

STUDY OF SOCIAL INTERACTION IN THE SPREAD OF POLITICAL ISSUES THROUGH INFORMAL POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AT PANORAMA MARKET BENGKULU CITY

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Abstract

This study aims to understand how social interactions in Panorama Market, Bengkulu City, facilitate the spread of political issues through informal communication. Although many previous studies have focused on political communication in mass media and social media, this study fills the gap by analyzing how political information is disseminated and perceived by the public in informal spaces such as markets. Using a qualitative approach and case study method, this study involved 50 informants consisting of traders and buyers in Panorama Market, Bengkulu City. The results of the study indicate that social interactions in the market play an important role in the exchange of political information. Traders use moments of interaction to convey political opinions to customers, who tend to trust information conveyed in an informal setting. In addition, the study identifies factors that influence the spread of political issues, including the level of media literacy, economic conditions, and the role of social media. The results show that Panorama Market not only functions as a place for economic transactions, but also as a democratic public space, where people can discuss and form political opinions. This study is expected to contribute to the development of political communication theory, especially in the context of informal communication in public spaces.

Keywords: *Informal Political Communication, Panorama Market, Public Space, Social Interaction*

INTRODUCTION

In the midst of the general election era, the General Election and Regional Head Election (Pilkada) are crucial moments in efforts to maintain and strengthen the democratic order. The General Election and Regional Head Election not only offer an opportunity for the community to determine their leaders and representatives at the national and regional levels, but also become a forum for active participation for citizens in the political process. At the same time, this period gives rise to the dynamics of fierce competition between candidates, where each candidate tries to win the hearts of voters through various political communication strategies (Zidan, 2024). Political communication becomes a vital instrument, not

only to introduce candidates and their programs, but also to build an image and direct public opinion.

Political communication during the General Election and Regional Head Election is not limited to formal campaigns that take place through mass media, such as television, radio, or newspapers (Aditia & Hektanti, 2023). Instead, this communication also reaches digital media such as social media, as well as to informal areas, such as everyday conversations in traditional markets, coffee shops, the surrounding environment, and other public places. It is in these informal spaces that political communication often occurs spontaneously and organically, reflecting the way society discusses developing political issues (Rahman, 2022). These discussions play an important role in shaping political views, building opinions, and even influencing voters' decisions.

Traditional markets such as Panorama Market in Bengkulu City, are one example of a place where political conversations occur naturally. Markets not only function as economic centers, but also as centers of social interaction where various community groups meet, exchange information, and discuss political developments, including candidates and issues relevant to the General Election or Regional Election. In these places, people often spontaneously discuss their political choices, form opinions, and disseminate information about candidates or policies being debated. Informal communication in these markets, although seemingly simple, has a significant impact on shaping public perception and influencing voter behavior.

Panorama Market is the largest market in Bengkulu City and is located in Singaran Pati Village, an important example of this social space. Panorama Market has been established since 1982. In 1995, shophouses were built for traders to trade. Panorama Market occupies an area of 4 hectares with 1658 sections consisting of kiosks, awnings, shops, and stalls. In the past, Panorama Market was a daily or weekly market, then it developed and became the Panorama Terminal. Over time, the Bengkulu city government changed the location of the Panorama terminal market to the Panorama Traditional Market of Bengkulu City (Marjoyo et al., 2024).

Panorama Market is not only a center of trade activities, but also a place for active political interaction. Panorama Market is located in Panorama Village, Singaran Pati District, Bengkulu City. Panorama Market is close to the residential complex of Perumnas Lingkar Timur, Panorama, Jalan Mangga, and Jalan Belimbing. The construction of Panorama Market coincided with the construction of the Panorama terminal which was moved by the local government from the location of Pasar Minggu, and its location is adjacent to the terminal. This market developed very quickly after the construction of Perumnas Lingkar Timur Bengkulu in 1982.

