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From Presence to Popularity: Twitter Use by Members of the Indonesian House of Representatives (2014–2019) in Non-Electoral Setting

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Abstract - Social media has changed the way politicians communicate and interact with citizens, but research on Indonesian political use of social media in a non-electoral context is still limited. This study aims to fill the gap by examining how members of Indonesia's legislature (DPR) of the 2014-2019 period adopted and used Twitter (now X) to enhance their online presence, branding, and popularity during non-electoral context. By using political branding theory and the equalization-normalization debate, the study seeks to answer three questions: (1) who among DPR members adopted Twitter, (2) how they used its features for branding and communication, and (3) what factors explain their online popularity. Based on a dataset of 436 Twitter-registered politicians (78% of total 560 DPR members) supplemented by social network analysis, this study finds that online legislators are predominantly male (82%), middle-aged (mean = 51, SD = 9), and university educated. Branding is mostly limited to displaying a profile picture, with small percentage of showing position and party affiliation. Popularity is highly skewed. Education and party size are strong predictors of adoption, and frequency of twitting is an indication of popularity. While large parties like PDIP and Golkar have the most members online, smaller parties such as PKS and NasDem outperform them in proportional Twitter presence. The study gives a contribution to digital political communication scholarship by establishing a baseline of Twitter adoption among legislators in emerging democracy before the current era of online disinformation.

Keywords: Twitter adoption; online politicians; content analysis; political communication

Introduction

Social media platforms have increasingly come under scrutiny for their susceptibility to exploitation by irresponsible actors seeking short term gains, a trend observed globally and notably in Indonesia today. The proliferation of fake accounts, disinformation, malign bots, and deepfake content exemplifies the range of illicit activities occurring in the digital sphere (Wijayanto et al., 2024). But a few years back, social media and the internet in general were perceived as the technology of innovation that brought unprecedented positive change, particularly related to public affairs.

For instance, social media brought hope into politics where politicians use social media to communicate with constituents and the public directly disseminating ideas, activities, and personal interests without any gatekeeping control. Also, citizens can contact, comment on, and criticize politicians or their representatives directly anytime in an asynchronous way.

New ways of communicating between politicians, presidents, ministers, governors, and citizens emerge in an unprecedented volume and speed thanks to the enabling features of social media like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. This article analyzes who and how the Indonesian 2014–2019 House of Representative members adopted and used Twitter as their tool for communication for political branding and gaining popularity in non-electoral setting from the conceptual understanding of online political communication. Understanding social media adoption is important to make us understand better the current state of political manipulation online.

The innovation in communication technology that introduced the internet is deemed as a new hope for the revival of political communication as a connective tissue feeding democracy. The new media offers various platforms such as social network sites, microblogging, web 2.0, and so on which transform political communication into many levels, both online and offline. The presence of online political communication creates both vertical (from parties and politicians to the citizens), and horizontal communication (among elites, and among citizens alike), where citizens can freely act as the communicators with less effort and free of gatekeeping constraint (Iosifidis & Wheeler, 2018). Here, I define online political communication as a practice of political communication by using digital media platforms on the internet such as websites, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and others, during electoral and non-electoral periods, which creates faster and more interactive distribution of political information.

Social media, like Twitter, offers helpful features for politicians to implement their agenda and communicate with the public. However, despite the promising capability of social media platforms, the intent and motivation of politicians to adopt and use social media is still the key prerequisite to the full realization of its potential (Hoffmann et al., 2016). There are several factors why politicians may be motivated to use social media despite their convenience with conventional media like television and radio. Conventional media tend to be biased towards popular politicians and big parties for the sake of news values. In Indonesia, the concentration of media ownership is so high especially with the strong model of conglomeration, which tends to impair impartiality in their reporting (Masduki & D'Haenens, 2022).

For example, research found that Indonesian national newspapers with strong ties to political parties tend to cover extensively and favorably its party affiliation during election campaigns (Simarmata, 2017). Television outlets operate to serve their owners' political and economic interests rather than public interest resulted in manipulative narrative of content diversity (Souisa, 2020). And the high cost of communicating through conventional media during campaigns or on daily basis isolates less affluent Indonesian politicians.

Other motivating factors for politicians to use social media for their communication is the increasing adoption of the platforms by Indonesian citizens. In 2016, more than 51% of Indonesians have access to internet, with 97% of the total look for social media in terms of content demand. Next, the most frequently accessed social media platforms are Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, google+, and twitter (APJII, 2016), and in 2023 there were 77% of Indonesian who used internet with 60,4% are active social media users (www.wearesocial.com, 2023). Despite significant penetration and powerful influence of social media on political campaign and participatory democracy in Indonesia, many politicians still hesitated to embrace it for various reasons such as fear of smear campaign, dislike transparency, deficiency of time, and lack of skill (Simarmata, 2014).

However, some typical politicians are highly active in updating status on social media particularly twitter to communicate their activities to the public such as popular governors of Basuki Tjahaya Purnama, Ridwan Kamil, Ganjar Pranowo, some ministers, and highly popular members of the DPR. Despite extensive work on Indonesian social media during election periods (Ahmad, 2022; Lim, 2017; Rakhmani & Saraswati, 2021; Sinpeng & Tapsell, 2021), the adoption and use of Twitter by legislators in non-electoral context remains under-examined.

