Political Internet Memes in Indonesia: Insulting the President in the 2019 Presidential Election

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Abstract

Hate speech has challenged Indonesian democracy. Mockery and insulting the president have become a common form of political expression during the 2019 Indonesian presidential election. This article analyses the discourse of the internet meme 'Jokowi planga-plongo' that mocked and insulted the president in the 2019 Indonesian presidential election. The insults and mockery of the president were massive. It urged the government to regulate insults to the president and vice president in the new draft of the Criminal Code. We collected 'Jokowi planga-plongo' memes during the 2019 presidential election campaign. We analyse qualitatively with the social semiotics analysis from the viewpoint of the internet meme theory and bisociation theory. We found that Indonesians use abusive and non-abusive memes to insult the president. We found that both abusive and non-abusive texts had been used in the insult. The insults came from a framework free of harsh or abusive language. These new languages were transmitted through memes that used insulting comparison, matching, modification, and freezing motion in a context where insults were intended. The non-abusive insulting memes created without harsh and abusive words could sneak in without being caught under the EIT law. The illogical, exaggerated, and incoherent content articulation mechanisms were the memetic trait that hid the abusive content. The discourse was developed by relating it to another discourse in unrelated discourses. These illogical sequences were tied together into a logical context by the creativity of the meme creator. We also found that the non-abusive memes were more than the abusive ones to avoid violation of the law. These findings can become an alternative perspective regarding contemporary Indonesian democracy that has declined.

Keywords

Political Internet Memes; Indonesian Presidential Election; Insult The President; Internet Memes Studies

Introduction

Indonesian democracy increased significantly after the fall of the Soeharto authoritarian regime, and the democratic Reformation era began in 1998. Afterwards, Indonesia became one of the best democratic countries in the political rights in the Southeast Asian region in 2016 (Lim, 2018, p.

482). All Indonesian citizens have the freedom of speech and freedom to express their political views in the public sphere. The internet has become a medium to share and discuss political discourse in various, cheaper and more accessible ways than ever before (Hill & Sen, 2005; Tapsell, 2017). However, Indonesia's democracy declined after the massive protest of *Aksi Bela Islam* (The Islam Defense Action) in 2016 (Power, 2018).

The Islam Defense Action protests were incited by the Islamist conservative radical group Front Pembela Islam (FPI/Islamic Defenders Front), demanding one of the 2017 Jakarta Governor candidates[*] imprisoned due to the blasphemy of Islam. The FPI exploited this protest as a political power to gain Islamist mass support in the 2017 Jakarta Gubernatorial Election and the 2019 Indonesian Presidential Election (Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2018). The exploitation of Islamist issues creates ideological polarisation among Indonesians (Afrimadona, 2021; Fossati et al., 2020). The polarisation gets intense towards the election on the elite and grassroots levels. Moreover, politicians use the hoax, fake news, and meme to gain grassroots involvement in the political discussion (Duile & Tamma, 2021). Bourchier (2019) mentions that the use of Islamist issues in Indonesian politics encourages President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) to be more authoritarian.

The police arrested some people for violating the law (Aliansyah, 2017; Hidayat, 2016; Nuramdani, 2017; Perdana, 2017; Romadoni, 2014; Ryandi, 2017; Santoso, 2017; Subagja & Pradana, 2017). The Electronic Information and Transactions Law (EIT Law) concerns regulating hate speech on the internet. However, EIT Law does not explicitly regulate hate speech against the President yet criminalises the citizen (Aditya & Al-Fatih, 2021). IET Law access to citizens' insults of the President is an abuse of power. However, the government is concerned about preserving the President's honour and dignity due to ethical considerations (Ministry of Law and Human Rights, 2021). This issue urges the government to put the provisions that criminalize insulting of the President and members of the government in the new draft of the Criminal Code [†] (Kartika, 2021).

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[*] The candidate is Basuki Tjahaja Purnama

[†] Draft Criminal Code is still debated and does not yet get approval from the House of Representatives

Furthermore, the provision that criminalizes insulting the President and member of the government on the new draft of the Criminal Code could be a repression of the freedom of speech and critics. It could be a tool for a regime to control society. However, control could be one of the characteristics of Asian democracy, as Thompson (2015) mentions. Thompson (2015) argues that Asian democracy needs collectivism and a consensual society rather than competitive and liberal democracy. Collectivism and consensual society need moral leadership and avoid opposition. These democratic characteristics make criticism, insult, and mockery of the President a threat to government and national interest. It could contradict the Western democracy, which has the freedom of criticise, insult, and even mock their leaders (Fry, 2004). These distinctions between the Asian and West democracy result in a question: How serious is the insult and mockery on the internet towards the President that urges the government to issue an article regarding the insult to the president and his vice president.

