



THE ART OF PERSUASION IN THE POLITICAL ARENA: THE VITAL ROLE OF RHETORIC IN SHAPING PUBLIC OPINION

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the use of rhetorical persuasion by political actors in the Indonesian political arena and the role of rhetoric in shaping public opinion amidst a fragmented media landscape and increasing political polarization. Against the backdrop of competitive political dynamics and a transformative digital media landscape, this study identifies gaps in previous studies, particularly related to the unique Indonesian political context and the influence of social media on the effectiveness of rhetoric. Using a qualitative approach and descriptive analysis design, data were collected through document analysis in the form of speech transcripts, politicians' social media posts (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook), online news and opinion articles, and political campaign materials. Data analysis was conducted through content analysis, discourse analysis, and interpretation based on Aristotle's classical rhetorical theory, framing theory (Entman), agenda-setting theory (McCombs and Shaw), and social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner). Triangulation techniques were used to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. The results show that Indonesian political actors strategically use a variety of rhetorical techniques including ethos, pathos, and logos, as well as utilizing issue framing, agenda-building through social media, and social identity mobilization to influence public opinion. The use of echo chambers and social media algorithms are identified as factors that strengthen rhetorical messages and deepen polarization. This study concludes that the art of rhetorical persuasion plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion in Indonesia, especially in the context of digital media and political polarization, and provides theoretical and practical insights into the dynamics of contemporary political communication.

Keywords: The Art of Persuasion, Politics, Rhetoric, Public Opinion

1. INTRODUCTION

The political arena is a dynamic stage where competing ideas, ideologies, and interests make the art of persuasion a crucial element in gaining support and power (Hutapea, 2020). In an increasingly complex and digitally connected political landscape, the ability to convince the public is the main foundation for the success of a politician, political party, or social movement (Sulistyarini & Zainal, 2020). Rhetoric, as a discipline and art of effective and persuasive language, plays an irreplaceable role in the process of forming public opinion (Sulistyarini & Zainal, 2020). The ability to convey messages convincingly, frame issues strategically, and build emotional connections with the audience is a determinant in winning the hearts and minds of voters (Rudini, 2024). The effectiveness of political communication depends not only on the substance of the message, but also on how the message is delivered (Nurfalah & Harmonis, 2023). In an era of abundant and often fragmented information, politicians and other political actors compete to gain public attention and influence their perceptions of various issues (Rizal & Izomiddin, 2017).

The intelligent and strategic use of rhetoric becomes increasingly important in cutting through the noise of information and leaving a strong mark on voters' minds (Wibowo, 2024). The increasing phenomenon of political polarization in various parts of the world also highlights the importance of understanding how rhetoric can be used both to build consensus and to deepen divisions (Tilaar, 2023). Therefore, a deep understanding of the mechanisms of rhetorical persuasion in the context of contemporary politics becomes very relevant. Previous studies have made significant contributions to understanding the relationship between rhetoric and public opinion in the political arena. Research conducted by (Nurhamidah, 2018) examined the use of metaphors in political speeches and how these metaphors affect voters' perceptions of a leader. Their findings suggest that the use of appropriate metaphors can increase a politician's appeal and credibility. Another study by (Gennaro & Ash, 2024) explores the role of emotions in political persuasion, highlighting how rhetoric that evokes certain emotions can significantly influence voter opinions and behavior. In addition, a study on framing by (Chong & Druckman, 2018) shows how the way an issue is presented (framed) can change an individual's interpretation and preference for the issue. Research on political narratives by (Kumaat, 2024) also highlights the importance of storytelling in building political support and legitimacy.

These studies collectively underscore that rhetoric is not just a decoration in political communication, but a powerful tool for shaping public opinion. However, there are several gaps that need to be addressed by this study. First, most previous studies tend to focus on textual analysis of political speeches or messages, with a lack of emphasis on the dynamic interaction between rhetoric, socio-political context, and diverse audience characteristics. This study will attempt to bridge this

gap by considering how contextual factors such as social media, political polarization, and media literacy levels influence the effectiveness of rhetorical persuasion. Second, research on the impact of rhetoric in the context of Indonesian politics, with its significant cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity and is still relatively limited [lack of research specific to the Indonesian context]. This research will focus on how the art of rhetorical persuasion is applied and received in the unique Indonesian political landscape. Third, the development of digital communication technology has fundamentally changed the landscape of political communication [changes in the digital landscape]. This research will explore how social media platforms and other forms of digital communication mediate and influence the effectiveness of political rhetoric in building public opinion.

