there are two interest groups that conflict with each other, resulting in two groups arguing and making rhetorical arguments. The purpose of this study is to describe the phenomenon of polarization of issues on social media carried out by interest groups using a public relations and rhetorical approach. This research method uses a literature study to obtain the desired data, related to the polarization of issues on social media. The data analysis technique used is content analysis. In conducting content analysis, the researchers triangulated the data by searching for the required literature, then classified the literature, conducted documentation, rechecked the classified data, then analyzed using a theoretical basis on polarization in social media using a public relations and rhetorical approach. The results show that rhetoric-based polarization on social media can create conflict, but before polarization occurs, public relations can prevent it by managing issues and gaining benefits for the organization.*

Keywords: *Public Relations, Polarization, Rhetoric, Social Media*

Introduction

Polarization in social media affects information and opinion in society. The existence of an algorithm that shows the routine habits of social media users, makes the system provide specific recommendations to users so that there is a contribution from social media users in the evolution of social network structures. The number of recommendations from links on social media and the dynamics of opinion models formed on social media, makes a lot of polarization occur in social media which is made from rhetorical strategies by public relations (Cinus et al, 2022).

Social media has significantly changed the way people consume information. Algorithms on social media contribute to the polarization of opinion through the effect of echo chambers. Echo chambers occur because of the interaction between individuals who have the same mind, then they mutually reinforce their point of view, especially ideological points of view. This influence is strengthened by the existence of an algorithm that strengthens echo chambers in the form of recommendations for the type of information that social media users should follow (Barbieri et al, 2014).

In the beginning, social media provided an opportunity for users to get easy access to abundant information from all over the world. Social media offers a variety of information and

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public spaces to express opinions freely. But in its development, social media is widely used for the benefit of a group of people in the form of partisan rhetoric and polarized discussions (Boutyline & Willer, 2017).

This phenomenon then gives rise to the phenomenon of echo chambers, where social media users end up isolating themselves by choosing exposure to content that matches their opinions and strengthens their beliefs, attitudes, and behavior (Flaxman, 2016). The existence of echo chambers has shaped the ideological homophile of users on social media in many contexts (Hutchens, 2019).

On the one hand, this phenomenon brings a negative side, such as fertilizing the practice of propaganda, disinformation, and misleading beliefs on social media users (Wang, 2018). In the COVID-19 pandemic, the polarization that occurred on social media led to an explosion of racism and xenophobia which resulted in discriminatory practices and attacks on certain races in several parts of the world (Qureshi et al, 2022).

Public Relations utilizes echo chambers to amplify favorable opinions for the organization with rhetoric on social media. Currently, public relations activities in the political field that are most often highlighted are causing polarization. One of them is the result of a survey from R & D Kompas (6/7/2022) which was later released by many other online media. The survey results stated that the polarization of the effects of the 2019 presidential election still exists today. The main cause is people who work consciously to confuse the situation, namely buzzers or influencers. As we know, these buzzers work on instructions from the public relations behind the scenes. Public relations for a particular mission is planning a war of opinion or simply throwing negative comments between the two opposing camps on social media. But sometimes because the network on social media continues to grow, the issues that are thrown do not bear the expected results.

Public relations use social media to be able to do issue management. However, many issues created by Public Relations are polarized, there are two conflicting interest groups, resulting in two groups arguing and making rhetorical arguments. The purpose of this study is to describe the phenomenon of polarization of issues in social media carried out by interest groups using a public relations and rhetorical approach.

Various plans made by public relations are also intentional so that polarization occurs on social media. All these activities need to be evaluated. Due to the consequences of growing social networks, it is important for public relations not to immerse themselves in the current polarizing trend. Public relations also need to ask and find out whether social media which is the driver of polarization can be controlled? What steps should be taken so that the polarization does not have a negative impact on real life. That is why this research was conducted.

Literature Review

Several previous studies found that social media users tend to access information from opinions that they like and are homogeneous (Nikolov et al. 2015; Pariser 2011). From the behavior of accessing that information, then confirming the user's prejudice which then turns into echo chambers, where they produce and consume information that strengthens their beliefs (Quattracocchi et al, 2016). However, there are also follow-up studies with different results.

Several other studies have stated that there are also different points of view on the Facebook algorithm (Bakshy et al, 2015). Recent research has also found that the phenomenon of echo chambers towards polarization depends on the role of the social networking platform used as content distribution (De Arruda et al, 2021). Produced content is also distributed in several combination methods supported by graphics, user interaction, and the presence of the latest network embedding.

