

MARUF AMIN'S POLITICAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN THE 2019 ELECTION CAMPAIGN: A LESSON FOR ANTI-HOAX POLITICS

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ABSTRACT. Social media (Instagram) with embedded text in various forms of multimedia content have become an important battleground for politicians to place the relevance of their policies to the public during election campaigns. The narratives played by politicians in the digital space are aimed at securing the mass base and votes of supporters, while seeking early certainty of their victory. This study aims to analyze Maruf Amin's political communication strategy in dealing with hoaxes in the 2019 Indonesian election campaign. In this study, the researchers used a qualitative method with a descriptive approach to analyze the data. Primary data were taken from interviews. Meanwhile, the secondary data were from journal articles, books, news, report releases, and digital contents. The data analysis model used in this study is inductive analysis, an analytical model in qualitative research that does not depart from theoretical deductions but rather empirical facts. This article was prepared by applying research steps, starting with data collecting, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Results indicated that digital political communication strategies applied in campaigns against hoaxes can be seen from how the digital presence with the identity of politicians, authentic character, and having intellectual and social capital as ulama is indirectly attached to scientific authorities who are bound by responsibility for delivering scientific truth. In addition, another finding is that coherence and consistency in campaigns can play an important role in success against hoaxes. To conclude, anti-hoax narratives in elections are inevitable. In other words, it is political resources that are free to use at any time and ready to be used by politicians to reaffirm an agenda, neutralize an issue, instill new ideas about nationalism, and provide educational and literacy messages for the wider audience.

Keywords: political communication, social media, digital literacy, political campaign, general election.

INTRODUCTION

Digital political communication has been widely accepted as everyday normality inherent in democratic systems (Medero, 2021; Jackson *et al.*, 2021) yet few have analyzed how new information and communication technologies impact on these processes. The essays in this forum address this gap, and consider the political significance of new technologies, new actors, and new practices that shape "Militarization 2.0" and normalize political violence in the digital age. The authors in this forum rely, to varying degrees, on common militarized tropes and dichotomies (such as authenticity, belonging, and (de) as politicians use digital technology media in political campaigns (Vaccari, 2022; Larrondo-Ureta & Meso-Ayerdi, 2022; García-Orosa, 2022). However, political communication in the digital space is highly crucial, especially during the general election momentum. Many contemporary studies show that social media play a significant role in national elections which can direct voter preference (Petkevic & Nai, 2022; Arslanagic & Mitrović, 2022; Carney, 2022; Enns-Jedenastik *et al.*, 2022; Bene *et al.*, 2022). The digital platform is chosen as a campaign medium because it is quite effective and inexpensive (Basavaraj, 2022;

(Varughese & Semetko, 2022; Hassim *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, it may facilitate electoral activities in reaching wider targets. This condition is different from previous methods in which the politicians must go directly to the campaign location which requires considerable time and effort (Veneti, Lilleker, & Jackson, 2022; Dhiman & Toshniwal, 2022; this data source has limitations and has to be collected manually, which makes it time-consuming and costly. The readily available internet inculcates the sharing of opinions freely on social media, facilitating government-citizen interactions. These interactions may show fluctuations in frequency and intensity on social media with the success and failure of some government schemes. Thus, this research proposes utilizing the Twitter data related to the government welfare schemes during the election duration to uncover the spatial and temporal relationships between the tweets' information diffusion pattern and political elections. To start with, we perform tweet classification to identify the target communities or groups and multiple user-engagements by employing deep learning-based pre-trained language representation (LRTosatto, Cox, & Nguyen, 2022; Gaber & Fisher, 2022). The use of social media is not only popular at the national level but also the regional level (Iglesias & Alonso, 2021; Elareshi *et al.*, 2021).

Even though they have different targets and scope of power, they both have similarities in competing to image themselves in a persuasive, active, attractive, and sympathetic way (Kasmani, 2022).