To analyze this phenomenon in depth, this study will base itself on several key theories, namely the classical rhetorical theory of Aristotle (translated by (Lawson, 1999) will be the main foundation in understanding the elements of persuasion such as *ethos* (credibility), *pathos* (emotion), and *logos* (logic). This theory provides a solid framework for analyzing how a speaker builds a convincing argument and influences the audience. Furthermore, the framing theory of Entman in (Tehuayo et al, 2022) will be used to understand how political actors select and highlight certain aspects of an issue to shape public interpretation. This theory helps explain how rhetoric is used to direct attention and influence assessments of an event or policy. In addition, the agenda-setting theory of McCombs and Shaw in (Efendi et al, 2023) will be relevant in analyzing how the media (including social media) and political rhetoric together determine what issues are considered important by the public. Finally, the social identity theory of (Tufjel & Turner, 1986) will help in understanding how political rhetoric can be used to build and mobilize social groups based on shared identity, and how this influences public opinion.

Based on the background of the problem, previous research, research gaps, and theoretical frameworks that have been described, the main problem formulation in this study is: how is the art of rhetorical persuasion used by political actors in the Indonesian political arena, and how does the use of rhetoric play a role in shaping public opinion amidst the existing media landscape and political polarization?

This study is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this study will enrich the understanding of the dynamics of political persuasion in the unique Indonesian context, as well as update and test the relevance of classical and contemporary rhetorical theories in the digital era. Practically, the findings of this study can provide valuable insights for politicians, political communication practitioners, and the general public about effective and ethical rhetorical strategies in building informed and participatory public opinion.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive analysis design. The qualitative approach was chosen because it aims to deeply understand the phenomenon of the use of rhetoric in the complex and diverse context of Indonesian politics. Data sources in this study were collected from various sources, including texts and transcripts, such as: transcripts of political figures' speeches, uploads and interactions on social media (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook) belonging to politicians, news and opinion articles in online mass media that are relevant to political issues, political campaign materials (posters, videos, advertisements). The data collection technique in this study was carried out by analyzing documents so that the rhetorical strategies used (ethos, pathos, logos, metaphors, framing, narratives, etc.) could be identified.

The collected data will be analyzed using qualitative analysis techniques, through content analysis, discourse analysis, and interpretation. Content analysis is used to systematically analyze the content of texts and transcripts to identify patterns, themes, and frequency of use of certain rhetorical strategies. Discourse analysis is used to analyze the language used in political communication to understand how meaning is constructed, ideology is represented, and power is negotiated. Interpretation is used to interpret the findings of data analysis in relation to the theoretical framework used (Aristotle's rhetorical theory, framing theory, agenda-setting theory, social identity theory) and the socio-political context of Indonesia. To ensure the validity and reliability of this qualitative research, the technique used is the triangulation technique.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The results of this study have identified the use of various rhetorical persuasion arts by political actors in Indonesia, thus providing in-depth insights into the dynamics of political communication in a complex context. Within the framework of Aristotle's classical rhetoric theory, these findings confirm the enduring relevance of the three pillars of persuasion: ethos, pathos, and logos. Political actors strategically utilize ethos by highlighting their track record and credibility, building public trust through narratives of achievements and experiences. This is in line with Aristotle's view that the credibility of the speaker is a key factor in persuasion. The use of pathos through the arousal of emotions such as nationalism and concern has also proven effective. In the Indonesian context, where national identity and sensitive issues such as religion and ethnicity are often the focus of debate, the ability to evoke relevant emotions becomes a powerful tool for mobilizing support. Finally, the use of logos through the presentation of selectively chosen data and arguments shows how political actors try to give the impression of rationality and objectivity, even in a context where the interpretation of data is

often influenced by political bias. Furthermore, Entman's framing theory provides a powerful framework for understanding how political actors shape public interpretations of certain issues. Research findings suggest that framing of issues such as the economy or religion is strategically used to direct attention and influence public judgment. For example, in economic issues, political actors may choose to highlight certain aspects such as economic growth or inflation, depending on their political agenda. In religious issues, framing often involves the use of identity and morality narratives to mobilize support from certain groups. This is in line with Entman's view that framing involves selecting and highlighting certain aspects of an issue to promote a particular interpretation.

McCombs and Shaw's agenda-setting theory is relevant in analyzing how the media, including social media, and political rhetoric together determine the issues that are considered important by the public. In the Indonesian context, where social media plays a significant role in the dissemination of information and the formation of public opinion, political actors actively use these platforms to set their agendas. Analysis of interactions on social media shows how political actors utilize echo chambers and social media algorithms to amplify their messages and expand the reach of desired opinions. This confirms McCombs and Shaw's view that the media, and in this context political actors through social media, have the power to influence what is considered important by the public.