This article examines how Indonesians mocked and insulted their President in the most intense political discourse toward the 2019 Presidential Election. The intense political discourse has occurred since Prabowo Subianto exploited the Islamist issue in 2019 (Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2018). The 2019 presidential election has become Indonesia's presidential election with high political tensions. This tension also occurred due to the exact repetition of the 2014 presidential candidate rivalry between Jokowi and Prabowo, which intensified the rivalry and triggered an intense antagonism within their grassroots supporters. Political discourses from both parties are filled with derisions and mockeries toward the opposing party. Mockery and insulting labels for the president's supporter group, *cebong* ‡ (tadpole) and *kampret* § (microbat), reinforced the polarisation (Fadly, 2020; Fensi, 2019). The mockery and insult became rough among candidates' supporters and Jokowi *planga-plongo* (dumbfounded with agape) was one of the most popular insults against Jokowi.

As a political discourse, 'Jokowi *planga-plongo*' lasted for quite a long time, following his national

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‡ Jokowi supporters
§ Prabowo supporters

political appearance in 2013. The discourse existed based on Google Trends search (Figure 1) and has dynamically been discussed since the 2014 Presidential Election.
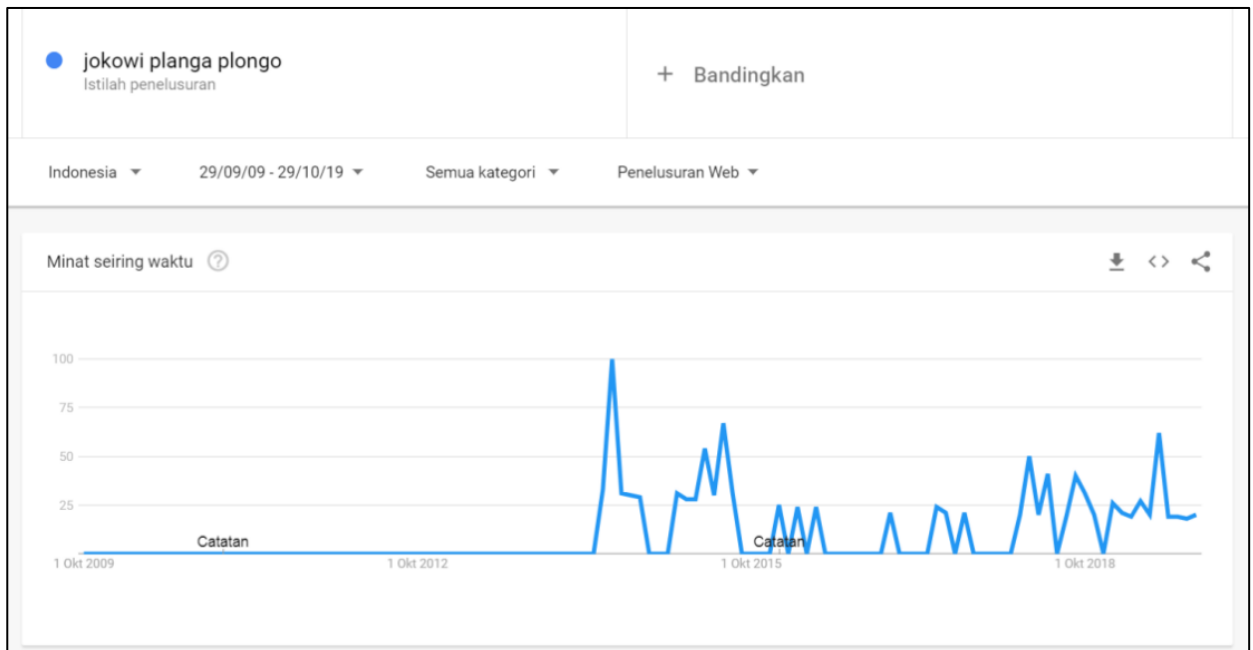

Figure 1. Semantic label usage trend of 'Jokowi *planga-plongo*' based on Google Trends

The mockeries of 'Jokowi *planga-plongo'* was related to the Jokowi's political background. Jokowi was not born into an elite, military, or political clan. Instead, he was a lower-class citizen from a village (Indonesian called *ndeso/* ingenious and hayseed). People know him as a modest and humble leader. However, this background has become an insinuation by his rival and associates as a "puppet candidate." (Mietzner, 2015, p. 35). Jokowi was considered a foolish '*planga-plongo'* candidate by his rivals based on the previous argument. The internet memes of "Jokowi *planga-plongo*" were collected and analysed to examine how rough netizens' insulting and mockery were. Internet memes were selected based on the suitability of data for examining the contemporary digital grassroots political discourse. Because the internet memes allow a non-serious and humorous discourse to be discussed and spread widely, it makes it easier to go undetected under the nose of IET law or any ethical consideration (Shifman, 2014; Shifman et al., 2007).