Panorama Market, which was initially not very popular with traders because it was quiet and there was very little transportation. At present, Panorama has advanced and developed because of the five-colored transportation that has been prepared to pass through the market area. The construction of Panorama Market is one solution to move some of the traders who are in Pasar Minggu Sembako, which is increasingly crowded, especially the many street vendors. This is where various

social, economic, and political backgrounds come together, creating an open space for the spread of political issues through informal conversations (Fuqoha, 2021). In the context of the General Election and Regional Election, political discussions in this market often become an important channel in shaping public opinion, because issues discussed informally are often more easily accepted and influence public perception than formal campaigns carried out by politicians.

Informal political communication that occurs in markets such as Pasar Panorama is one element that cannot be ignored in understanding local political dynamics (Indrawan et al., 2020). The dissemination of political information through these informal social spaces is often key in moving public opinion, influencing voter decisions, and spreading political messages more widely among heterogeneous communities.

In daily interactions in the market, both traders and buyers are often involved in discussions about political issues, whether related to elections, government policies, or local and national politicians (Hidayati, 2021). Such discussions not only reflect individual views, but also serve as a means of disseminating information that, although informal, can influence public opinion widely. According to data from the Bengkulu City Industry and Trade Service, in 2023, Pasar Panorama recorded more than 5,000 visitors per day, most of whom were local residents with diverse educational and economic backgrounds. The high level of social interaction in this market creates great potential for the dissemination of political issues through informal communication.

The dissemination of political information through informal communication is not always based on valid data. Many of them are subjective, often in the form of rumors or gossip that have no strong basis (Aditia & Imran, 2024). The spread of this kind of information, if not managed properly, can lead to disinformation that is detrimental to society, especially in a political context. A study conducted by the Indonesian Survey Institute (2022) showed that 40% of Bengkulu people get political information from informal sources such as markets, coffee shops, and social media. This shows the high dependence of society on informal communication in obtaining political information, which in turn influences their political views.

This research is important to fill the gap in the study of social interaction and political communication in informal spaces such as traditional markets. Most previous studies have focused more on political communication in mass media and social media, while studies on political communication in informal spaces such as traditional markets are still very limited. This research also provides novelty by analyzing how political issues are spread and perceived by the public through daily social interactions in the market.

The purpose of this study is to understand how social interactions in Pasar Panorama facilitate the spread of political issues through informal communication. This study also aims to identify factors that influence the spread of political issues in the market, as well as their impact on public political perceptions. Thus, this study

is expected to contribute to the development of political communication theory, especially in the context of informal communication in public spaces.

The importance of understanding how political issues are spread through informal communication is becoming increasingly relevant, especially amidst increasing political polarization and rampant disinformation. Informal communication in traditional markets such as Pasar Panorama can be an effective means of disseminating correct and educational political information, but it can also be a medium that is vulnerable to the spread of misinformation. Therefore, this study will provide important insights into the dynamics of the spread of political issues in traditional markets and how this affects people's political participation.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to understand the phenomenon of the spread of political issues through informal political communication in Pasar Panorama, Bengkulu City. According to Pureklolon (2021), a case study is a study that includes an assessment aimed at providing a detailed description of the background, nature and character of a case, in other words, a case study focuses on a case intensively and in detail. Research in the method is carried out in depth on a situation or condition in a systematic manner starting from making observations, collecting data, analyzing information and reporting results (Sugiyono, 2017).

The qualitative approach was chosen because the research is exploratory in nature, aiming to explore how social interactions in the market can facilitate the spread of political issues. The research location was Panorama Market, the largest market in Bengkulu City, which is a meeting point for social groups with diverse economic, educational, and political backgrounds. The research subjects were selected using purposive sampling, involving 20 informants, consisting of traders, buyers, visitors, and local political observers. Data collection techniques included participant observation of political conversations that occurred in the market, in-depth interviews with key informants, and relevant documentation such as activity reports and statistical data from related agencies.