Consumption of information obtained from sources scattered on social media can cause polarization of attitudes that have an impact on behavior. The distribution of friends on social media platforms can also make polarization more real (O'Hara & Stevens, 2015). Studies on polarization have long been carried out in various disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, communication, and others. The following is a table of theories from the three scientific studies above related to polarization:

Table 1.
Study of Polarization Theory from Sociology, Psychology and Communication
 Source: Queshi (2022)

No	Field of study	Theory	Explanation of Theory
1	Sociology	Game	Game theory is used to understand the mechanisms that link user behavior to expectations
		Muted Group	The theory of silenced groups shows that marginalized groups are unable to express themselves on social media, resulting in distortion of information and polarization.
		Social Identity	This theory shows the feelings of individuals based on their group membership. Strong social ties to the group will encourage partisan attitudes towards the ideological attitude of the group
		Social Distance	This theory describes the level of acceptance or trust that an individual or group feels towards other individuals or groups in the network.
		Protracted Social Conflict	This theory refers to hostile interactions between groups based on long-standing ethnic, cultural, and religious hatreds.
2	Psychology	Cognitive Dissonance	This theory refers to the phenomenon when a person experiences positive feelings due to getting information that strengthens his opinion on social media
		Confirmation Bias	This theory describes the tendency to interpret, seek, remember and like information that confirms his belief in
		Motivated Skepticism	This theory describes a tendency towards information skepticism that is disliked while

			receiving information that is in accordance with his beliefs
		Motivated Reasoning	This theory refers to individuals who enjoy biased reasoning to maintain consistency between attitudes, behavior, and self-image so as to arrive at a preferred conclusion.
		Anti-reflexivity	This theory refers to the mobilization of several sectors of society that resist change and tend to maintain the industrial capitalist system and polarization.
3	Komunikasi	Agenda Setting	Agenda setting theory describes the influential role of the media in disseminating information about issues that the public should think about
		Cultivation	This theory refers to the phenomenon of reality in society that tends to be in harmony with the reality displayed in the mass media.
		Elaboration Likelihood Model	This theory describes how people's attitudes are formed from persuasive arguments circulated in the media
		Flaming	Teori ini menggambarkan interaksi online di ruang This theory describes online interactions in social network chat rooms that are incompatible and hostile due to differences in ideological beliefs
		Spiral of Silence	This theory describes individuals who tend to be silent when they realize that there is an unpleasant opinion climate, so they choose not to express their opinions to the public

Based on the theoretical study above, the making of polarizing rhetoric is not by itself. It is created from the collaboration of scientific disciplines and theory. In this case, in addition to collaborating with other fields in the organization, public relations also carry out strategic and intensive collaboration with various parties. There is a gap in public knowledge about the dynamics of polarization in social media, making the work of polarizing rhetoric on social media closely monitored and controlled by public relations. Messages that contain polarization are also aimed at the public who have also been polarized on social media (Ballard, 2022).

The issues that most often create polarization are political issues in the online realm. Political polarization is a new phenomenon in Indonesian politics, this phenomenon became a sharp spotlight in the 2019 elections with two opposing poles regarding their political choices (Annas et al, 2019). Related to the above theory, flaming, confirmation bias, and motivated reasoning are theories that can explain this phenomenon. The flaming theory explains inconsistent interactions because individuals tend to argue and confirm information that is already believed and maintain its consistency in online forums on social media. In other cases, some polarization theories can also explain this phenomenon.

The polarization that occurs in the online realm is inseparable from the rhetoric conveyed on social networks. Rhetoric is used to persuade and motivate audiences in certain circumstances by providing information or suggestions (Rohimah, 2022). Rhetoric is suitable to be used to encourage the audience's choice of inaccessible original information. Rhetoric is built on logos, pathos, and ethos. Logos with logical arguments. Pathos using emotional psychology. And ethos with a good disposition from communicators (Safitri, 2017). In making rhetoric, public relations are also guided by five canons, starting from invention, arrangement, style, delivery, and memory.

Methodology

The methodology used in this research is qualitative. This research method uses a literature study to obtain the desired data, namely data related to the polarization of issues in social media. The data analysis technique used is content analysis. There are three news analyzed, about the same theme in the same online media. Namely the news release from a survey conducted by Kompas.com (6/6/2022). The following is a table of analyzed content:

Table 2.
Analyzed News Titles

No	News Titles	Source
1.	“Buzzer” dan Hoaks Jadi Penyebab Kian Runcingnya Polarisasi Politik Sejak Pilpres 2019 (B1)	nasional.kompas.com
2.	Survei Litbang Kompas: Publik Nilai Buzzer Provokatif Harus Ditindak Tegas (B2)	nasional.kompas.com
3.	Survei Litbang Kompas: 87,8% Responden Anggap Buzzer Peruncing Polarisasi (B3)	news.detik.com

In conducting content analysis, the researchers triangulated the data by searching for the required literature, then classified the literature, conducted documentation, rechecked the classified data, then analyzed using a theoretical basis on polarization in social media using a public relations and rhetorical approach.