Political Internet Memes Studies

Investigating the studies of internet memes can be traced back to the *meme* concept prompted by Dawkins (1976). He used the term *meme* to refer to the imitating behaviour and culture passed down by a predecessor to its successor. Dawkins argues that culture is inherited by replicating and imitating its most minor elements (called *memes*) and is widely spread. Other scholars develop this idea to understand another phenomenon. Blackmore (1999) and Brodie (1996) use the *meme* concept to explain imitating (mimetic) ideas and actions among people. Furthermore, Shifman (2014) uses the *meme* concept to understand mimetic action in the internet culture.

In the digital era, imitation and impersonation are common. Imitations are carried out by replicating popular digital content modified and uploaded, which are spread by many people through the internet (Shifman, 2014). Imitating and impersonating digital content are carried out to spread a particular message or are practical jokes solely for entertainment purposes (Goriunova, 2012). Internet memes have become a means to express digital society's creativity, which is often presented in humour (Vasquez, 2019). According to Blumer's (1969) arguments, people use symbols in messages in interactions with a shared meaning within societies. It means that the messages not only carry meaning but also disseminate perspective of an issue, a way of thinking, or a freedom of speech culture and liberalism. Some communication strategies use it as an entertaining communication message to achieve their significant goals. For instance, "Gangnam Style" video clips and dance in South Korean cultural promotion (Shifman, 2014, p. 1), or the virality of the mimetic action Ice Bucket Challenge to increase awareness of the Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis and encourage donations for its research (Gal et al., 2016). This characteristic makes humorous messages, and internet memes still have an important role in political discourses and social movements (Bayerl & Stoynov, 2016).

Internet memes have facilitated minority, marginalized, and queer groups within their role as cultural participants. A study by Gal et al. (2016) shows this. Gal et al. (2016) studied memes of "It Gets Better" campaign, which was a campaign to prevent suicide among gay teenagers. Internet memes have become a means to negotiate identity, norms, and action toward LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) as a marginalized group. Unlike in consensus, which

considers a meme an insignificant message, joke, or merely humour, in this context, the meme was considered an important means of discourse. Internet memes can be considered a message with persuasive purposes within a serious discussion. Its objective is to negotiate identity and collective norms to be accepted by society. Gal et al. (2016) argue that the discussion and negotiations move from subversive actions to acts of obedience. Those actions were not only represented by the contents but had also been hidden in certain forms and stances. This argument makes internet memes become a means and form to negotiate different perspectives within the groups of society.

Internet memes can be lethal to the ruler (Tsakona & Popa, 2012). The memes have become a means to discuss, infiltrate and camouflage prohibited issues in humour (Hatab, 2016; Mina, 2014). These characteristics allow taboo topics to be discussed in public spheres by many people. Even in non-democratic states, political satire can spread through internet memes. The circulation of internet memes implies its discourses through the stance or attitude of a political internet meme (Görkem, 2015; Jones, 2017; Shifman, 2014).

Studies in political internet memes are moving forward, examining new forms of memes as a new means of expression in the digital era of internet networks. Internet memes have enabled a brand new multimodal language capable of presenting political discourses in many ways (Bayerl & Stoynov, 2016; Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2017). Studies in political internet memes also investigate the impact of memes on the political dynamics of a country, whether it is their role in political campaigns or their means of critics and resistance toward the current government (Gambarato & Komesu, 2018; Hatab, 2016; Pearce & Hajizada, 2014).

Furthermore, internet memes as a way of expressing criticism and humour have spread globally and broken the boundaries of Western culture and Eastern culture via the internet network, where some countries are imitating other countries' internet memes, which may be perceived differently than in their cultural origins (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2016; Shifman et al., 2014). Another study found that humour, critique and other communication forms had led to conflict and even violence (Kuipers, 2011). Comedies, critiques, and other forms of communication have sparked debate and even resulted in an international crisis. The use of humour in a discussion about every

topic or event is inappropriate. A phrase that can make someone laugh cannot be mentioned to everyone or in every circumstance. For instance, Kuipers (2011) examined the controversy that arose from the controversial Mohammad the Prophet caricature published in the Danish daily Jyllands-Posten. Kuipers theorised that conflict arises from differing viewpoints on mockeries, ridicules, derisions, and the satire tradition between Islamic and Western communities. Other literature backs up Kuiper's assertion that the Islamic society's concept of humour differs from that of the West. Moreover, Muslims that predominate Indonesian society may have a different sense of humour compared to that of Westerners. It becomes vital in understanding cultural differences. It is not proper to use in-jokes and humour in every conversation. According to the Indonesian perspective, the citizens should not mock and laugh at their leaders and the elites (Sudarmo, 2004). We argue that the use of abusive humour and satire on the internet has adopted the western culture. It has become a new problem on the political culture and critics in Indonesia.