Many studies have shown that social media in practice are not always used as a tool to support the strengthening of democracy. In other words, it can also be used by political actors as an instrument against democracy (Tucker *et al.*, 2017), which is often added with the spread of fake news to influence the election results (Lorenzo-Rodríguez & Torcal, 2022). Media and political experts and analysts reveal that hoaxes and disinformation are the main causes of polarization during election campaigns (Pedriza, 2021; the media and political candidates Shmargad & Sanchez, 2020; Lee, 2019; Jalli & Idris, 2019). The reality in the field indeed shows that fake news and disinformation fill the digital space, including during the 2019 Indonesian general election. Therefore, it is not surprising that this momentum is considered to be closely related to the peak of political propaganda in the post-truth era (Aminulloh *et al.*, 2021). The spread of hoaxes, which are often followed by hate speech, is getting more popular because it is driven by populism in the public sphere. Both Joko Widodo & Maruf Amin and Prabowo Subianto & Sandiaga Uno, in the study conducted by Sihidi *et al.* (2020), are described as political actors who do not want to miss the votes of the Muslim population. In other words, both of them also benefit from the existing populism. However, the unfortunate risks of populism – including the black campaign and hoax attacks – are addressed to them, resulting in a dilemma for each party.

The negative impact of the rapid flow of hoaxes on social cohesion is more complicated and worrying than what happens among political elites. Latief (2019) found several impacts of the high intensity of fake news during the 2019 election correlated with social ties, such as the establishment of social frictions, the development of destructive propaganda in campaigns, massive identity politics, racial intolerance, and the weakening of society's critical reasoning (the inability to filter news). Even though hoaxes and disinformation are vague, they do not really disappear, but instead, contribute to sharpening the polarization that tore apart social and national solidarity after the 2019 election. Referring to the 2020 Indonesian Political Indicators, Kustiasih (2020) found how social polarization develops in society. Moreover, responding to the polarization, Muhtadi (2021) argued that the residue of political polarization is unavoidable in the next general election.

Political polarization can be minimized if serious efforts are taken to overcome the spread of

hoaxes and disinformation in elections. Therefore, this study discusses important lessons from the political communication practices carried out by Maruf Amin's team during the 2019 election campaign in countering fake news. In addition, this study also attempts to identify alternatives to digital political communication strategies that are potential and can be used by politicians to overcome the spread of hoaxes and disinformation in facing the upcoming electoral political landscape. In this study, the researchers explore more about the applied practices in terms of the initiative and creativity of politicians as political agents, as stated in the categorization put forward by Guess *et al.* (2020) regarding the prevention of hoaxes by emphasizing the ability of political elites to use agencies to achieve reputation incentives.

This study focuses on examining the Instagram page of Maruf Amin as his official social media account during the 2019 election campaign. It becomes the focus of this study due to several important considerations. First, the figure of Maruf Amin is relatively rarely reviewed because more attention is paid to Joko Widodo, aggravated by the fact that his appointment is unexpected but reasonable. Joko Widodo often gets accusations from a group of conservative Muslims who often call him a figure who is antipathy to ulama and Islam (Simanjuntak, 2019). According to Qurtuby (2018), conservative groups also often spread 'black campaigns' containing false news through the mosques to attack Joko Widodo. Thus, choosing Maruf Amin to accompany him is considered to be able to neutralize negative sentiments that come from Islamic groups who oppose him. Second, studies on the eradication of hoaxes in terms of creativity and initiative of the political elite are still rare. However, the importance of interventions to improve community critical literacy has been investigated previously. Guess *et al.* (2020) stated that interventions to the public are highly needed so that they have knowledge in filtering news and training their skepticism in detecting fake news. A recent study from Pennycook & Rand (2021) reveals that a low level of reasoning is the cause of a person's inability to judge the truth of the news. Meanwhile, other studies conclude that media and political literacy have a major influence in determining the extent to which a person can distinguish the truth of news (Jones-Jang, Mortensen, & Liu, 2021; Brashier *et al.*, 2021) but corrective messages quickly fade from memory. We tested whether the longer-term impact of fact-checks depends on when people receive them. In two experiments (total N = 2,683).