The main instrument in this study was the researcher himself, who conducted semi-structured interviews to dig deeper into information about the informants' experiences related to the spread of political issues (Pureklolon, 2021). The data obtained were then analyzed using thematic analysis methods, where the main themes regarding social interactions and political perceptions were identified through the coding process. Furthermore, the researcher triangulated the data to increase validity by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation.

The validity and reliability of the data in this study were strengthened through the triangulation method and member checking technique. Triangulation involves the use of multiple data sources, collection techniques, and analysis to gain

a more comprehensive and in-depth perspective on the phenomenon being studied. Meanwhile, the member checking technique is a process in which researchers return to informants to verify and seek clarification on the data and findings that have been collected. This involves returning the results of the analysis to informants so that they can assess the accuracy and precision of the information presented.

By involving informants in the data verification process, researchers can ensure that the information obtained is accurate and representative. This process also provides an opportunity for informants to convey additional views or experiences that may not have been previously revealed. In this way, member checking not only increases the validity of the data, but also strengthens the relationship between researchers and informants, creating a sense of mutual trust that is important in qualitative research. This member checking technique also helps reduce potential bias that may arise from the researcher's interpretation. Through discussion and clarification, researchers can identify and correct errors or mistakes that may occur in the understanding or representation of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social interactions at Panorama Market support the spread of political issues through informal communication.

Social interaction in Panorama Market plays an important role in the spread of political issues through informal communication. The market as a center of economic and social activities, is not only a place for buying and selling transactions, but also a space where individuals from various backgrounds gather and interact (Ayres, 2017). Through this interaction, there is an exchange of information and opinions covering various issues, including political issues. Informal communication in the market is often more flexible and personal, allowing for the delivery of information in a more in-depth and impactful manner.

Research conducted at Panorama Market shows that traders who have certain political views often take advantage of moments of interaction with customers to spread their opinions. In a friendly and relaxed atmosphere, traders not only sell their merchandise, but also raise political issues that are currently being discussed. Through everyday conversations that occur during transactions, political information can be conveyed in a context that is relevant to the daily lives of buyers (Triwicaksono & Nugroho, 2021). For example, when explaining the products being sold, traders can mention the impact of government policies on the price of goods, which makes the political information feel more real and directly affects the customer's shopping experience.

Data from observations of these interactions shows that customers tend to be more receptive to information delivered in an informal atmosphere, where they feel comfortable and familiar. This approach creates space for two-way dialogue, where customers not only receive information, but can also express their opinions. This creates a dynamic that supports the exchange of ideas and opinions, making

the market an unexpected arena for political discussion. In addition, the friendly market atmosphere also encourages customers to be more open in sharing their views, so that political information conveyed by traders can be strengthened through broader social interactions (Okditazeini, 2021). This shows that Panorama Market not only functions as a place for economic transactions, but also as a space for the dissemination of political ideas that can influence public perception and attitudes towards current issues.

Analysis of interviews with 50 respondents in the market also revealed that more than 70% of them felt more confident in political information delivered directly by traders they knew. This shows that the personal relationships and mutual trust formed in these interactions greatly influence the acceptance and trust in the information delivered. Many customers also stated that information delivered in the context of everyday conversations tends to be easier to understand and more relevant to the situation they are facing, compared to information received through mass media or digital platforms.

Interview analysis of 50 respondents in the market also revealed that more than 70% of respondents felt more confident in political information delivered directly by traders they knew. One of them was as conveyed by the research informant:

"I trust the information provided by traders in the market more. In everyday conversations, they explain the situation in a way that is easy to understand and relevant to my life. News from television or the internet often feels distant and difficult to understand, whereas from traders, I can directly ask questions and understand better what they are saying." (Interview with Rulis Maula, Buyer at Panorama Market, Bengkulu City, on September 23, 2024, at 09.30 WIB)

This shows that the personal relationships and mutual trust formed in these interactions greatly influence the acceptance and trust in the information conveyed. Many customers also stated that information conveyed in the context of everyday conversation tends to be easier to understand and more relevant to the situation they are facing, compared to information received through mass media or digital platforms.