Findings & Discussion

Rhetoric is considered as intelligence to make the right persuasion trap on a given occasion. Public relations in this case, must be able to use the right social media in conveying an aesthetic message to the public (Sari, 2022). Rhetoric as a science, has developed, starting from classical, modern, and contemporary rhetoric. In contemporary rhetoric, the study is specifically for analyzing written texts (Sutrisno & Wiendijarti, 2014). Rhetoric can also be in the form of the use of spoken and written language (Wangsadanureja, 2022).

This study analyzes the ethos, logos, and pathos of the text of the compass R & D survey results regarding the hot polarization that occurred during the 2019 election. There were three news items that were discussed. In the first news (B1), polarization is carried out by influencers,

buzzers, or provocateurs (ethos) they are consciously clouding the situation (pathos). Both camps actively produce content on social media that provokes negative responses by claiming each other's achievements and not appreciating the work of figures in the opposing camp (logos). The effect of the rhetoric caused to date is still a war of opinion between the two opposing camps (polarization). The presence of social media gives them space to provoke or agitate by spreading incomplete information, from sources that are not credible, to hoaxes. B1 made a link to read three news stories as well. The first news entitled: KIB tanda tangani nota kesepahaman, Airlangga: Kita Berupaya Tak Ada Politik Identitas dan Polarisasi di Masyarakat. The second news entitled: Jokowi Dinilai Cukup Pragmatis dalam Tangani Polarisasi. The third news entitled: Perludem: Kerumitan Teknis dan Potensi Polarisasi Akan Kembali Kita Hadapi di Pemilu 2024.

In the second news (B2), the polarization is carried out by provocative influencers or buzzers (ethos) by creating terms or labels for cebong and kadrun/kampret (logos). In addition, they also comment on each other on social media that causes hatred or anger (pathos). The effect of the rhetoric is also the same, namely the war of opinion or just negative comments between the two camps is still happening today. B2 made a link to read three news stories as well. First news: Buzzer hingga hoaks jadi penyebab kian runcingnya polarisasi politik sejak Pilpres 2019. The second news entitled: Litbang Kompas: 79 Persen Responden Menilai Keterbelahan sejak Pilpres 2019 Merusak Demokrasi. The third news entitled: Litbang Kompas: Interaksi Warganet terhadap Anies Teratas, tapi Sentimen Positif Prabowo Tertinggi.

The third news (B3) also states that the perpetrators of rhetoric are buzzers or influencers (ethos) who consciously confuse the situation (pathos) by provocatively clouding the atmosphere (logos). B3 creates news tags with the choice of words R & D Compass, R & D survey Kompas, buzzer, influencer, and polarization. B3 also made other news links by reading too: Litbang Kompas: Pecah Kubu Pilpres 2019 Dinilai Rusak Demokrasi.

From the explanation above, we can see that one news source from the results of the Kompas R&D survey can become several news stories on Kompas online and be re-released with other media. We can see that the activities of Public Relations carried out by Kompas can disseminate information to many media channels and carry out consistent agenda setting by including other news on the reading link as well as three news articles which according to the editors are related to the news that is being disseminated to the public. For other news agencies, in this case detik.com also tries to play the agenda setting by creating a reading link as well, but there is only one of them. Detik.com focuses more on click bait by creating a tag of five keywords. To attract the public by using other theories such as cultivation, flaming, and elaboration likelihood models.

What needs to be observed from the three news stories regarding polarization is the use of buzzers and influencers in public relations activities. Especially in political organizations and government. At first the buzzer was used as a promotional strategy and carried out rhetoric to the public to win certain political candidates. Government public relations use buzzers so that government programs get public attention and become trending topics on social media (Rohmah and Ernungtyas, 2020).

The presence of a buzzer as a funnel or speaker always hums certain information or content massively and repeatedly. Influencers are people who have many followers, have

influence and credibility in their fields. Therefore, messages conveyed by influencers will reach their followers in the form of shared and traffic on their social media (Wahyuningtyas, 2017). The presence of buzzers and influencers is then appreciated by public relations based on demand and supply in the market and creates a new industry in the digital era. This industry is managed by communication agents in this case public relations, clients, and buzzers (Camilla et al, 2017). The communication agency is the provider of buzzer accounts and determines buzzer rates for clients. A communications agency that strategizes and looks for potential buzzer accounts. Potential buzzer accounts are mapped based on the number of followers and engagement on social media.

Buzzer makes rhetoric by spreading messages and issues massively through writing, narration, pictures, memes, videos and more on social media. With the existence of algorithms in social media, it becomes a place for distributing information that can be mapped based on user homophily (Morrar et al, 2017). And this is used well by public relations to create polarization to read the map of social media users according to their ideological attitudes and beliefs for the benefit of the organization. The results show that rhetoric-based polarization on social media can create conflict, but before polarization occurs, public relations can prevent it by managing issues and gaining benefits for the organization.

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