This study seeks to answer three research questions: *first*, who adopted Twitter among DPR members of 2014-2019? *Second*, how did they utilize its features for branding? And *third*, what factors

explain the most popular legislators? The remainder of the article will proceed with laying out the theoretical framework, research methodology, findings and discussion and then a conclusion.

Theoretical Framework

Political communication occurs in three interconnected layers: communications undertaken by political actors, by non-politicians, or about these actors and their activities as represented in news reports (McNair, 2017). Political communication has also gone through gradual changes, from the first phase where political parties dominate as the sources of political information to the second phase where limited access to television started to supply the information to society. And then to the third phase with massive utilization of television (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999), and now, we have the fourth phase with the advent of internet creating hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2017), where social media takes dominating role across democratic political systems.

The study of political communication deals with the investigation of how politics is communicated; the role played by language and symbols, the impact that political messages have on citizens, political leaders, and the larger political system (Perloff, 2014). This study focuses on the who and how politics is communicated by members of parliament to boost their popularity.

Social media has provided politicians with an opportunity to organize their direct communication with citizens because of the online communication infrastructures: the internet, web, and smartphones. They can communicate 24 hours per day to disseminate ideas, influence public agenda, and motivate constituents to support their policy proposal or political stance on various issues. Moreover, the online presence of politicians has viral effect on the online communication network, which gives an even wider effect for their strategic presence and interaction both with supporters and with other politicians alike. Social media also plays fundamental functions during campaigns in informing, involving, connecting, and mobilizing citizens (Foot & Schneider, 2006). Many politicians have also maximized these electoral seasons' activities during daily routines including President Joko Widodo with his well-known vlogging updates.

One potential of the strategic goals is building online presence through political branding. It becomes a constant effort for politicians running for the first time and seeking re-election, particularly in the era of eroding party identity. A brand is crafted around a product which, in politics, consists of the indivisible components of politicians, party and policies. In the online era, online branding refers to the way "online channels are used to support brands, which in essence are the sum of the characteristics of the product, service, or organization as perceived and experienced by a user, customer, or other stakeholder " (Rowley, 2009). Political branding relies on the belief that "political parties, candidates, and causes can be managed as products…and political marketing scholars increasingly agree that these political entities can be managed and studied as brands" (Milewicz & Milewicz, 2014). "A political brand comprises three components: firstly, the policy as the service offering; secondly, the politician as the tangible service offering and thirdly, the party as the brand offering." (O'Shaughnessy & Henneberg, 2007).

The second potential goal of twitter adoption is for communication and sharing information with the public. The strong correlation between social media characteristics of direct communication with the need for close relationships between politicians and people urges politicians to maximize the wide ranges of messages on their online communications from private matters, individual activities, to emotional contents (Russmann et al., 2024).

The final goal of online political communication strategy is to establish popularity. Popularity on social media is perceived to be electorally promising for winning an election following the basic algorithm of victory, that is widely known a politician is expected to be liked and then voted for (Abid et al., 2025; Ólafsson, 2023). Research reveals that "interactions with politicians on SNS increase the perceived likeability of candidates, and thus also trust in government" (Starke et al., 2020). This paper argues that when politicians adopt and use social media like twitter for their political communication during non-electoral periods, it is meant to be a strategy for achieving fundamental objectives of political branding, communicating, and then finally popularity

The study of social media-politics relations started slowly in Indonesia but has showed steady increase in interest for the last five years or so. Some relevant works are the study of the role of social media on political activism (Lim, 2023), the role of social media during 2014 election in Indonesia (Holmes & Sulistyanto, 2016), and how social media use caused post-truth and tribal nationalism during

local election (Lim, 2017), as well as disinformation (Saraswati, 2021). These studies mainly focused on electoral-related events. There has been rare research on the adoption of new technology by Indonesian politicians.

Therefore, the objectives of this study are, *firstly*, to identify members of the DPR who adopted twitter as their communication channel-based age, gender, education, party affiliation, and electoral district. *Secondly*, to analyze the factors influencing twitter adoption itself. *Thirdly*, to analyze the uses of twitter's features for political branding. *Fourthly*, to analyze the volume of online communication made by the members of DPR during the selected timeframe. *Fifthly*, to analyze how the adoption and use of twitter influences online politicians' popularity.

This article argues that Indonesian DPR members use Twitter as a tool for their political communication to communicate, brand, and engage with citizens which then determine their popularity among Twitter audience. This study contributes to digital political communication literature through the revelation of how Indonesian House of Representatives members (DPR) 2014–2019 employed Twitter in building political communication, personal brands, and popularity outside the election period within the framework of an emerging democracy. It also highlights the gap between phenomenal social media potential and limited strategic adoption by most Indonesian political elites, who remain largely reluctant to engage in active, transparent, and structured digital politics.