To understand this phenomenon, communication theory of diffusion of innovation by Everett Rogers are very relevant. This theory explains how new ideas and information spread in a community through certain communication channels (Firmansyah & Kurniawan, 2021). This theory emphasizes that the diffusion process occurs through five stages, namely knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation (Kusno, 2020). Traders in Panorama Market act as agents of change who help spread political information in a way that is easy for consumers to understand. When traders deliver political information to customers, they are in the knowledge and persuasion stage. Customers, who may not have previously known about a particular issue, begin to accept the information and decide to consider it valid. The social context in the marketplace supports the

confirmation process, where customers can discuss with others and strengthen their understanding of the issues discussed.

Rogers also emphasized that the communication channels used to disseminate innovations affect the level of adoption of ideas. Face-to-face interactions in traditional markets provide a deeper nuance compared to information disseminated through digital media. Traders not only convey facts, but also build narratives that link political information to personal experiences and local contexts that are familiar to buyers (Arsyad et al., 2024). Therefore, social interactions at Panorama Market are not only a space for economic transactions, but also function as an important arena for the dissemination of political information. By utilizing personal relationships and more intimate communication, traders are able to change the way customers view and political attitudes, while strengthening social ties between them (Perkasa & Aditia, 2023).

At Panorama Market in Bengkulu City, traders and buyers function as agents of change, disseminating political information through their social interactions. This process includes stages such as knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation, where each interaction becomes an opportunity to shape individual political views. In this context, traders who share political information can open customers' insights about current issues, help them understand different perspectives and ultimately encourage them to make more informed decisions when facing elections or other political situations.

This process becomes richer when we view it through the lens of social network theory. This theory assumes that individuals do not operate in a vacuum, but rather in complex networks where social relationships serve as channels for the dissemination of information (Erlisya et al., 2024). In Panorama Market, each individual, whether a trader or a buyer, can be considered a node in a larger network. When a trader conveys political information to a customer, they are not only sharing knowledge with one person, but also creating the possibility of further information dissemination to others who interact with that customer.

The nature of social networks allows information to spread exponentially. For example, if a customer receives political information from a merchant and then shares it with friends or family, the information has the potential to reach many more people in a short period of time (Triwicaksono & Nugroho, 2021). Social networks in the marketplace also rely on trust and pre-existing interpersonal relationships. When information is delivered by someone who has a close relationship with the recipient, such as a long-standing merchant, there is a greater likelihood that the information will be well received. This suggests that in social networks, trust is a key element in the spread of information (Ardianto et al., 2020). Merchants who are trusted are better able to influence their customers, making them effective agents of change in political contexts.

Social network theory also includes the concept of the power of weak ties, which states that looser ties with individuals outside the core group can be important conduits for bringing new information (Yusuf & Hukma, 2023). In

Panorama Market, this could mean that customers who interact with merchants from different backgrounds or communities can introduce new perspectives to their group, broadening the political discussion taking place in the marketplace.

This suggests that social interaction in Panorama Market is not simply an exchange of information, but a dynamic process in which political information effectively spreads through the networks that exist between merchants and buyers. This illustrates how public spaces such as markets can serve as strategic arenas to increase political engagement and improve political literacy among the public. Awareness of the importance of this social interaction can be used to design better and more inclusive communication strategies in the political context, so as to encourage wider public participation in the democratic process.

Factors influencing the spread of political issues in Panorama Market and its impact on public political perception

This study successfully identified several factors that influence the spread of political issues in Pasar Panorama, involving 50 respondents consisting of traders and market visitors. The survey results showed that social interaction was the main factor, where around 68% of respondents stated that they were involved in political discussions when transacting or gathering in the market area. These discussions are often triggered by the latest news circulating, either through mass media or social media. In this case, social media plays a very significant role, where 64% of respondents admitted to getting political information from platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook. This phenomenon reflects that Pasar Panorama not only functions as a place to buy and sell, but also as a public space that facilitates the exchange of political information and opinions.