After reviewing many works of literature and previous studies, the topic that discusses the strategy

of the political elite in navigating fake news deeply is still rare to find. Therefore, this article is intended to fill this gap by finding out how politicians as political communicators can contribute to increasing media literacy and public politics. For this reason, in the context of this study, digital political communication from Maruf Amin plays a central role in eliminating fake news and disinformation aimed at Joko Widodo. Furthermore, this article is also expected to be a reference in future studies related to the eradication of hoaxes in terms of political communication for political elites in the digital era.

METHOD

In this study, the researchers applied a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The descriptive approach aims to make a systematic, factual, and accurate description of the facts, characteristics, and relationships between the phenomena being investigated (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The source of primary data was interviews carried out online with 5 informants who were members of Maruf Amin's official social media management team. They served as a Digital Content Strategist (Indonesian: Ahli Strategi Konten Digital (ASKD)), Instagram Page Administrator (Indonesian: Administrator Laman Instagram (ALI)), Content Disseminator (Indonesian: Diseminator Konten (DK)), Multimedia Content Creator (Indonesian: Kreator Konten Multimedia (KKM)), and Mass Media Coordinator (Indonesian: Koordinator Media Massa (KMM)). Meanwhile, sources of secondary data were articles, news, report releases, books, and digital content concerning Maruf Amin's campaign. The collected data were then studied, processed, and analyzed to understand the context of the event accurately based on the narrative of the social media team for Maruf Amin's campaign. These results were combined with outcomes from the analysis of secondary data to provide flexibility for researchers in developing answers based on an empirical approach to existing research questions through procedural, organized, and evaluative steps (Johnston, 2017; Doolan & Froelicher, 2009) so that researchers could formulate a contextual explanation.

The data analysis model used in this study is inductive analysis, an analytical model in qualitative research that does not depart from theoretical deductions but rather empirical facts. The purpose of the inductive analysis model is to allow research findings to emerge from frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in the raw data without the limitations imposed by structured methodologies (Thomas, 2006). This article was compiled by applying research steps following the Miles and Huberman model, starting with data collecting, data

reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Fast Action in Establishing Identity in the Digital Space

During the 2019 election campaign, the role and effects of digital political communication carried out by Maruf Amin's team tended to be less highlighted by the public. The impression that emerged among political observers was that Maruf Amin could not increase Joko Widodo's electability because he was chosen based on compulsion and urgent short-term needs as a 'political bumper' that served as a deterrent to anti-Islam attacks against Joko Widodo and to attract votes from Muslims, especially the Nahdliyin (Danial, 2019). Indeed, the figure of Maruf Amin is relatively unknown to the public, especially among young people. In dealing with this condition, Maruf Amin's team, through a mandate from Maruf Amin, worked quickly to create an Instagram page filled with various content aimed at introducing Maruf Amin's track record, bringing Maruf Amin closer to young people, and promoting the president and vice president's work programs between 2019 and 2024 (the results of the interview with Maruf Amin's Digital Communication Strategist, March 20, 2022).

In the era of digitalization, the public has high expectations of politicians who can show their digital presence through social media channels because this is considered a visible identity in cyberspace. Meanwhile, in addressing a condition in which Maruf Amin's popularity is very low but demanded to be able to match Joko Widodo in the campaign, the Maruf Amin team – that manages Maruf Amin's Instagram page – quickly took action by building a digital presence from Maruf Amin's figure. This is important because the absence of social media channels may affect electability, especially since social media is used as an initial reference for the public to get to know the profile of a figure quickly. This initial process is crucial because being known by the public really helps politicians to act as agents of political communicators and carry out social roles in shaping and directing public opinion (Gorodnichenko, Pham, & Talavera, 2021).