In Indonesia, studies on internet memes have begun since 2014 (Anggraini et al., 2014; Mahadian, 2014). Political discourse in Indonesian society takes many different forms on the internet. Internet memes have become a popular political expression (Akmal, 2017; Mahadian, 2014). Around 2009, the launch of the website yeahmahasiswa.com contributed to the rise in popularity of internet memes (Allifiansyah, 2016). During this period, internet memes are considered fun political entertainment. They are also considered the Indonesian youth's political voices (Akmal, 2017; Allifiansyah, 2016). Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the Indonesian president from 2004 to 2014, was the target of political issues and criticisms since internet memes gained popularity. Indonesian society freely used memes to criticise, satirise, and even mock their president. Internet memes were used by Indonesian society to discuss the candidates during the 2014 presidential election (Akmal, 2017; Anggraini et al., 2014; Wadipalapa, 2015). Some expressed their support, while others insulted the candidates or denounce their competitors. In the 2014 and 2019 Presidential elections, the discourse war of internet memes still occurred among the supporters. It was even more involved in the polarization among grassroots presidential supporters (Afrimadona, 2021). We argue that using internet memes during the political campaign has escalated the discourse war among the supporters. It potentially stimulates considerable ideological conflict among societal groups.

Some researchers consider internet memes to have induced not only mere entertainment, but they also contain criticism (Wadipalapa, 2015). Some researchers had studied the role of internet memes in the 2014 Indonesian presidential campaign. Internet memes acted as a medium of political discussions (Anggraini et al., 2014). However, some of those studies were carried out without sufficient internet memes. Furthermore, some research had examined a meme as a message or a new language in conveying a message. A study conducted by Wildan (2016) investigated the words, phrases, clauses and sentence combinations in the informal message context. However, Wildan (2016) has yet to discuss the universal structural patterns in comprehending internet memes' structural languages to be interpreted. Some scholars attempted to comprehend internet memes' role in Indonesia, considering significant political events like the 2017 Jakarta governor election. It is phenomenal since it involved sensitive religious issues during the campaigning period (Dewi et al., 2017). Memes also brought up provocative racial and ethnic messages because one of the governor candidates belongs to a minority group in Indonesia. Internet memes delivered some provocative racial and ethnic messages regarding candidates. Internet memes have also become a message carrier for supporters in sarcastic contexts (Kurniasih, 2016).

According to the previous literature review, Indonesian internet meme research is limited to two areas: scenarios showing internet meme representations and internet meme representation in specific political events (Allifiansyah, 2016; Anggraini et al., 2014; Juditha, 2015; Pusanti, 2015; Triputra & Sugita, 2016; Wadipalapa, 2015). Other scholars had studied online memes from a linguistics viewpoint to analyse and grasp their use of forms, themes, usages, and other linguistic features (Bangun et al., 2017; Listiyorini, 2017; Lukman et al., 2016; Widiana, 2015; Wildan, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

Regarding the analysis process to examine internet memes, this research developed a theoretical framework that referred to the internet meme theory (Shifman, 2014) and humour theory (Bisociation theory) (Koestler, 1964). The theories were used to identify the basic elements of internet memes and their mechanism in a discourse.

First, essential elements of the internet meme, according to the internet meme theory developed by Shifman (2014), were identified. Shifman developed an online meme definition that has gained wide acceptance and has been adopted by internet meme researchers. Shifman mentions that an internet meme is "*a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance, that are created with consciousness for each other, and are spread, imitated, and/or transformed; via the Internet by many users*." (Shifman, 2014, p. 41). According to Shifman's argument, the internet meme has three elements: form, content, and stance. Form refers to a sensible message perceived by a person. Content refers to the meaning of the specific text, referencing the idea and the ideology within. Stance is a position that addresses the position of the text toward issues in some certain linguistic codes. According to the stance definition, another theory is used to assist a linguistic code. Furthermore, the Bisociation theory was selected to examine the humour mechanism in a linguistic humour code.

Second, we examine a humour mechanism in internet memes according to the Bisociation theory. Bisociation theory was developed by Koestler (1964), which defines humour as *"the perceiving of a situation of idea (...) in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference"*. Koestler (1964) mentions that humour was created from logical incoherence, which generates tension and explosion. The logic of incoherence is created from two-story (context of content) with intercorrelation (associative) into one storyline. The logical incoherence created is the result of implementing two contexts (story) with intercorrelation (associative context[**]) into one storyline (denoted by "M" or Matrix in Figure 2) which is perceived simultaneously. Associative humour contexts (denoted by "M1 [Matrix 1] & M2 [Matrix 2] in Figure 2) are incompatible, paradoxical, or incoherent with each other.

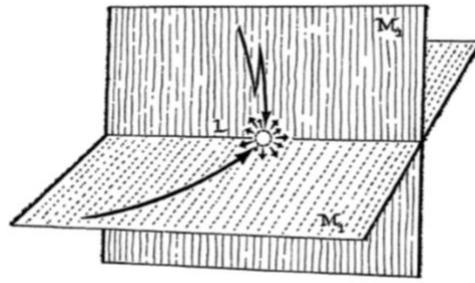[**]Contexts associated to an issue, story, discourse, sentence, or something similar

Figure 2. Contexts Association Pattern in Humour (Koestler, 1964, p. 34)

Humour was built by two associative contexts or more unrelated to each other but delivered in a single specific frame of the message. In other words, humour is constructed of two or more unrelated stories, but it is united in a single frame of the story. While Raskin (1984) and Attardo (1994) tried to comprehend verbal humour's mechanism, they opine that conceiving the contexts of verbal humour is required to understand it since perceiving only its grammatical perception is not enough. The isotopy model is a model which can be utilized to comprehend humour mechanisms by perceiving its grammatical and contextual aspects (Attardo, 1994; Raskin, 1984). These opinions are complementary and will be the theoretical basis in this article to gain insight into how humour works.

