

# Narrative of politics in the era of social media: a multimodal analysis of president Joko Widodo's video blog

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**Abstract.** This research aims to investigate the use of social media in constructing political narrative by examining the video blogs (vlogs) of Indonesian President, Jokowi, on Youtube as a case study. How does President Jokowi use his vlogs to construct political narratives about his personal life and presidency? What kind of semiotic resources deployed in his vlogs? This research uses the method of Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis and concludes that President Jokowi has used his vlogs to build his political narrative with the underlying themes of progress and reformation, stating that his presidency will lead Indonesia to a better situation. The political narrative championed in his vlogs strengthens his political legitimacy as a leader who is humble, modest, and close to the people. In building his political narrative, President Jokowi has used a variety of semiotic resources, including participants, process or kinesics action, locative circumstance, visual collocation, speech, and text. This research confirms the change of political communication in content dimension and shows the importance of applying multimodal analysis in understanding contemporary political communication. This research recommends politicians to use vlogs as a platform to build their political narratives in this new political environment.

## 1 Introduction

The presence of social media brings a number of influences on political communication [1,2]. The emergence of the second generation of internet democracy, with social media platforms as its backbone, brings both challenges and opportunities for politicians. As stated by Loader and Mercea [1], active users of social media related to politics include social and political activists, politicians, party workers and those who are indeed committed to public issues. According to Young [3], testimonials, storytelling, speech, and rhetoric can all be used as discursive formats of democratic engagement that are able to realize a more open democracy (inclusive democracy).

The question is then, how do politicians adjust their political communication approach in this new political environment marked by increased access and interaction of citizens to new media such as social media? This research puts this big question in a more specific

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context, that is how politicians use social media in their daily activities to build their political narratives. This study examines how Indonesian President, Jokowi, uses social media to build his political narrative. By specifically analyzing President Jokowi's vlogs posted on YouTube, this research attempts to analyze President Jokowi's use vlogs to form particular political narratives about himself and his presidency.

This research also departs from the theoretical view of Kress [4] who views human communication as essentially multimodal, in the sense that it involves a number of modes of communication as well as a semiotic source in the process of meaning formation. Vlog is a multimodal phenomenon involving images, kinetic, written as well as oral language, and soundtracks in forming particular elements of its narrative meaning. In this context, the question is then: What semiotic sources does President Joko Widodo use in his vlogs that have the potential to shape his political narrative? Thus, this study departs from two research questions: (1) How does President Jokowi use vlogs to form political narratives about himself and his presidency? (2) What semiotic source(s) does President Joko Widodo use in his vlogs that has the potential to shape his political narrative?

## **2 Theoretical review**

Political communication, or communication in general, is basically a narrative [5]. Fisher defines narrative as a symbolic action - words and or actions - which have sequences and are meaningful to those who live, create, or interpret these symbols [5]. Patterson and Monroe briefly interpret narratives as stories that people tell (people tell stories) [6]. Bruner understands narrative as a series of events or an event that contains meaning and/or present something unexpected or contrary to the prevailing belief [7]. Prince defines narrative as a representation of at least two real or fictitious events or situations in the sequence of time [8].

Shenhav places political narratives as a form of political discourse. Shenhav acknowledges that defining political narration as a concept is not an easy job. Such difficulty is actually rooted in the broad range of understanding the political concept and the narrative itself [9]. According to Shenhav, there are two things that need to be considered in defining political narratives as a concept [9]. First, one should understand the understanding of each of the two concepts; what is meant by politics and what is meant by narration? Second, after understanding the meaning of each of the two concepts, the next step is to understand the interaction between the two terms. Political narratives can be seen as a subcategory of a larger concept of political discourse. A narrative is considered political if it relates to political elements embedded in it or relates to the context in which the discourse develops, in the sense that the communication process comes from formal political institutions and politicians.

According to Shenhav, formulating and analyzing political narratives cannot be separated from a political context, in the sense that the narrative can only be fully understood if the political context is well understood as well [9]. The study of political narratives can be a powerful method for capturing voices that arise in politics.

Political narratives in the new media environment are actually not new practices. What's interesting about this phenomenon is how the narrative is formulated, presented, and distributed on social media. In the era of digital communication, narratives, including political narratives, are built through many channels, starting from face-to-face communication, books, films, to social media [10]. In Page's view, narrative experience in the digital era involves various available semiotic sources. Thus, narrative analysis begins to pay attention to new forms of communication involving various modes of communication, each of which has its own narrative function and potential [10].