Political communication that starts with building Maruf Amin's digital presence is interpreted as an effort to make his candidate present, active, and taken into account because politicians as political communicators must act conditionally by relying on their ability to influence the community (Haman & Školník, 2021; Farkas & Bene, 2021). Spreading influence is a priority so that Maruf Amin's digital political communication embodied in the content of

Instagram posts can directly enter and participate in the dynamics of issues circulating in mainstream mass media, especially activities on Maruf Amin's social media, which directly have an effect on preventing hoaxes aimed at Joko Widodo. The positive influence was spread in the form of memes, visuals, and video clips to show Maruf Amin's humble personality and his dedication as an academician and ulama who is responsible for conveying scientific truth (the results of the interview with Maruf Amin's Mass Media Coordinator, March 18, 2022).

Maruf Amin's position with a background as an ulama is considered important in countering hoaxes because his views can help answer and balance the narrative that corners Joko Widodo as anti-Muslim. Meanwhile, the figure of Maruf Amin as an academician is attached to a scientific authority who is bound by the obligation to convey scientific truth according to his capacity. This impression was built since the beginning of Maruf Amin using an Instagram account. The digital communication shows the scientific and academic authority of Maruf Amin, whose goal is to emphasize the scientific capacity of an ulama who is also bound by the obligation to uphold scientific accountability. The source of legitimacy that comes from the mastery of knowledge and values of academic honesty is the main element in the development of Maruf Amin's identity in cyberspace.

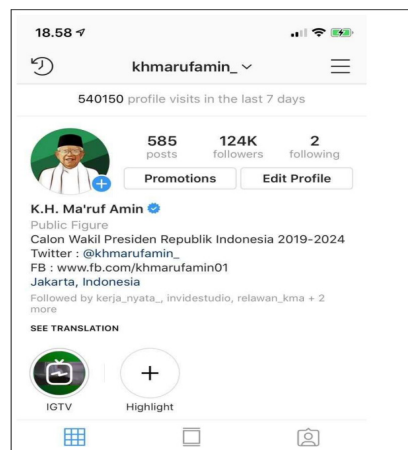


Figure 1. Maruf Amin's Instagram profile in early January 2019

Maruf Amin's communication style on the Instagram page at the beginning of its creation was adjusted to his character as a scholar which was understood by the public in the real world. We can see it from the characteristics of Maruf Amin who often wear white clothes, *peci*, and *sarung*. In addition, his speaking style is in a low tone. Moreover, he is identified with his simple digital image. He is also not reactive to negative news and hoaxes. He is portrayed as a calm, authentic, and wise figure. Furthermore, he tends to prioritize peaceful and religious narratives. By correlating these facts with the argument of Perloff

(2021), it shows how digital political communication is built from the authenticity of the characters that are maintained in the digital realm, and even in the form of internet-mediated digital communication. Tsoumou (2020) argued that politicians may benefit because their supporters feel free to participate in political issues through their interactions with politicians who are campaigning as if they are face to face. In this context, Maruf Amin's credentials as a 'hoax antidote' are condensed in a digital image.

Not only as a figure/symbol of moderate Islam, but Maruf Amin also presents himself as a consolidator and aggregator for traditional Islamic groups to voice support for Maruf Amin as a vice presidential candidate. The solidarity of this group becomes the equal and balancing force of opposing supporters. The support of a solid group, united in the mission brought by Maruf Amin, is highly needed to fight hoax attacks. This is because, in practical politics, hoaxes act as a memetic practice which is defined by Shifman (2013) as a unit of popular culture that is spread, circulated, imitated, and transformed by internet users intentionally to create similarities in cultural experiences. As a memetic practice, hoaxes also have the potential to be useful as a means of forming communal beliefs and ideologies in society (Rodríguez-Ferrándiz *et al.*, 2021; Nieuburt, 2020). This means that politicians like Maruf Amin are trying to make Instagram a powerful tool and information center to answer questions, doubts, and skeptical public opinion.