Referring to Koestler (1964), humour is built by two or more unrelated associative contexts, enabling the combination of two or more unrelated issues, stories, or discourses (in specific associative contexts) in humour or paradox. It implies the involvement of unusual issues or taboos in humour. Which, in turn, has enabled sneaking taboos into humour and still being accepted by the public (Gilbert, 2004; Lee et al., 2017; Ruch, 2008). The involvement of unusual issues, or taboos, is being used as *puns*[††]*;* thus, memes can make taboo, unusual, or controversial issues accepted and discussed within their humour message (Gilbert, 2004; Lee et al., 2017; Ruch, 2008). It is due to the humour mechanism being constructed by two or more *associative contexts*[‡‡]*,* where

[††]Humour element in the form of sentence, statement, or phrase which is considered important and induce humorous impression as the result of inconsistency or paradox.
[‡‡]Contexts associated to an issue, story, discourse, sentence, or something similar

an associative context involved is taboo, unusual, or controversial, which tends to be paradoxical within humour (Koestler, 1964). So that taboos, anomalies, and any controversies attached to the general or popular issue can be accepted by broad audiences. Furthermore, identifying the hidden issue in humour makes it possible to investigate the underlying societal sentiments.

Based on the internet memes theory and Bisociation theory, we developed a theoretical process in Table 1. First, to analyse the internet meme, we must identify the memes' associative context (intercorrelation context of content). Second, we identify the potential form of the internet meme for a content and stance analysis process (see Table 1).

Form			Content	Stance
Associative Context 1	Potential form: Visual	Person (Gesture, Posture, Accessories, Facial expression), Background, Another visual object	Potential meaning of content constructed by Internet memes form, which is analysed based on the context of each discourse	Description of internet memes stances, purpose, and essential idea of memes
	Potential form: Text	Word, Sentences, Meaning		
Associative Context 2	Potential form: Visual	Person (Gesture, Posture, Accessories, Facial expression), Background, Another visual object	Potential meaning of content constructed by Internet memes form, which is analysed based on the context of each discourse	
	Potential form: Text	Word, Sentences, Meaning		

Table 1. Analysis Framework

Methodology

This article analyses the discourse of '*Jokowi planga-plongo*' on the internet memes that mocked and insulted the Indonesian President in the 2019 Indonesian presidential election. The data were collected in the presidential campaign from August 2018 until April 2019 in the form of photos or images. This research collected the data using the Google search engine, with keywords: 'Jokowi *planga-plongo'*. Collecting the meme data using Google search had successfully been done by

Campbell et al. (2018), Gambarato and Komesu (2018), and Seiffert-Brockmann et al. (2018)[§§]. Google Search assists researchers in collecting relevant data based on Google Search's algorithm with its semantics labels. Those semantics labels attached to the internet memes are circulated and stored on the server computer which become the basis of selection. Google Search is an intermediary between a client and the server computer that is activated via specific keywords (Cilibrasi & Vitányi, 2007; Huang et al., 2011; Seiffert-Brockmann et al., 2018). Memes collected were then selected based on the criteria: first, containing signs which represent Jokowi, whether it is in the form of an icon, image, or text; second, has potential to be interpreted as '*planga-plongo*', the interpretation can be textual or contextual; and third, being significant, popular, and often appear during the searching process. Based on the selection criteria, 19 memes were chosen and then analysed (Table 2).

No	Analysed Memes	No	Analysed Memes
1		11	

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[§§]Another study conducted by Gal, Shifman, and Kampf (Gal et al., 2016) utilizing YouTube search engine. It was a study of memes in video form which were shared on YouTube.

2		12	
3		13	
4		14	
5		15	

6		16	
7		17	
8		18	

9		19	
10			

Table 2. Analysed Memes

A discourse analysis with the qualitative approach toward internet memes containing the relevant discourses was used. The social semiotics analysis proposed by Leeuwen (2004) was used in the analysis process. To identify the elements within a meme, the social semiotics methods utilised in this research were assisted by the internet memes theory (Shifman, 2014) and Bisociation theory (Koestler, 1964), as mentioned in section 3 (Theoretical Framework). In the analysis process, the internet memes elements, and their humour mechanism to examine 'what' and 'how' the discussed mockeries and insulting discourses were identified. To evade bias and preserve validity, the meme's discourse was analysed and investigated with multiple theories strategy (Lune & Berg, 2017, p. 14). First, we identified the discourses of internet memes using the humorous mechanism

according to the Bisociation theory. Second, according to the internet memes theory, we identified the internet memes element. Third, we analysed the potential meaning of the semiotics resources according to the social semiotics.