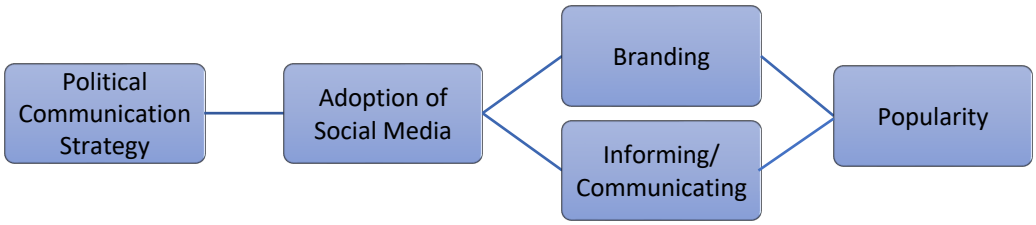


Figure 1. Theoretical framework
(Source: summary of literature)

Material and Methodology

This research employed a quantitative approach (content analysis) combined with social network analysis to examine online political communication of Indonesian politicians. The study is grounded in the paradigm of digital political communication, with a focus on the relational dynamics within social media platforms, particularly Twitter. To collect data from politicians' Twitter accounts, a content analysis protocol was operationalized. This protocol also facilitated the collection of offline supplementary data (documents), which were recorded in a separate section of the coding sheet. The document studied is taken from various websites (www.dpr.go.id, WikiDPR, and party's website) to supply the missing demographic and political data of the DPR members which are not all provided on their twitter accounts. The content analysis's coding process was conducted by two trained research assistants who received sufficient instruction in applying the coding protocol prior to the actual data collection phase (Holsti's method results between 0.7 to 1.00).

A social network analysis was conducted using the NodeXL program. SNA is a comprehensive strategy for investigating social structures (Otte & Rousseau, 2002), emphasizing relational data within a networked system. In this study, the system under investigation is the online political communication network of Indonesian politicians on Twitter. The unit of analysis is the Twitter account of members of the People's Representative Council (DPR) from the 2014–2019 period.

Data collection followed three sequential steps: *First*, identification of DPR members via www.dpr.go.id, recording variables such as name, gender, age, education, party affiliation, and electoral district. *Second*, Twitter account retrieval using the name list, searching through the DPR website, WikiDPR (an online-based pressure group), and Twitter's search bar. *Third*, offline data collection to complement online data, sourced from the Election Commission (KPU) and DPR websites. This process yielded data on 560 DPR members, of which 436 had Twitter accounts or were at least associated with one. All accounts were cross validated to ensure authenticity. The coding process commenced on 1

November 2016 and concluded on 31 March 2017. Any changes to Twitter accounts beyond this period were excluded from the study.

The following variables were observed and coded: Identities means gender, age, education, party affiliation, electoral district, and duration of Twitter use (in years); Use for branding means features used for self-promotion, such as biography, personal website, party position, header image, and profile picture. These were coded based on presence; Use for communicating/informing measured by the total number of tweets and retweets, indicating the intent to disseminate political or non-political information; Responding is assessed through the "like" feature, used as an indicator of political responsiveness; Popularity is measured by the number of followers as displayed on each Twitter account by the time of data collection.

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, resulting in frequency distributions across the measured variables. The analysis focused on the characteristics of politicians (gender, age, education, party affiliation, and electoral district), their adoption of Twitter, branding activities, and communication practices.

Results and Discussion

Characteristics of Politicians: Gender, Age, and Education

From 560 members of DPR 436 of them have their registered accounts on twitter (78%). This measure is drawn from simple calculation of presence or absence category of the names of the DPR politicians on twitter. Therefore, it did not calculate the activeness or passiveness of the politicians, for instance by calculating the proportion of tweets relative to their timespan on twitter. These findings show the very basic nature of adoption of twitter by the members of DPR which is by creating a twitter account. In terms of gender, male politicians (82%) extremely outnumber female politicians (18%) and it is echoed on twitter as well. Out of 436 having twitter accounts, 357 of them are male, and 79 females.

The finding also shows that highest usage of Twitter is among middle-aged users. They are those belonging to the 46–55-year age group who constitute the largest number of adopters. This trend follows to the 56–65 and 36–46 age groups. In contrast, young users (26–35) and elderly users (66–75) utilize Twitter at very low adoption levels. These findings suggest that Twitter is used primarily by middle-aged adults, with younger people possibly using alternative types of social media, and older adults possibly being less engaged overall with digital tools.

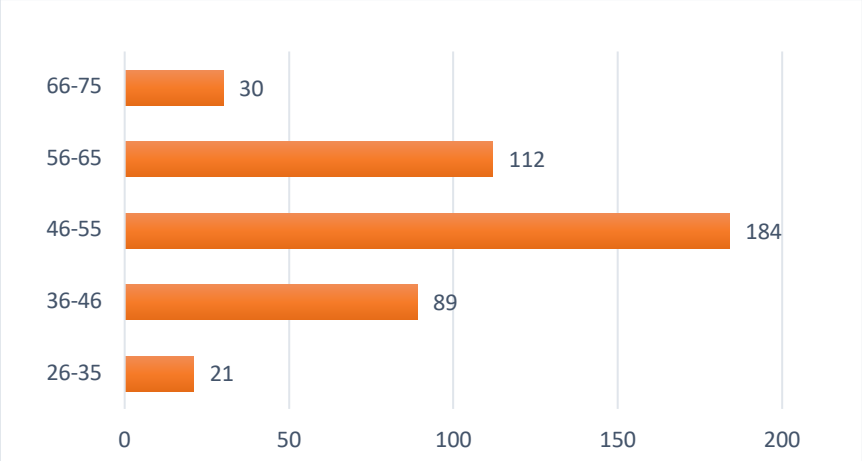


Figure 2. Distribution of age
(Source: Twitter data analysis, 2018; N=436)

