

Political Information Seeking of The First-time Voters in Local Politics Contestation

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Abstract - Political knowledge obtained from political information seeking activities is the prominent factor needed by the participants before they are engaged in political choice. This has especially prevailed in a country that adheres democracy system from central to local government. This study aimed at describing information seeking behavior among first-time voters during the process of local politics contestation. The research design used in this study was descriptive qualitative that involved nine first-time voters as the source of data in the direct depth-interview. The findings showed that the first-time voters' action on political information seeking tended to be passive in which the main source of political information was from their family while the local media was the additional source that encouraged political talks in a family. Therefore, the received content information was the background of the local leader candidate.

Keywords - Behavior, Information Seeking, Local Leaders Election, The First-time Voters.

I. INTRODUCTION

The first-time voter segment plays strategic roles in a country which adheres democracy as its form of government, especially for Indonesia where direct democracy is organized from national to local level. This role is due to the high number of first-time voters. Moreover, it is followed by a growing number of first-time voters which later on will affect the polls. Central Bengkulu Regency is one of the regencies with a high number of first-time voters.

Central Bengkulu Regency has the highest number of first-time voters in Bengkulu Province. It can be seen from two previous elections held in Bengkulu. On the election of the district head in 2017, this region had 2.730 voters where 3.40 % of the voters were first-time voters. The percentage increased compared to the previous election of the governor of Bengkulu Province, where there was only 3.08% first-time voter. Furthermore, this percentage was higher compared to the national percentage of first-time voters on

the simultaneous regional election in 2017, which was 2.99%.

Even so, the role of first-time voters in enacting their political right is not done maximally yet in democracy context. Several research findings reveal that political decision of first-time voters are uncertain and can be easily affected by other (Afnaniyati, 2012; Sulthan, 2017). Further, Nur, Ahmad, & Muhammad (2015) find first-time voters' decisions are not basically based on their knowledge and independence in democracy.

Political participation of first-time voters was determined by their political knowledge and perception which are gained through political information seeking (Resnick & Casale, 2014). In addition, Bhakti (2014) argues to create a high political participation of first-time voters they need a good access to political information. Moreover, Singh & Roy (2018) claims passive individuals tend to vote in the election by force, not their political preference. Thus, political information seeking and supportive social environment are needed (Vossing & Weber, 2017). This

situation indicates the importance of conducting political information seeking for first-time voters.

Based on the explanations above, the purpose of this article is to elaborate political behavior of first-time voters in seeking political information in the local political context. This problem is interesting to discuss due to the increasing number of first-time voters and the availability mass-media as tools to disseminate political information. In addition, local political contestation is fascinating to be explored since it occurs in the social environment that is close to the voters. So, this article is expected to expand insights on political information seeking among first-time voters.

Literature Review

Political Information Seeking

The main concept used as the reference of this current article is the concept of *Information Seeking* by Wilson (2000). The concept argues that information seeking is a kind of human behavior related to information sources, active and passive behavior, and information use. More specifically, Reid (1988) claims information seeking is done by voters by investigating several information sources. Specifically, this article investigates the process of information seeking carried out by the first-time voters in local political contestation.

Several previous research studies have already discussed the political information seeking by first-time voters. Winchester, Binney & Hall (2014) find that first-time voters tend to be passive in political information seeking. They generally rely on informal sources, such as parents, teachers, and peers, as the main information sources. Additionally, Limia & Fuady (2016) opine television is an information source for first-time voters, while in interpersonal communication they depend on their family as the information source. Youth segment realizes that they depend on family, peers, teachers, news channels, newspapers, comedy show, social media, and community meeting as information sources, which is categorized as passive information seeking behavior (Smith & MCMenemy, 2017). As the result of this passive behavior, first-time voters are very much influenced by mass-media (Kaid, McKinney & Tedesco, 2007).

The purpose of information seeking can be seen from the contents accessed. Limia & Fuady (2016) state there are several contents accessed by first-time voters: candidates profiles, work program, leadership, and ideology. Even though some previous research studies have explored information seeking behavior among first-time voters, but

they have not specifically discussed the context of the election. Thus, this study elaborates the information seeking behavior of first-time voters in the context of local political contestation of Central Bengkulu Regency of Bengkulu Province.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted under qualitative research meaning as the research that aims at exploring the social phenomena by describing the particular case in complex and comprehensively, reporting the informants' views in detail, and doing the factual investigation (Berg, 2009). Since the focus of the research is exploring information seeking behavior related to self-experience and the data needs to be explored deeper and more detail so that qualitative method was expected to describe the finding of research deeply.

The data was from the direct interview that involved the first-time voters in 15 – 30 minutes length for each informant. The data collection was conducted from April 02 to May 02, 2018. The informants were purposively selected which well-known as purposive sampling technique in which this study chose the informants based on specific criteria in order to answer the research question. Thus, it involved nine first-time voters as the informants which consisted of four males and five females with age 18 – 20 years old. Before conducting the interview, it had been ensured that the informants were ones who had participated in local leaders election, accessed local media and lived with their family.

After the data collection process finished, the findings could be classified by using the data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) consisting of data collection, data display, data reduction, and conclusion. The relevant data related to the formulation of the research problem was analyzed by information seeking behavior approach (Wilson, 2000).