Research Findings

The 2014 Indonesian presidential election brings Jokowi and Prabowo Subianto together as contending parties. The 2014 Indonesian presidential election probably had the most challenging competition among its contending candidates. It is due to both presidential candidates sharing strong support from the Indonesian community (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2014). Even though Jokowi did not belong to the Indonesian elite, he won the 2014 Indonesian presidential election due to his popularity and defeated Prabowo, the elite's representative (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2014; Mietzner, 2014, 2015). Jokowi and Prabowo's rivalry repeated itself in the 2019 Indonesian presidential election. Jokowi and Prabowo are the Indonesian presidential candidates for the following 2019-2024 periods. The intensely fierce and repeating rivalries between these two presidential candidates had created intense polarization within the Indonesian community. The discourse war during the presidential campaign among the supporters is unavoidable. It has become a challenge for Indonesian democracy against hate speech and political polarization in the society. Mockeries and insulting words have become a new political culture on social media.

The political internet memes of 'Jokowi *planga-plongo*' are famous and iconic. They are still circulated and allowed to be spread on the internet even though Jokowi had stated his contempt (Prasetia, 2018). A verified online media platform[***] also published Jokowi *planga-plongo*' memes (Fardianto, 2014) (see Figure 3). Due to its failure to present Jokowi in his best posture, the abovementioned publications on online media could be interpreted negatively. Moreover, that photo of Jokowi was then modified into various internet memes that can be classified as insulting.

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[***] Verified by Indonesian Press Council. Online media enterprise data can be accessed at https://dewanpers.or.id/data/perusahaanpers.

Figure 3. The publishing of Jokowi's photo on a verified Indonesian online media platform, which then became viral as 'Jokowi *planga-plongo*' meme

According to our data, 12 out of the 19 Jokowi's memes used this photo (Figure 3). These findings became our database in creating a meme map to investigate the content's evolution (see Figure 3). Memes were mapped based on the themes of their sign's utilisation. Mapping was carried out by identifying memes forms. This step is referred to by Shifman (2014) as a meme entity is built by a 'form', which is presented by image, photo, text, or photoshop software (photo editing or manipulating). The form of memes is a combination of a mode of signs (Leeuwen, 2004) that can construct specific meanings of discourses. However, memes are often built on the logic of humour, which contains two associative contexts or two discourses in one frame (Koestler, 1964). According to the previous argument thus, memes are categorised by using the specific combination modes of the signs. For example, the "Red Berets" meme is created by matching it with a common text. Its purpose is to compare Jokowi and Prabowo's appearance in the uniform (see Table 3). This meme was created by matching two images with a similar genre without adding text or any

other significant signs on the image. Even a picture without any text captures the ugly side, and an ugly movement (frozen motion) would become a meme with a negative connotation.

Internet memes	Associative Context	
	M1	**Associative context 1**: frame of reference set up was built by presenting Joko Widodo in the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) cadre uniform and a red beret, but with silly and gawking facial expressions (commonly called "*planga-plongo*" in the native language). Joko Widodo is not military personnel, and he will never be able to look like military personnel.
	M2	**Associative context 2**: puns in the frame of reference were introduced by presenting Prabowo Subianto in his complete military outfit and a red beret. He was standing in a robust posture while holding his stick of command
	M3	**Associative context 3**: "*Yang penting sama-sama Baret Merah*" means "the important thing is that they are in Red Berets'. Second pun in the form

			of a frame of reference was introduced by presenting the quip, which affirms the resemblance in both pictures. They are both wearing red berets. However, they were presenting different facial expressions and gestures; Joko Widodo was presented with his silly facial expressions, as for the other party, Prabowo Subianto was presented in his bold and robust posture

Table 3. Analysis of the "Red Berets" Memes

Table 3 is an example of the analysis process to get the potential meaning of the memes. Creators of the memes potentially insult Jokowi by comparing him to Prabowo and showing that they are in favor of Prabowo without abusive text with puns. The first pun compares the representation of Joko Widodo against Prabowo Subianto. Second Pun is the line that quips Joko Widodo's as a lesser match the excellent physical representation of Prabowo Subianto. The comparisons are made hyperbolically, where one party is presented as polished, while the other party is presented in a very gloomy appearance to highlight the distinctive contrast and ridicule. This meme takes its stance in opposition to Jokowi. This analysis process was undertaken for all sample of memes that had been selected in the data collection.