According to Kress, all text is basically multimodal [4]. Following this view, all forms of narrative communication, in principle, are multimodal [10]. The multimodal nature is increasingly felt in the digital era, when everyday communication takes many forms. By placing narrative text as a multimodal phenomenon, attempts to reveal the narrative's potential in a text is no longer sufficient if it only focuses on one aspect of the mode, such as language. The narrative's potential presented by non-verbal elements in a text needs to be explored together in order to see its potential in shaping the overall narrative meaning. The multimodal approach, according to Page, provides a better methodological ability in capturing the overall narrative potential in a multimodal text [10].

Schubert highlights the importance or function that narrative plays in political communication [11]. In general, according to Schubert, narrative serves as a tool to support the main goal of persuasion by conveying the selection of ideologically biased events. By taking selective actions in choosing the events that are told, one wants to achieve four functions of political narrative, namely personalizing, integrating, exemplifying, and dividing [11].

Studies of political narratives, especially the ones conducted in the United States, often make the political communication of the president an object of study. An example is Lewis' study of the Reagan presidency [12]. Other examples are Shenhav's study of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon [9] and Bacon's study of public political narratives in Russia in Russia's Putin-Medvedev era [13]. These studies generally conclude that narrative is an effective form of communication in shaping political perception.

In Indonesia, studies on political narratives, including President Jokowi's political narrative, are still limited. However, a number of studies can be explored to see how President Jokowi and the people around him built President Jokowi's narrative figure. The research conducted by Hatherel, which applies the concept of repertoire in political representation, concludes that Jokowi built a classification of his representation in the society through a simple repertoire, namely *blusukan* (impromptu visits) and performance [14].

### 3 Research methods

This study uses President Jokowi's vlogs posted on his YouTube account as the object of study. This study examines three vlogs which entitled: (1) Tracing Trans Papua with a Motor Trail, posted on May 24, 2017; (2) Two-Goat Childbirth Birth at Bogor Palace, posted on March 13, 2017; and (3) Trying the Best and Most Expensive Coffee in the World, posted on January 19, 2018. According to the researchers, these three vlogs represent the diversity of President Jokowi's overall vlog themes and also represent different time periods. The diversity of themes and times is important in understanding how President Jokowi uses different stories at different times in building a cohesiveness in his political narratives.

This study uses a multimodal analysis method with a Systemic Functional approach (SF-MDA). SF-MDA mainly aims to identify social functions of various forms of organizing languages. The main concepts are functions and systems or units [15]. The main purpose of this research is to identify the function of vlogs in shaping President Jokowi's political narrative and how these functions are realized in the vlogs' language system.

By considering the main objectives of SF-MDA, researchers will take the following steps. First, researchers will transcribe the vlogs to identify the semiotic sources used in the vlogs. Transcription is done by following the transcription form of Baldry and Thibault [16]. Second, researchers will analyze the text based on the metaphysical framework, namely experiential functions, interpersonal functions and textual functions. All three functions interpret meaning by using the perspective of political narrative.

## 4 Results

The three vlogs of President Joko Widodo, which become the object of this research, carry a number of messages almost similar to his experiential meaning. All three vlogs talk about "progress and renewal".

In the Papua vlog, the Trans Papua road is portrayed as a way of progress, which will bring prosperity not only to Papua, but also to Indonesia as a whole. In the entire vlog, President Jokowi is mainly portrayed as an actor behind the progress of Papua. As an actor, he is the initiator of this progress who takes concrete actions by visiting Papua, meeting Papuans, and directly reviewing the progress in Papua, especially regarding the development of the Trans Papua road. When President Jokowi becomes an actor, the goal position or to whom President Jokowi's actions are directed is occupied by participants related to Papua.

Regarding interpersonal meaning, the Papua vlog shows President Jokowi as a president who pays a great attention to the progress of Papua. Locative circumstances in the form of Papuan roads that are still being built (not yet paved) and the difficult circumstances, where President Jokowi had to trace the Trans Papua road with dirt bike, shows the importance of Papua on the one hand and Jokowi's political attention on the other. Using a dirt bike, Jokowi, in his position as a president, was willing to trace the heavy terrain of the Trans Papua road to see first hand the development of this road. The interpersonal meaning of this attention will be even stronger when linking the message of this vlog with the context that it was the umpteenth time for Jokowi to visit Papua, making him the president who visits Papua most frequent. This vlog also portrays Jokowi as a president who is not only friendly and close to the community, but also wants to listen. When he got off the plane and met his greeters, who were represented by two Papuan children, President Jokowi spoke with them and attentively listened to what the Papuan children said.