Thus, as a step to capture the support of voters who are active on social media, especially those who are classified as supporters of Joko Widodo or the mass base of moderate Islam, this is intended to make the support base of the voting community well-maintained. Political communication by prioritizing such identity indicates the consolidation of Maruf Amin's self-image which aims at solidifying the support of moderate Muslims to unite on Maruf Amin's side in fighting hoaxes. Through digital political communication, politicians often carry persuasive messages that invite and even gather their supporters to become volunteers (known as buzzers), in which they share a collective bond as supporters of Maruf Amin with the beliefs that an ulama who nominates for vice president is considered worthy and actually represents a belief in authenticity which is the opposite of lies. This also makes them the main bastion that accompanies politicians as troops ready to act digitally in countering hoaxes and amplifying Maruf Amin's views.

Social media provides relatively easy and universal access to the ongoing practice of political communication because this media can create connectedness between people who participate in

channeling and exchanging issues and discourses. Therefore, social media is also a platform that facilitates the establishment of associations of people based on commonality and interest in certain issues, discourses, aspirations, and ideas (Heikkilä, Leguina, & Purhonen, 2020; Marcinkowski & Došenović, 2020; Workneh, 2020).



Figure 2. Graphic content created by Maruf Amin's social media campaign team in mid-January 2019 (posted on the Instagram story)

The graphic content above shows how the digital communication strategy is pursued by adapting the 'memetic' practice which functions as a countermeasure. Although it is vague, the 'memetic' practice in this context contains an ideological message and purpose. This is in line with a study conducted by Shifman (2013) that mentions three dimensions in a digital post, namely content (referring to the ideas and ideologies that are brought or want to be conveyed) form (containing a call-to-action), and stance (containing the manner or style of how message addressers position themselves against texts, linguistic codes, and message addressees). Considering the two visual illustrations above (figures 2 and 3), in terms of content, shows how the photo of the pair of candidates in white costumes conveys the idea of goodness and virtue from a campaign process that is honest, wise, and does not use fake news. Meanwhile, in terms of form, the inherent message is very clear from how the pair is presented as figures who emphasize the promotion of vision, mission, and work programs. Furthermore, in terms of stance, the style of delivering messages has a strong impression of rejecting the spread of hoaxes, while maintaining a campaign style that emphasizes the competition of visions, missions, and work programs.

Turning Hoaxes into Promotional Means

Maruf Amin's team developed its response in dealing with repeated hoax attacks addressed to Joko Widodo by replying to negative posts (hoaxes) with positive campaigns based on facts (the results of the interview with Maruf Amin's Instagram Page Administrator, March 21, 2022). This digital communication strategy is similar to the strategy commonly called 'riding the wave, turning the tide'

(Young, 2021; Nieuburt, 2020), which means that the digital communication style adopts a way of surfing in terms of issues to observing the public discourse, engaging in, and entering into conversations in the digital space while carrying out 'counterbalance' actions to re-influence the public conversation and fill it with information about the vision, mission, and work program based on facts, news, and statement releases from Maruf Amin.

According to a report from the Digitroops political research institute, Joko Widodo received more hoaxes than his opponent, Prabowo Subianto. There are seven types of hoaxes that are often repeated, including those concerning anti-Islam issues and pro-China political leanings (Ihsanuddin, 2019). The response of Maruf Amin's team regarding this matter was to create content that contained a clarification that Maruf Amin is a unifying ulama. Those contents were distributed with a frequency of 5-6 times in the form of Instagram stories, media releases, Instagram feeds, and memes that are shared in many WhatsApp groups. These contents contained processed results from Maruf Amin's photos, economic principles taken from his book *Ekonomi Keumatan* (English: Public Economy), and his quotes on other social media, combined with images, illustrations, and designs that fit the context (the results of the interview with Maruf Amin's Multimedia Content Creator, March 23, 2022). During the campaign, Maruf Amin's team consisted of 10 people, spreading 10 visual contents, including graphics, memes, and short video clips to Instagram, WhatsApp groups, and Facebook, and responding intensely to all oblique comments about Maruf Amin (the results of the interview with Maruf Amin's Content Disseminator, March 23, 2022). (Table 1)