By 2018, the youngest member of DPR on twitter is 29 years old, and the oldest 79 (M=51; SD=9). The dominant age is 46-55 years old which amounts to 184 (42%). The others consist of 112 aged 56-65 years old, 89 aged 36-46, 21 aged 26-35, and 30 aged 66-75 (Figure 2). Furthermore, the histogram (see Figure 2) displays the distribution of years of schooling among 436 individuals. The data is approximately normally distributed, centered around a mean of 17.22 years with a standard deviation of 2.18. This indicates that most individuals in the sample have attained education levels

roughly equivalent to a bachelor's degree or higher. The majority fall within the 15–19 years of schooling range, with fewer individuals at the lower (10–13 years) and higher (21–23 years) ends.

This suggests a relatively well-educated sample population, likely composed of university-educated individuals. The majority level of education (Figure 3) obtained by DPR politicians on twitter is master's degree (44%). The variable of level of education consists of are measured in years of schooling: senior high school (SMA), bachelor (S1), master (S2), and doctoral degree (S3). The rest of the education level is bachelor (40%), doctoral (9%), and some levels of senior high school (6%).

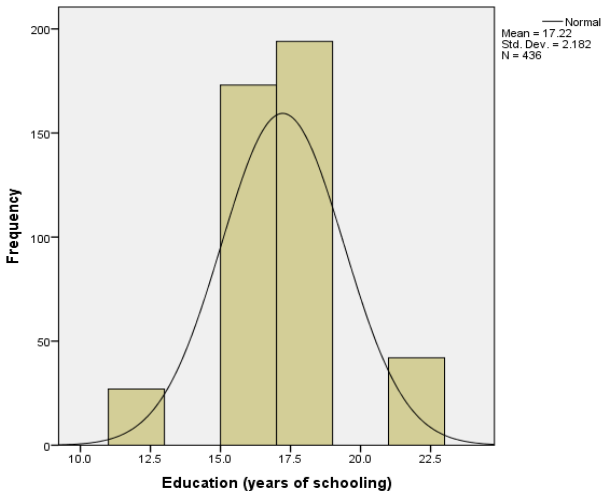


Figure 3. Distribution of Education
(Source: Twitter data analysis, 2018)

Party Affiliation

Based on party affiliation, the number of members sitting at the parliament are parallel with the number of its members on twitter by the measure of having a twitter account. As shown in Figure 3, PDIP has the highest members on twitter as ranked the first on the list at the Council in terms of total seat or electoral votes. A similar pattern goes consistently down until the smallest party of Hanura. However, if the party's presence on twitter is measured by the percentage of member representation of each party on twitter, the results show different parties' positions, meaning parties with most seats at the parliament do not have the highest percentage of twitter presence.

Twitter presence is based on the number of party's members on twitter relative to its total members at the parliament. As the Table 1 below shows, PKS absolutely dominates the percentage of twitter presence based on their total members at the Council resulting in 100% online presence, followed by NasDem (86%) and Hanura (88%). Contrarily, major parties only have 72% of PDIP, 77% of Golkar, and 75% of Gerindra online representation on twitter respectively.

Table 1. Parties' Twitter Presence and Digitization index (N=436)

No	Party	Total Members of the Council	Total Members on Twitter	% of twitter presence	Digitization index (ratio of online-to-offline representation)
1	Hanura	16	14	88%	1.12
2	PPP	39	24	62%	0.79
3	NasDem	35	30	86%	1.10
4	PKB	47	38	81%	1.04
5	PAN	49	38	78%	1.00
6	PKS	40	40	100%	1.28
7	Demokrat	61	48	79%	1.01
8	Gerindra	73	55	75%	0.97

9	Golkar	91	70	77%	0.99
10	PDIP	109	79	72%	0.93
	Total	**560**	**436**	**78%**	

(Source: Multiple sources collected by author)

While there is a general equivalence between electoral strength (votes/seats) and Twitter activity among major parties (PDIP, Golkar, Gerindra), other parties like PKB and PPP are underrepresented on Twitter relative to their electoral performance. This suggests that social media activity is not directly equivalent to political strength. Also, some parties may underutilize digital media as a tool of political communication and outreach. Figure 4 below shows the graphical relationship between party total votes or number of seats and presence on twitter. Despite its highest votes in 2014, PDIP does not take all its DPR members into Twitter, whereas it is totally different from PKS party.