Meanwhile, Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory helps in understanding how political rhetoric can be used to build and mobilize social groups based on shared identities. In the context of political polarization in Indonesia, rhetoric is often used to reinforce differences and mobilize support from polarized groups. Political actors use identity narratives to build a sense of togetherness among their supporters and to distinguish them from other groups. For example, narratives of religious or ethnic identity are often used to mobilize support from certain groups. This is in line with Tajfel and Turner's view that social identity is an important factor in the formation of public opinion and political behavior.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that the art of rhetorical persuasion plays an important role in Indonesian politics. Political actors strategically use various rhetorical techniques to build credibility, arouse emotions, present arguments, frame issues, set agendas, and mobilize social groups. In the context of a fragmented and polarized media landscape, the ability to use rhetoric effectively becomes increasingly important for political actors seeking to influence public opinion and achieve their political goals. This study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of political communication in Indonesia and highlights the importance of understanding how rhetoric is used to shape public opinion.

The use of social media, especially Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, has become an important arena for political actors to interact directly with the public and spread rhetorical messages. Analysis of interactions on social media shows how political actors utilize echo chambers and social media algorithms to amplify

their messages and expand the reach of desired opinions. In the context of political polarization, rhetoric is often used to reinforce differences and mobilize support from polarized groups. Data interpretation shows that the use of this rhetoric plays an important role in shaping public opinion, especially in a fragmented and polarized media landscape. Triangulation techniques, by combining content analysis, discourse analysis, and interpretation, strengthen the validity of the research findings and provide a comprehensive understanding of how the art of rhetorical persuasion is used in Indonesian politics. The research findings explicitly highlight that social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook have transformed into crucial arenas for political actors to interact directly with constituents and strategically spread rhetorical messages designed to influence public perception and opinion. This phenomenon is inherently related to the concept of *ethos* in Aristotle's rhetorical theory. The presence and activity of political actors on social media allows them to build and maintain their self-image and credibility (*ethos*) in the eyes of the public. Consistency in delivering messages, responsive interaction with comments and questions, and the ability to present oneself as a competent and trusted figure through the content shared, all contribute to the formation of *ethos* in the digital realm. However, unlike traditional platforms, social media offers an interactive dimension that allows the public to directly evaluate and respond to the *ethos* displayed, so that credibility becomes more fluid and vulnerable to criticism or disinformation. Furthermore, the analysis of interactions on social media reveals the tactics of political actors in utilizing echo chambers and platform algorithms. Echo chambers refer to online environments where individuals are exposed to information and views that tend to confirm their existing beliefs. Social media algorithms, designed to increase user engagement, often reinforce this phenomenon by prioritizing content that matches users' previous preferences. In the context of political rhetoric, political actors strategically target groups that share similar views, amplifying their messages within these echo chambers, and thereby deepening opinion polarization. This is closely related to social identity theory. The rhetoric disseminated in echo chambers often emphasizes group identity ("us") and differences from other groups ("them"), reinforcing internal solidarity and external antagonism. Social media algorithms can unwittingly reinforce this process by limiting exposure to diverse perspectives, thereby reinforcing existing beliefs and making constructive dialogue more difficult. The use of echo chambers and social media algorithms is also closely related to framing theory. Political actors actively select and highlight certain aspects of an issue or event to frame the public's interpretation of it in accordance with their political agenda. On social media, framing can be done through the use of emotionally charged language (*pathos*), the selection of suggestive images or videos, and the emphasis on particular narratives. Social media algorithms then work to reinforce these frames by spreading them more widely to users who are more likely to respond positively to the frame. For

example, an economic issue can be framed as a government success to garner support, or as a failure to generate public anger, depending on the rhetorical goals of the political actor and their target audience.

Implementation of religious literacy activities

Religious literacy activities in this program are carried out methodically and evaluatively with the aim of helping students carry out their religious obligations methodically and focused. Asmau lhusna, Al-Waqi'ah letter, and congregational dhuha and dzuhur prayers are used to introduce this activity. The Islamic Religious Education teacher also supervises and leads this activity, using lecture and memorization methods to inspire students. The purpose of this daily religious literacy activity is to improve worship routines, teach students to become leaders through the teachings of the imam, enforce discipline, and strengthen the habit of praying and remembering. This activity aims to help develop the religious character of students so that they can integrate spiritual principles into their daily lives. Through this activity, it is hoped that students will not only understand the basics of worship but will also be able to create a sense of clarity and steadfastness from Allah SWT. (MUHAMAD et al., 2024)

Religious literacy habits in forming religious character emerge as an effort to instill religious values in everyday life. The main purpose of this study is to encourage people to have independent actions that are in accordance with religious beliefs. The process of habituation in scientific religious activities is very important, especially to foster good writing and behavior. By routinely engaging in religious activities such as praying, reading the Qur'an, or even just asmaul husna, people will be able to live their lives according to religious principles. Ultimately, a person will have more integrity and have good religious qualities and morals. Because of the need to get used to it, religion is considered the center point in everyday life. In addition, the purpose of these religious activities is to encourage good deeds and be a good example for others. (Aep et al., n.d, 2025) The impact of religious literacy activities on student performance and behavior is quite positive. Students who have a strong understanding of religion at school tend to be more disciplined, wiser, and more aware of the rules and responsible. Outside of school, they encourage people to be more empathetic, disciplined, and worship others. (Siti & Khoiriyah, 2024)