The responses made by Maruf Amin's team can be divided into four main message categories: (1) national unity (including inter-religious unity and the unity of leaders which is often associated with a nationalist background that embraces the ulama), (2) polite campaign with reliable information, (3) clarifying issues with facts and data, and (4) introduction of sectoral work programs. This is in line with the argument of Freelon & Wells (2020) that messages play a significant role in political communication. Meanwhile, the study conducted by Gilardi *et al.* (2022) mentions that social media provides or becomes a place for the exchange of messages either from one person to many people (one to many) or from many groups of people to a wide audience (many to many). Thus, the message in Maruf Amin's political communication during the campaign shows how the relationship building between political figures and their audiences mediated by technology signifies an evolution in the world of politics (Andriadi, 2017).

Table 1. List of hoaxes aimed at Joko Widodo, as well as attitudes and responses to them

Hoaxes	Attitudes to the issue and responses applied in creating visual content
Joko Widodo is considered PKI.	Attitude: responding calmly and giving a statement that emphasizes Joko Widodo's closeness to the ulama. Response: creating visual content containing illustrations of Maruf Amin and Joko Widodo with familiar gestures. The illustration is also added with the Jokowi-Maruf campaign jargon which contains an invitation to maintain national unity for the realization of 'Onward Indonesia'.
Joko Widodo is considered to be abolishing <i>adzan</i> , criminalizing ulama, and being anti-Islam.	Attitude: conveying educational messages to the public and inviting voters to be wise and not to believe in the news that cannot be accounted for. Response: making the illustration of Joko Widodo and Maruf Amin together with messages of unity and always giving the impression of embracing the ulama as a religious group. The illustration is also added with work programs targeting <i>santri</i> and <i>pesantren</i> , such as affirmation scholarships for <i>santri</i> .
Joko Widodo offered some islands of Indonesia to China and allowed Indonesia to be flooded with foreign workers.	Attitude: answering hoaxes by disclosing data (fact sheets) by emphasizing firm statements on economic cooperation while maintaining state sovereignty. Response: designing visual content based on citations of data from official statistical records of credible institutions. The visualization is also filled with narratives that respond to hoaxes by promoting work programs in the fields of education, youth, poverty alleviation, and health through the Smart Indonesia Card (Indonesian: <i>Kartu Indonesia Pintar</i> (KIP)) and Healthy Indonesia Card (Indonesian: <i>Kartu Indonesia Sehat</i> (KIS)).

Maruf Amin's Response and Digital Communication Strategy

Maruf Amin's response and digital strategy can be seen from how his team visualizes content to ward off hoaxes aimed at Joko Widodo, such as those accusing that Joko Widodo will eliminate *adzan*, be anti-Islam, criminalize ulama, offer Indonesian territory to China, and allow foreign workers to enter Indonesia. In the following, the researchers show visual content created by Maruf Amin's campaign team, which was circulated in Maruf Amin's Instagram story feature from February to March 2019.