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This article aims at exploring information seeking behavior of the first-time voters on the local political contestation. It deals with information seeking behavior and information sources used by the participants of this study. The results of the interview, it is found that first-time voters tend to be passive in information seeking and also they mostly use family members as the political information sources. Another fact is that first-time voters are easily influenced by political news on local mass-media. Unfortunately, the information received from their family members and local media directly becomes their political

preference in determining their decision without any further information selection process.

Information Seeking Behavior

Passive political information seeking behavior

Information seeking behavior suggested by Wilson (2000) refers to active or passive information seeking activity and information seeking goals. The results of the interview with the participants indicate passive behavior of first-time voters in information seeking related to local leader election in Central Bengkulu Regency. It can be seen from the following interview excerpts,

“Not really interested in looking for the information sometimes. Much information was got from my grandfather because he ever participated in politics. In contrast, we do not really like politics, it may be because we are still new in politics.”
(Interview, 7 April 2018).

“So, before the election, my parents will inform me about the candidates. I do not search for information by my self since I am not really interested in politics. (Interview, 16 April 2018)

Those statements indicate that first-time voters are really passive in political information seeking. This finding is in line with previous research findings that claim passive behavior of information seeking among first-time voters (Apospori et al., 2010; Winchester, Binney & Hall, 2014; Limia, 2016).

The finding is also supported by Smith & MCMenemy (2017) who argue that young voters are passive in political information seeking. Further, this article reveals that passive information seeking behavior among first-time voters is due to their disinterest in politics. This study also informs there is a correlation between political perception and political information seeking behavior (Smith and McMenemy, 2017).

Political Information Sources

Family as the main source

Information source is one of the indicators of the information seeking process (Wilson, 2000). For political information sources, Reid (1988) opines information sources can be any media in the voters' surroundings. The finding of this current research shows that family member is the main information source used by first-time voters during local leader election. It is shown by the following interview excerpts,

“In the family, the information I got was especially from my grandfather. Because I am close with him.”
(Informant A, 07 April 2018)

“Em.. knowing more information was from family and friends. I am many times informed by my parents I think.”
(Informant R, 07 April 2018)

“Political information of local leaders election of Banteng was usually got from my parent, usually got from father.”
(Informant Y, 25 April 2018).

This finding strengthens statement which says passive political information seekers are dependable to the information from their nearest social environment, especially their family (Winchester, Binney & Hall, 2014; Limia, 2016). Further, this research highlights the reason why first-time voters use family as a dependable political information source compare to other sources. Reliable and honest information becomes a strong reason for first-time voters to maintain the information from their parents, moreover, they have no interest in politics.

Political information from Local Television

The local television channel plays the crucial role in spreading the local politics information. The findings showed that political information conveyed by the local media RB TV (Rakyat Bengkulu Televisi) became additional politics information among the first-time voters, then encouraged political talks arose in a home. This is showed from following interview result:

“Usually, the information from RB TV was accessible in our region, it also had good timing when we had free time for watching TV.”
(Informant S, 20 April 2018)

“Talk about local leaders election, I was usually informed, another way was getting the information from local television RB TV.”
(Informant Y, 25 April 2018)

The findings were agreed with previous research that political information sources than the parent is a media, especially the television (Smith & MCMenemy, 2017; Limilia & Fuady, 2016). Political process displayed by local television such as candidate debate, political advertising,

and news that became political talks among the family of first-time voters. The access of media resulted in interpersonal political conversation stimulant (Lee, 2007).

The above explanation of political information through television can increase knowledge and self-confident to participate in political choice (Kaid, Mc, Kinney & Tedesco, 2007). This study gives deeper insight that was although exposed by the information content of local mass-media, in case of the decision in selecting, the first-time voters were still influenced by main information source that was family (Vossing & Welber, 2017).

Political Information Content

The credibility of the candidates

The last point discussed in this study explored the information content searched by first-time voters in local politics contestation. Based on the result of interview research, it was found that information content related to the candidate profile most often obtained by first-time voters were credibility and candidates' performance in their previous work. This is concluded from the interview:

"Yes, this is, it may be about the nominated candidates, who are they, how are they. How their work in society."

(Informant A, 07 April 2018)

"Usually it was the information of the candidates, how their personalities are. How about their track record, whether they had been involved in corruption or not, how about their previous work"

(Informant R, 07 April 2018)

The findings were in line with Limilia & Fuady's (2016) finding that candidate profile is the main point in seeking the political information. However, another information content like the political party as the bearer of offered work program is not detected. Even from the interview process, it was seen that first-time voters are not able to understand the work program proposed by the candidates on previous local political campaign. This indicated how weak political knowledge owned by first-time voters.

IV. CONCLUSION

Political information seeking is highly believed to encourage the first-time voters to engage themselves in politics. This is an important process since political activity

needs critical people to filter the political information as they have a chance to choose one candidate. In this case, first-time voters are expected to know the much political information in order to be more knowledgeable so that they can participate well in political activity. From this research, it can be concluded that the behavior of first-time voters in doing information seeking of local politics in local leaders election tend to be passive since they only rely on the information obtained from the interpersonal process in their social environment. And even, the information access they have is limited. This condition describes that political knowledge of first-time voters in local politic campaign tends to be limited so that the decision to choose of first-time voters tended to be influenced by a political business of a family, not political preference among the youth (Singh & Roy, 2018).

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