Figure 4. The General and Jokowi Memes

Some memes also featured non-abusive or sarcastic texts. Non-abusive words, such as: '*apaan ini?*' (What is this?) could be insulting when they are placed on certain memes. For example, the memes with the question 'what is this?' (See Figure 4) are used to question the credibility of the intended persons in the text, which could be disrespectful to them. Even positive words like '*Jendral Besar*' (The Great General) on an image with a quipping context or positive words such as '*yang penting baret merah'* (they are both in the red berets[†††]) could be contextually insulting words. It potentially conveys a meaning that Jokowi is intending to imitate an elite military, Red Beret, as has been successfully portrayed by Prabowo.

The 'red beret' issue is related to the militaristic tradition of Indonesian national leaders. Since their independence, seven presidents have led Indonesia, Soekarno, Soeharto, B. J. Habibie, Abdurahman Wahid (Gus Dur), Megawati, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), and Joko Widodo

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[†††] Red Baret is popular as the special forces corps uniform in the Indonesia military forces.

(Jokowi). For fifty-three years (1945-1998), Indonesia was under authoritarian and militaristic presidents, Soekarno and Soeharto‡‡‡. Soekarno was not military personnel, but his outfits in public made him look like one. On the other hand, Soeharto was an army general who reigned in Indonesia for thirty-two years. Six years after the fall of Soeharto's regime, SBY, another army general, took the Indonesian presidency. SBY's administration lasted ten years after winning a direct and democratic Indonesian presidential election. For sixty-three years out of the entire seventy-six years of Indonesian independence, Indonesian presidents with military backgrounds had led the Indonesian society. There were always military figures for the presidential or vice-presidential candidates in almost every Indonesian election after the Reformation era§§§. There is a limited number of studies to this date focusing on why Indonesian society still has preference for leaders with military backgrounds****. Irawanto et al.'s (2011) and Vickers's (2005) studies mentioned "stability" and "instability" when discussing this issue. However, in the 2014 and 2019 elections, a military figure (Prabowo) had to concede his defeat to a humble civilian, Jokowi, in the direct and democratic Indonesian presidential election.

According to the analysis, some internet memes can be categorised as vulgar and abusive†††† due to the use of animals as comparison, or harsh and insulting texts, such as '*actor dibalik kehancuran KNRI'* (the actor behind the fall of the Republic of Indonesia) or the usage of '*planga-plongo'* words on an image. In Indonesian culture, certain animals are often used as swearing words, such as '*anjing*' (dog), '*babi*' (pig), or '*monyet*' (monkey). From the Indonesian perspective, society sees these swear words as disrespectful, vulgar, and even offensive. Based on its usage of abusive signs, 'Jokowi *planga-plongo*' internet memes are divided into two categories: memes with abusive signs and memes with non-abusive signs (See Figure 5). An abusive sign meme contains harsh words representing insults, taunts, negative adjectives, or images with vulgar negative connotations.

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‡‡‡Soekarno and Soeharto became Indonesian presidents after winning the vote in undemocratic presidential elections.

§§§There were Generals, Wiranto, Agum Gumelar, and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in the 2004 election; In the election of 2009, there were Generals, Wiranto, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, and Lieutenant General Prabowo Subianto; In the 2014 and 2019 elections, there was Lieutenant General Prabowo Subianto.

****The statement still holds its relevance, even though a civilian currently leads Indonesia (see Chin, 2021).

†††† The abuse in jokes and humor is refer to Oring (2008). It is a humour that comes across as assaults to defend their interest.

Meanwhile, a non-abusive sign meme is a meme that does not contain harsh words, insults, ridicule, or images with no negative connotations, but when used in one frame of memes, it can carry an insulting or offensive meaning.

Non-abusive memes   Abusive memes

Figure 5. Memes with abusive-non-abusive sign categorisation

Both abusive and non-abusive sign memes are mockeries of President Jokowi, which do not always contain abusive signs (see figure 6). It refers to the structure of the mode of sign in memes. Insulting memes do not always contain abusive signs because the meaning of the abusive memes can emerge from their structure. It is constructed by combining certain signs and the discourse is built later. This finding relates to Leeuwen's argument, depicting that the sign's meaning is not fixed but according to the context (Leeuwen, 2004). The context can also be presented as a structure of comparing, matching, modifying or utilising freezing motion. When the comparison and matching can be built by the logic of humour, which combines two associative contexts into one frame of memes, thus, it is related to the Bisociation theory (Koestler, 1964). For instance, Jokowi's photo matches a sculpture (Figure 6). Both figures are entirely unrelated; however, in