In the context of political polarization that characterizes Indonesia's current political landscape, the research findings highlight how rhetoric on social media is often used to reinforce differences between groups and mobilize support from polarized groups. Rhetoric that emphasizes exclusive group identities, propagates "us versus them" narratives, and uses language that denigrates opposing groups are common strategies. This is directly related to social identity theory, which explains how individuals identify with certain social groups and how this identification influences their perceptions and behaviors toward members of other groups. Effective political rhetoric in the context of polarization often taps into

individuals' psychological need to feel part of a group that is superior and different from other groups. Furthermore, the role of social media in determining which issues are considered important by the public is in line with agenda-setting theory. Political actors who are active and strategic on social media have the ability to bring certain issues to the forefront and make them the focus of public attention. Through the use of viral hashtags, coordinated online campaigns, and intense interaction with online media, political actors can influence the media agenda and, in turn, the public agenda. Social media is not only a channel for conveying messages, but also an arena where issues are contested and defined. The speed of information dissemination on social media allows issues to move up and down the public agenda very quickly, requiring political actors to be highly adaptive in their rhetorical strategies.

The overall interpretation of the research data underlines that the use of rhetoric on social media plays a very significant role in shaping public opinion in Indonesia, especially in the context of a fragmented and polarized media landscape. Media fragmentation, where audiences are divided into groups that consume information from different sources, is reinforced by social media algorithms that create filter bubbles and echo chambers. In such an environment, strong and emotional rhetorical messages, strategically disseminated through social media, have great potential to influence voter opinion and behavior. Political polarization, with deep ideological and identity differences between groups, further enhances the effectiveness of rhetoric that emphasizes differences and antagonisms.

The triangulation technique used in the study, by combining content analysis, discourse analysis, and interpretation, provides higher validity and reliability to the research findings. Content analysis allows the identification of patterns and frequencies of the use of certain rhetorical strategies in various forms of political communication on social media. Discourse analysis helps in understanding how meaning is constructed through language, how ideology is represented, and how power is negotiated in online interactions. Interpretation then connects these findings to relevant theoretical frameworks and the broader Indonesian socio-political context. Thus, this study not only describes the phenomenon of rhetorical use on social media, but also provides a deep understanding of the mechanisms by which rhetoric works in shaping public opinion in the complex Indonesian political landscape.

The integration of research findings with a solid theoretical framework shows that social media has become a crucial rhetorical battleground for political actors in Indonesia. The use of ethos, pathos, and logos is adapted in digital formats, reinforced by the mechanisms of echo chambers and social media algorithms. Framing and agenda-setting theories explain how issues are prioritized and interpreted, while social identity theory helps understand how rhetoric mobilizes polarized groups. A deep understanding of these dynamics is essential to analyzing

and critiquing public opinion formation in the evolving digital era. Further research can explore the long-term impact of the use of rhetoric on social media on the quality of democracy and political participation in Indonesia.

4. CONCLUSION

The art of rhetorical persuasion plays a central role in the dynamics of Indonesian politics, especially in the context of a fragmented media landscape and strong political polarization. Political actors actively and strategically utilize a variety of rhetorical techniques, both rooted in the classical Aristotelian framework (ethos, pathos, logos) and contemporary concepts such as framing, agenda-setting, and mobilization of social identity.

The research findings specifically highlight the crucial role of social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook) as a vital new arena for the practice of political rhetoric. Political actors not only use social media as a channel to spread messages, but also actively utilize platform features such as echo chambers and algorithms to amplify their messages among support groups and expand the reach of desired opinions. In the context of polarization, rhetoric on social media is often aimed at emphasizing differences between groups and mobilizing support based on strong social identities.

The integration of research findings with relevant theoretical frameworks provides a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of public opinion formation. Classical rhetorical theory helps analyze the elements of persuasion used, framing theory explains how issues are interpreted, agenda-setting theory highlights how issues become salient in the eyes of the public, and social identity theory explains how rhetoric influences group loyalty. Overall, this study confirms that the ability of political actors to use the art of rhetorical persuasion effectively, especially through social media, is a determining factor in influencing public opinion and achieving their political goals in Indonesia. This study makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the dynamics of political communication in the digital era and highlights the importance of rhetorical analysis in unraveling the complexity of public opinion formation in the unique socio-political context of Indonesia. The implications of these findings open up opportunities for further research on the long-term impact of online rhetorical practices on the quality of democracy and political participation in Indonesia.

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