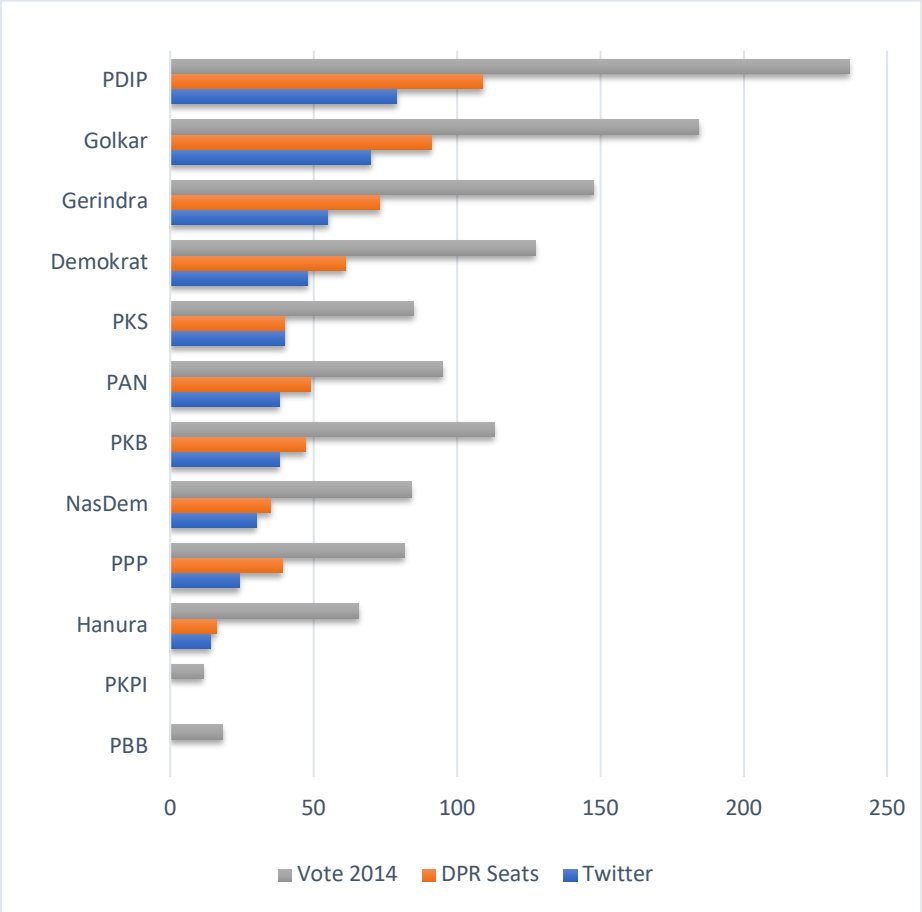


Figure 4. Members of DPR by Parties and Electoral Votes
(Source: Multiple sources collected by author, 2018; N=436)

Electoral District

Electoral district is the region or province that members of DPR represent at the parliament. It could be a single province, but also divisions of a province. In this analysis, all the district categories are subsumed under the name of provinces for simplicity. The finding shows that there is a good correlation between provinces along with their popular votes and the number of members of DPR on twitter from the provinces. The graph explains that these online members of DPR come from three dominant provinces in Java, namely West Java, Central Java, and East Java. These are also the center of voters' distribution for national elections. Other striking provinces outside of Java in terms of number of online representatives are North Sumatera, South Sulawesi, Lampung, and South Sumatera.

Furthermore, the provinces with high number of representatives at the parliament as shown above are also regions which have the highest internet penetration over recent years. The table below shows

that Java, Sumatera, and Sulawesi are three islands with the highest internet penetration. Java Island is still dominant at 65% in total of national internet users in Indonesia. There is a strong correlation between the number of voters, internet penetration, and online politicians on twitter in the context of electoral district. However, the main reason as to why members of DPR use twitter cannot give us deeper insight from the figures. Twitter is a world-wide online media in terms of access, whereas members of DPR only need to have direct contact with their district-level constituents.