Figure 3. Graphic content of the illustration of Maruf Amin's view



Figure 4. Graphic content about the unity between leaders and ulama



Figure 5. Graphic content about a good campaign



Figure 6. Graphic content about a good campaign



Figure 7. Graphic content about the unity and work program promotion

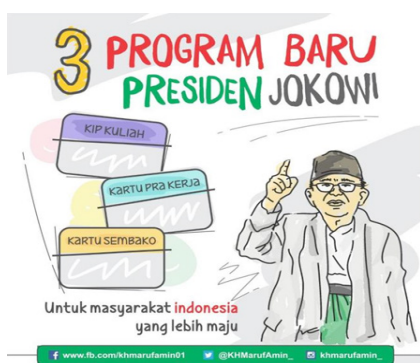


Figure 8. Graphic content about the unity and work program promotion



Figure 9. Graphic content on clarification of the issue of foreign workers with explanations of articles in the applicable law



Figure 10. Graphic content on clarification of the issue of foreign workers with explanations of data presentation

Based on the visualization of the contents, the researchers then make a classification of the main message contained in them in the following table 2.

Utilizing visual content to convey campaign messages from Maruf Amin is considered effective in reaching audiences and strengthening the trust of the voter base. This is because social media is an ideal vehicle and an information center that may serve to get an overview of policies and political positions while maintaining support from the people who provide sympathy during the campaign (Araújo & Prior, 2020; Papakyriakopoulos, Serrano, &

Hegelich, 2020). This digital communication allows participants or voters to have equal opportunities to participate widely in knowing and interacting with politicians (Orfan, 2020; Garnett & James, 2020; Boulianne, 2018).

In dealing with hoaxes on social media, Maruf

Table 2. The types of main messages in the visual content created by Maruf Amin's team to ward off hoaxes aimed at Joko Widodo

Visual Contents	Message Category
Figures: 3 & 4.	Unity between leaders and ulama
Figures: 5 & 6.	Polite campaign with reliable information
Figures: 7 & 8.	The introduction to sectoral work programs
Figures: 9 & 10.	Clarification of issues by presenting facts and data

Amin's digital political communication strategy serves two functions: changing the direction of hoaxes into positive campaigns and educating the public through the distribution of visual content on the Instagram page. Guess *et al.* (2020) distinguish interventions in overcoming fake news into three: (1) individual level – which must be preceded by digital literacy, (2) online platforms – by implementing the blocking of news sources that are not credible, and (3) efforts by political elites to reap and increase their respective reputation incentives. The efforts made by Maruf Amin's team are categorized as an intervention in dealing with fake news which emphasizes the role of political actors in increasing people's digital literacy. In this case, the digital political communication strategy used against hoaxes by Maruf Amin's team also aims to foster digital literacy and public politics through clarification based on data and facts as seen from the explanation of the issue of foreign workers from China which is then responded with exposure to data and regulations. This is in line with the results of previous studies showing that the role of social media also covers educational facilities (Stellefson *et al.*, 2020; Aldahdouh, Nokelainen, & Korhonen, 2020) which involved 502 staff members, a descriptive analysis of their usage of social media, technological devices, and Microsoft Office 365 cloud services was performed, with various demographic variables being considered. During the second phase, which involved a subsample of 106 staff members, structural equation modeling (SEM, including political education (Shehata & Strömbäck, 2018) and the development of public digital literacy (Matli & Ngoepe, 2020). The clarification of issues can be used as an educational medium and may open public literacy in understanding public issues that are often misunderstood (Ahmed, 2021). The concise presentation of statistical data and applicable laws also provides a solid overview and accurate understanding based on the available data.

In this context, social media brings changes to the pattern of political communication, especially its big role in reducing communication barriers that exist between political actors and the general public. Gilardi *et al.* (2022) in their study argued that the impact of digital technology can change the political process, accelerate the exchange of information between the public and existing political actors, and strengthen the relationship between political elites and their masses. The monumental and crucial political process in a democratic country (i.e., the general election) is considered to be significant because it includes the participation process and the political education of all people of Indonesia.