There are also concerns regarding the spread of hoaxes among the public. Around 42% of respondents admitted to having believed political information that turned out to be inaccurate, and 58% of them stated that they rarely verified before accepting the news circulating. This indicates a low level of media literacy among respondents, which can result in the formation of erroneous political perceptions. In addition, the study also found that the economic conditions of the community have a significant influence on their perspective on political issues. The data shows that 72% of respondents pay more attention to welfare issues, such as social assistance and government programs related to poverty alleviation. This link between political issues and economic conditions shows that people are very sensitive to changes in their daily lives, and this has a direct impact on how they consume and discuss political information.

The results of this study show the complexity of the dynamics of the spread of political issues in Pasar Panorama, which cannot be separated from the social and economic contexts that surround it. Social interactions that occur in the market create a dynamic communication network, where political information can spread quickly and widely. With 68% of respondents reporting that they are involved in political discussions, this reflects a collective awareness among the community

regarding the importance of political issues that affect their lives. These moments of interaction are not only a means to exchange information, but also to form opinions and attitudes towards political candidates and existing policies. In this context, the market functions as a democratic public space where everyone, from various backgrounds, has the opportunity to voice their opinions.

The high dependence on social media as a source of information also poses serious challenges. Although social media can be an effective tool for disseminating information, 64% of respondents who rely on this platform for political news indicated the risk of spreading hoaxes. Around 42% of respondents who admitted to having been trapped in misinformation emphasized the need for better media literacy education. In a world filled with abundant and sometimes misleading information, the ability to analyze and verify information is becoming increasingly important. This is a challenge for the public who must be able to sort out which information is reliable and which is not, so as not to get caught up in a false narrative.

The economic aspect that also influences the spread of political issues in Pasar Panorama is also no less important. With 72% of respondents showing a great interest in economic issues, it is clear that the public tends to respond more to political issues that are relevant to their well-being. This illustrates that politics cannot be separated from the economic context, where political decisions taken by the government directly impact the daily lives of the public. When the public faces economic challenges, such as unemployment or rising prices of basic necessities, their attention to political issues will increase (Aditia, 2021). They want to ensure that the elected leader has a real program to improve their well-being. In this case, the spread of political issues in Pasar Panorama is not just a conversation, but also part of the community's collective strategy to face existing challenges.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that social interaction in Panorama Market has a significant role in the spread of political issues through informal communication. The market not only functions as a center of economic activity, but also as an arena where individuals from various social and political backgrounds interact and exchange information. Through everyday conversations, traders and buyers are able to discuss relevant political issues, build trusting relationships, and convey information in a way that is easier for the public to understand. This proves that the social context greatly influences the acceptance and understanding of political information by the public.

The use of communication theory and social network theory in the analysis of interactions in Pasar Panorama also provides deeper insight into how political information is spread. The diffusion of innovation theory explains that the process of spreading new ideas occurs through several stages, where traders act as agents of change who help the community gain knowledge and build understanding of political issues. Meanwhile, social network theory suggests that existing interpersonal relationships between traders and buyers strengthen the process of

information diffusion, creating effective channels for the spread of political information among the community.

This study makes a significant contribution to deepening the understanding of the dynamics of political communication in the context of public space, especially in traditional markets such as Pasar Panorama. The market as a social interaction space not only functions as a place for economic transactions, but also as an arena where political information circulates and is discussed. Although the character of the information conveyed in this market is often informal and unstructured, its impact on the political perception of the community and the decisions taken by voters has proven to be very large. This phenomenon shows that informal communication in the market can influence the way individuals understand and respond to political issues that develop around them. Therefore, it is crucial for stakeholders, including the government, non-governmental organizations, and the media, to pay more attention to and utilize the potential of informal communication in the market environment. This not only functions as a channel for conveying accurate and educational political information, but also as an effort to maintain the integrity of the information circulating, as well as build public trust in the sources of information they receive.

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