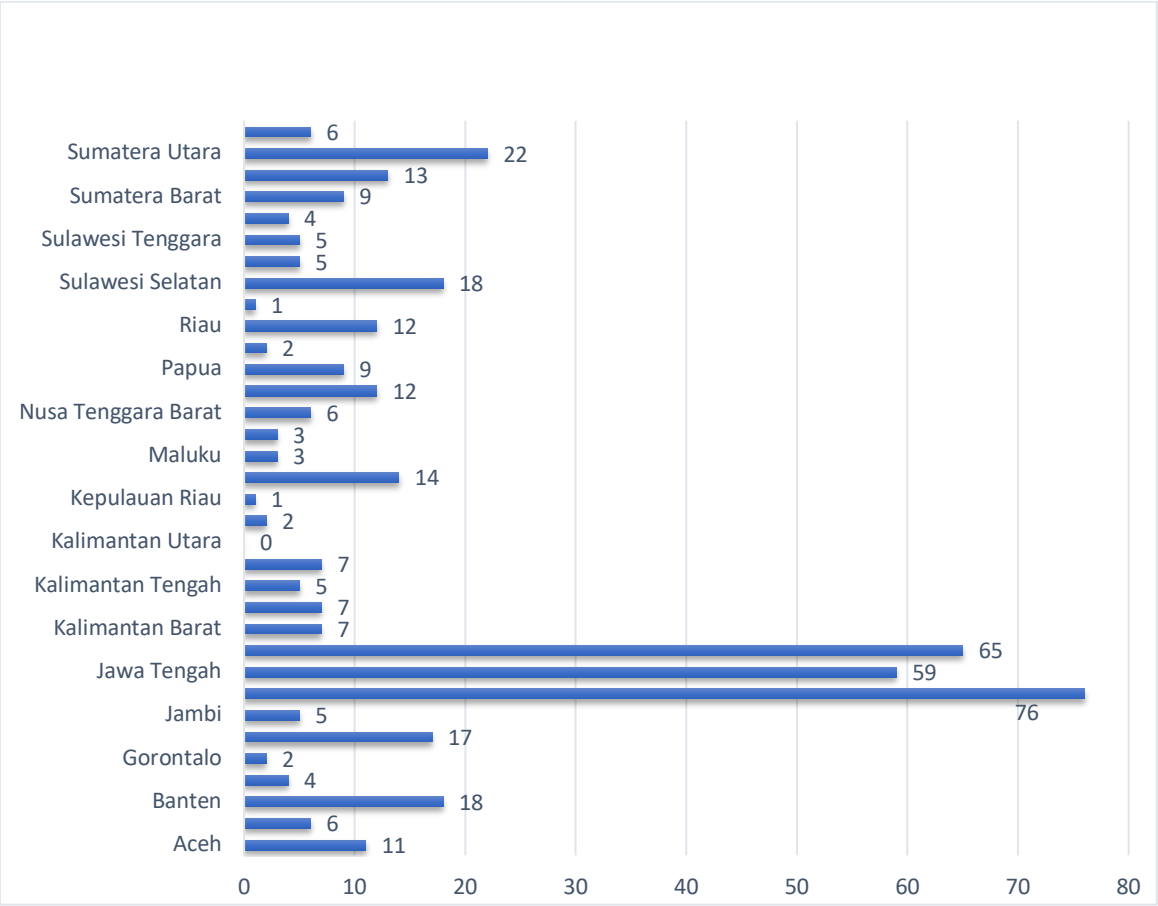


Figure 5. Tweeting DPR by Provinces/Electoral Districts
(Source: Multiple sources collected by author, 2018; N=436)

For Personal Branding Purposes

The length of time that politicians have on twitter certainly could influence their online popularity and engagement. Number of tweets and followers normally could be predicted from the timespan that a politician has on twitter. The earlier politicians joined twitter the better it would be for their communication success. The current members of DPR (N=436) joined twitter differently, starting in 2009 where the second direct election was held. There was a significant number of politicians joining twitter in 2010 (68), but the trend went down consistently until 2012 with 34 newcomers to twitter. The peak was a year before 2014, when outstanding number of politicians joined twitter in 2013 with 179 in total.

The adoption of twitter by members of DPR is heavily influenced by the proceeding election session as seen during 2013 before the election in 2014.

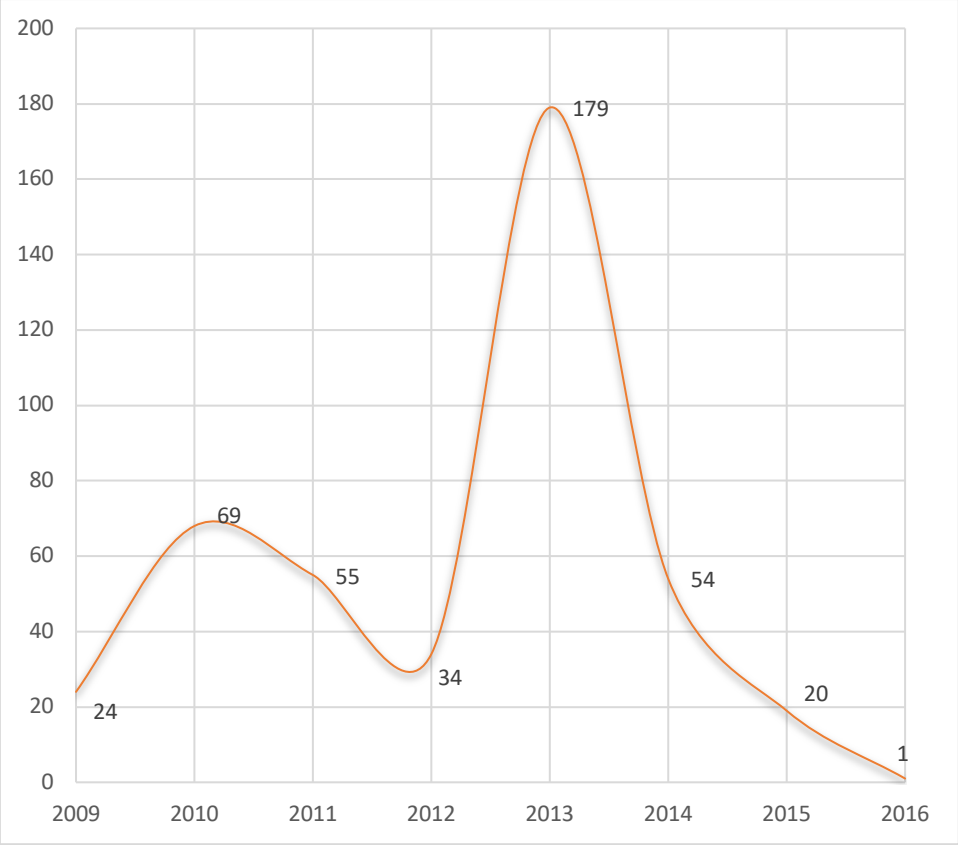


Figure 6. Start of Adoption
(Source: Twitter data analysis, 2018; N = 436)