specific contexts, they are bound into a single message that is simultaneously interpreted. The first figure is an unfinished statue of Wisnu Kencana in Bali, which matches the photo of President Jokowi taken when he was making funny expression (freezing motion).
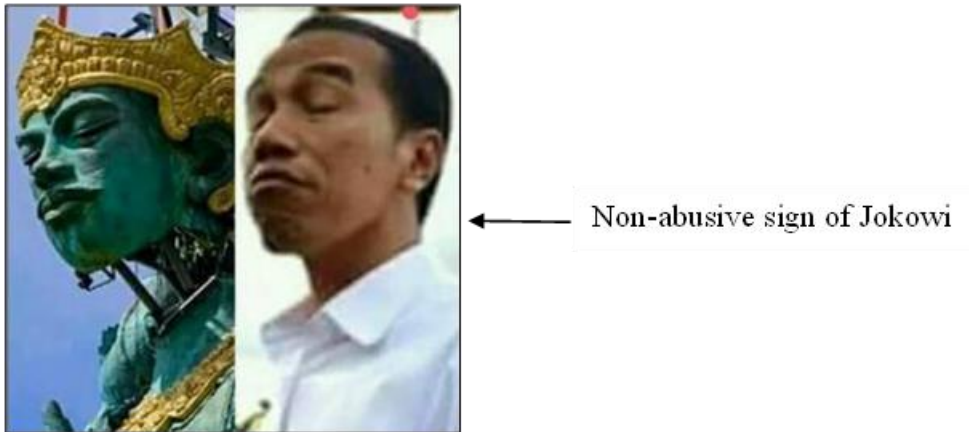

Figure 6. Non-abusive Sign on an Insulting Meme

We argue that the mockery of the president with abusive and non-abusive memes has become a common political expression that challenges the quality of Indonesian democracy. Triputra and Sugita (2016) argue that political internet memes have become cultural jamming that defaces the political issue. It distracts the discourse with the defacing symbol. Memes articulate symbols and discourse into the political discussion with incoherent and paradoxical language. However, democracy should facilitate all these discussions. Lorenz-Spreen et al. (2022) argue that hate speech has decreased the quality of democracy. The mockeries with internet memes potentially exacerbate the quality of Indonesian democracy. The mockery memes legitimize the stance and strengthen the supporter's fanatism toward their political leader. The meme of 'Jokowi *planga-plongo*' established the opposition group with hate speech without criticism. It contributes to the polarization in Indonesian societies.

Conclusion

This article examines the 'Jokowi *planga-plongo'* internet memes that mocked and insulted the President. The rough insulting and mockery urged the government to create a law against insulting the President. The insult can be in the form of abusive or non-abusive texts. Non-abusive memes

are built with the combination of certain signs, and then the discourse is built later. The insult emerges from a structure without harsh and abusive words. These messages are sent through memes that insult by comparing, matching, modifying, and also the utilisation of freezing motion in a specific context that connotes insults. People could interpret the insult through the story's context without harsh and abusive words and this is against the law.

Internet memes have become a popular means of political expression in Indonesia. However, internet memes are considered a problem for the Indonesian government and democracy, escalating the polarization after the massive protest in 2016 (Afrimadona, 2021; Duile & Tamma, 2021). We found abusive memes that were not coherent with the Indonesian culture. It is considered a taboo to insult leaders and the elite (Sudarmo, 2004). According to the new draft of the Criminal Code, abusive memes can potentially be categorized as insulting. This prohibition could aggravate Indonesia's democracy and freedom of speech and result in the decline of the democracy index as occurred during Jokowi's presidency. However, we found that non-violent memes outnumbered violent memes. This finding indicates that Indonesia's democracy is still doing well. It could be an alternative perspective to Power's (2018) argument that Indonesian democracy has declined. The Indonesian citizens still have the freedom of expression, even in the form of abusive content.

We found that the non-abusive memes were higher in numbers than abusive memes. It could be an attempt to avoid getting into trouble with the enforcement of the EIT law. People cannot be accused of hate speech and insinuation against the President by spreading non-abusive text. The law should regulate the interpretation of insinuations against the President more comprehensively. Internet memes could be a medium to share political expressions that escapes the law. Internet memes allow citizens to express their political views or even political messages that are considered offensive, insulting, and disdaining the President, the national symbol. Even though not directly specified in the Indonesian national constitution, insults toward the President can be considered an act of defamation. However, the usage of non-abusive signs conceals it. Thus, the interpretation of abusive memes can be interpreted based on their contextual meanings. However, memes utilisation in this context is inappropriate since they do not convey any substantial message and

are considered trivial.

Furthermore, we found the non-abusive memes were politically charged, like abusive memes, and its presentation can be a means of political expression and sublimate criticisms. The characteristic of memes that concealed the abusive content was employed on the illogical, exaggerated, and incoherent content articulation mechanisms. The discourse was developed by connecting it to another discourse in unrelated discourses. The meme creator's creativity bound these incoherent issues into a rational context in a specific logic. This data supports Way's argument (Way, 2021, p. 96) that a meme's discourse (content) can mutate with a random but interlinking patterns in logical and remixing cultures. The idea spread by a meme can be used to attack candidates based on an irrelevant discourse. Thus, the collective wisdom of Indonesian society ties together that specific remixed meme.

This study has its limitations since it is only a single case. Thus, future researchers may want to study multiple cases or internet meme forms in multimode, such as visual, audio, and video. Hopefully, this study contributes to the researcher's efforts to delve into internet memes utilisation in the context of political discussion in Indonesia and be an additional resource for the global society regarding Indonesia's democracy.

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