In the Vlog of the Birth of Two Goats, President Jokowi speaks about birth as a regeneration that brings optimism for the future. This is the ideational meaning realized by a number of semiotic sources used in this vlog. In the Vlog of Birth of Two Goats, President Jokowi places himself as a role model, initiating a change in the new political culture in the direction that Indonesia needs, namely the merging of political elites with ordinary people symbolized as Palace and Goats. In order to make himself a new political symbol, President Jokowi displays a number of certain qualities, including looking modest, having a close ties with the people, and willing to get dirty (choosing goats).

In the Coffee Vlog, the presence of two participants in the same space (professional young baristas and quality coffee from Mount Puntung together in Sejiwa Cafe) represents the progress that will bring Indonesia in a position equal to that of other nations in the world. This Vlog is like activating a big narrative that this nation has every requirements to be a great nation. President Jokowi took the position of a promoter, with the main task of encouraging the best sons and daughters in the country to manage Indonesia's rich natural resources. For this reason, Jokowi shows his quality as a leader who was close and on the same side with young generation, placing himself as a part of the youth. President Jokowi in the whole vlog mainly acts as an actor, especially as a narrator who informs the audience about the Soul Coffee, which is a hangout place for young people, about young Baristas who look professional, and about the coffee from Mount Puntang which is one of the best coffees in Indonesia.

## 5 Discussion

All three of Jokowi's vlogs have a happy ending: a developed Papua, a competitive Indonesia, and a regeneration of political culture. These narratives show the narrator's

perspective. One characteristic of narrative discourse, according to Patterson and Monroe, is that it requires the narrator's perspective in the story conveyed [6]. These three vlogs show President Jokowi as the protagonist of progress and reform. To support this, President Jokowi, as the narrator, includes other participants who reinforced the messages embedded in the vlogs: two children in the Papuan vlog coffee and young saristas in coffee vlog, and goats in the goat birth vlog. As Aristotle put it, the main function of the character in a story is to realize the soul of the plot [16].

In political narratives, according to Schubert, there are four narrative functions, namely personalizing, integrating, exemplifying, and polarizing [11]. These three Jokowi Vlogs run these functions differently. In the personalizing function, narrative is centered on certain individuals. These three vlogs are actually all centered on President Jokowi. The three functions to build or form a narrative about the figure of Jokowi and his leadership. Coffee and Goat Vlogs have the function of integrating, placing Jokowi as part of a particular group or community. The polarizing function of these three vlogs occurs when the audience activates the broader meaning of the narrative by putting Jokowi and his leadership in comparing him with other leaders.

The findings of this study can at least be a kind of a case in point which gives additional evidence to the views of Henn and Vowe [17], which states that the new media environment has changed political communication in a number of aspects, including the content dimension, where political communication is no longer merely talking about large public policies, but ordinary daily events experienced by politicians. This study reinforces Fisher's view that communication, including political communication, is a series of narratives that have their own rationality [5]. In the current era of social media, researchers argue that narration is a form of political communication that is more in line with this new era, an era that provides convenience and opportunities for many people.

## **6 Conclusion**

Regarding the first goal, identifying the narrative meaning of President Jokowi's vlog post, this study concludes the following points. First, this study finds that President Jokowi has used vlogs as a medium to build his political narrative. President Jokowi uses his daily activity vlogs to form a political narrative about himself and his presidency. Secondly, the three vlogs studied have a thematic red thread, namely all three vlogs convey a big theme about progress and reform. Jokowi's presidency (leadership) is the presidency that brings development and progree. In this progress discourse, President Jokowi is portrayed as an initiator, promoter, and symbol of progress. The theme of President Jokowi's progress and position in it is closely related to one of the pillars of Jokowi's political legitimacy: a leader who is expected to bring real progress to Indonesia. Third, the compilation of plots in all three vlogs together presents a comedy-romance genre. The story moves towards a good ending (happy-ending story).

In connection with the second objective, namely to identify the semiotic sources used in the vlogs, this study finds that in building his political narrative, President Jokowi combines the chosen participants, kinetik arrangements, locative circumstances (place), visual collocations, and oral statements as semiotic sources to form narrative meanings. In general, all semiotic elements are present in the three vlogs studied, but they have different roles in the process of forming narrative meaning.

## Acknowledgements

This work is supported by Hibah PITTA 2018 funded by DRPM Universitas Indonesia No.2027/UN2.R3.1/HKP.05.00/2018

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