Education seems to be a dominant factor in adoption. It might be because of the sufficient knowledge that educated politicians have on social media. It gives them confidence to adopt and use it for their best interest. The perceived usefulness and the perceived ease of use play considerable roles. In the meantime, the bigger the party the higher number members it has on twitter and the wider electoral votes won nationwide. If the party is popular, there is a chance that people on twitter will follow its members.

The use of twitter by DPR politicians is seen in their communication and efforts to brand themselves on twitter. Following the American Marketing Association that defines a brand as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of these, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors", Kotler emphasizes that a brand identifies the seller or maker which means a brand is essentially a seller's promise to deliver a specific set of features, benefits, and services consistently to the buyers (Kotler, 2000), or voters in political context.

So, branding is aimed at framing and depicting candidates, parties, and its programs in such a compelling way to persuade citizens. This goal is achieved through various strategic communication tools such as advertisement, press release, news coverage, and so on. One benefit of adopting twitter by politicians is having brand building tools in a considerably low-cost budget. Several twitter features that politicians can exploit are writing personal biography, position and party affiliation, uploading attractive header, uploading appealing profile picture, and revealing personal website on it.

Table 2. Branding Activities

No	Elements of branding	Use		Total
		Yes	No	
1	Providing biography on Twitter	281	133	414
2	Informing personal website	204	213	417

3	Showing position in party	200	231	431
4	Designing personal header	211	200	411
5	Creating personal profile picture	408	14	422

(Source: Twitter data analysis, 2018)

Communicating and Informing

Like other public communication initiated by politicians, online communication of politicians is mainly aimed at disseminating ideas and activities to inform followers, public at large, and journalists. Twitter-based political communication of politicians in this study is measured by the volume and topic of the communication. The volume of communication is generated by adding up the number of tweets of all politicians from the same political parties to result in a party-volume index. The total tweets of all politicians out of 10 political parties are 991.265. Given the bigger number of its members on twitter, PDIP has the highest volume of communication on twitter with 31% of share. Golkar party (13%) and Gerindra (11%) come second and third respectively. Strikingly, PKS stands in the second position with 19% of share of tweets.

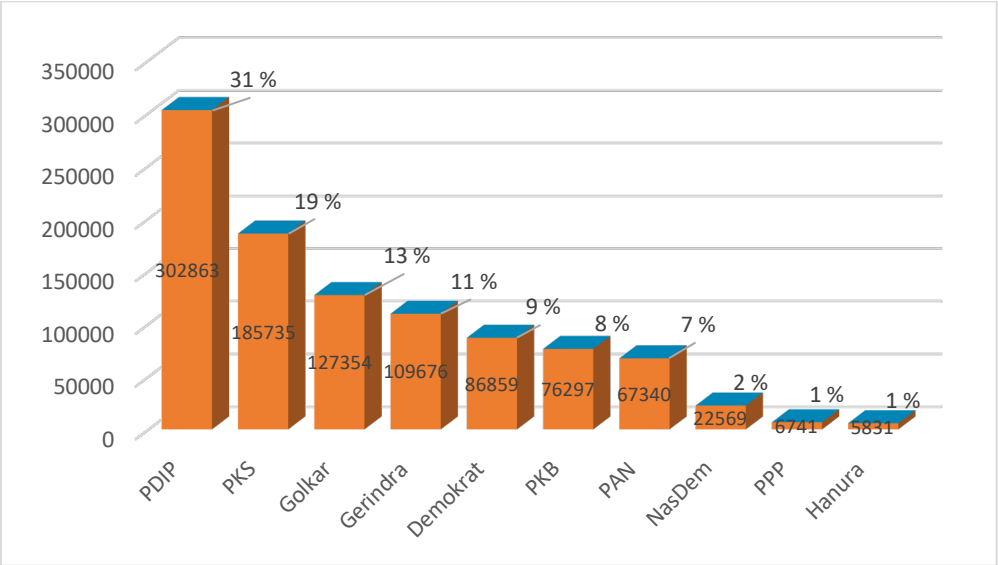


Figure 7. Total number of Tweets
(Source: Twitter data analysis, 2018; N=991.265)

The table below shows that the most active politician (Budiman Sudjatmiko) on twitter is not the most followed one (previous table), and the parties are more evenly represented here. The total number of members of DPR is 560, and 436 of them own twitter accounts. The total number of them (vertices) have been replying or mentioning others is 270. The overall edges are 8249 comprising of unique edges (559) and edges with duplicates (7689). The self-loop vertices are excluded. The graph density is 0.031. The influencer is Fadli Zon with betweenness centrality 4983.14.