Thus, changing the tone of a negative campaign into a positive one can be seen in the style of political communication that reaffirms Joko Widodo's closeness to the ulama (represented by Maruf Amin as a *kyai*). The impression of closeness between the ulama and the leader (umara) is considered an important key to the success of the campaign and the implementation of work programs that target various groups. Specifically, the closeness of the two is associated with perceptions of caring, empathy, hard work, sincerity, devotion, and social justice. These values are projected in Maruf Amin's digital political communication strategy in which the ulama is considered to be able to strengthen these values because of the general views that are also attached to the ulama, such as wisdom, patience, prudence, protection, and enlightenment. The impression of the closeness of Joko Widodo and Maruf Amin continues to be supported in visual depictions and is continuously (repeatedly) echoed to emphasize that the unity between leaders and ulama brings faith and develops a general message, namely national unity to achieve the onward Indonesia mission, which is also accompanied by interlude content containing their work programs.

In the context of this study, some important points must be noted. First, the hoax related to anti-ulama was responded to by the togetherness of Joko Widodo and Maruf Amin accompanied by special messages typical of a *kyai* regarding the virtues of a responsible campaign (although delivered subtly and calmly, this is also intended to respond to hoaxes). Second, it was the follow-up message accompanied with education about the importance of positive campaigns to stay away from the use of hoaxes and forward the message of kindness to instill optimism because the challenges faced by the Indonesian people are getting bigger and real. This means that other hoaxes that accompany the anti-ulama issue were not responded to with anger or strong rebuttals. On the other hand, every time a series of other hoax issues arise and negative comments are directed at Maruf Amin – whether posted directly on the Instagram

page or indirectly in media reports, this opportunity is used by Maruf Amin's support team to intensify the message of national unity and optimism. Negative campaigns can actually have a positive impact on candidates who are hit by bad issues, while positive campaigns can be effective if they are fully supported through interpersonal and distributive networks. Such a rhythm must be maintained continuously because it provides momentum to maintain the attention, support, and emotional attachment of the public. Third, this maintained rhythm also plays an important role as a discourse that increasingly binds and unites Maruf Amin and his supporters. Therefore, the campaign content also focuses on promoting programs in the fields of education, health, poverty alleviation, and youth.

CONCLUSION

The 2019 election campaign in Indonesia provides lessons and potential ideas that are useful for the implementation of a healthy and hoax-free campaign in the upcoming elections, especially in the 2024 election which is more worrying because polarization still exists and can occur again. Hoaxes emerge because of the 'excesses of communication blockages' in the previous era. Moreover, hoaxes in the post-truth era have shaped voter fanaticism and sharpened polarization that can worsen socio-political conditions, especially if politicians continue to use hoaxes and surf on narratives of economic difficulties and social inequality. Even though the presence of Maruf Amin is considered to be a burden on the electorate, the key to the 2019 election victory lies in the strategy for managing hoax issues in the digital space to generate election incentives. Underestimating Maruf Amin's role by considering it insignificant does not produce important reflections that we can learn. Although the majority agrees with this, it only limits the analysis space to find alternative strategies for dealing with hoaxes. On the other hand, if being considered closely, the role of Maruf Amin's presence is felt in reducing the political temperature with his simple style typical of the *kyai*, in which he consistently carries this style in managing issues in the digital space. This study indicated that digital political communication strategies applied in campaigns against hoaxes can be seen from how the digital presence with the identity of politicians, authentic character, and having intellectual and social capital as ulama is indirectly attached to scientific authorities who are bound by responsibility for delivering scientific truth. In addition, another finding is that coherence and consistency in campaigns can play an important role in success against hoaxes. Coherence in building a positive impression must prioritize unity in which

the ultimate goal has a campaign tagline ‘*Indonesia Maju*’ (English: Onward Indonesia) which becomes a common thread that connects all derivative responses in addressing various hoaxes, especially those related to the issue of anti-ulama and foreign workers. From the message coherence supported by the figure of Maruf Amin, content visualization has two functions, namely education to build digital literacy by filtering fake news and promoting work programs. To conclude, the digital presence and identity solidity combined with the strategy and direction of digital political communication in delivering messages and educational goals can optimize the role and power of political actors who are often forgotten in preventing fake news.

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