Table 3. Most active politicians

No	Politician	Party	No. of Tweets
1	Budiman Sudjatmiko	PDIP	150000
2	Fahri Hamzah	PKS	52800
3	Dede Y. Macan Effendi	Demokrat	35200

4	Rahayu S. Djojohadikusumo	Gerindra	29300
5	Meutya Hafid	Golkar	24400
6	Teguh Juwarno	PAN	20200
7	Maman Imanul Haq	PKB	15300
8	Akbar Faizal	Nasdem	8954
9	Moh. Arief S Suditomo	Hanura	3405
10	Irna Narulita	PPP	1852

(Source: Twitter data analysis, 2018)

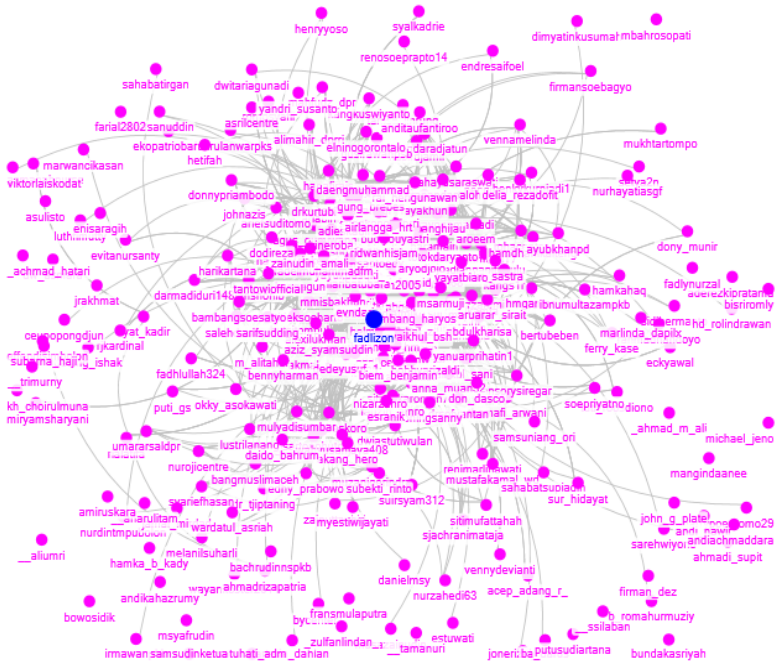


Figure 8. The top Influencer
(Source: Twitter data analysis, 2018)

Politicians' active communication on twitter gives them popularity. Popularity is something that every politician strives for. It is perceived as a strong factor for electability. On twitter, the popularity can be measured by the total number of followers that politicians have. In this analysis the followers-based popularity is aggregated to form some kind of party-popularity index. It simply means that the popularity of all politicians from a single party on twitter shapes the party's popularity.

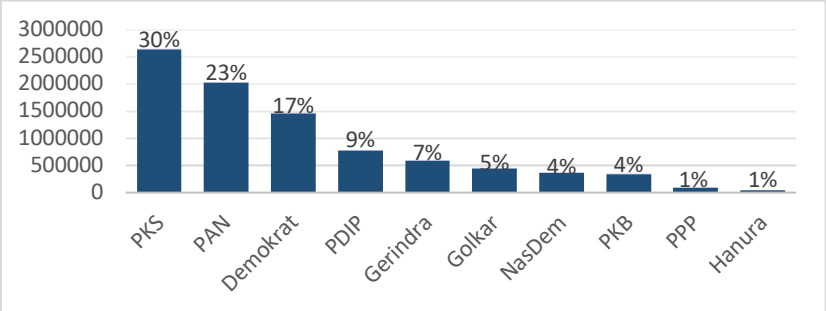


Figure 9. Distribution of Followers by Parties
(Source: Twitter data analysis, 2018; N=8.860.254)

Descriptive analysis shows that there are still politicians who do not have followers at all since the first created account on twitter. So, the lowest number of followers is 0. Contrarily, the highest number of politicians' twitter followers is 1270000. The distribution is skewed, where there are many politicians with so little followers, whereas there are few politicians with extremely huge number of followers (M=20321.69; SD= 106287.088).

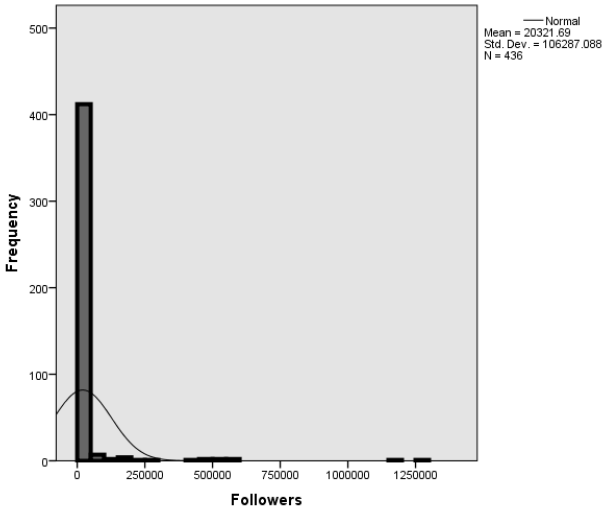


Figure 10. Distribution of followers
(Source: Twitter data analysis, 2018)

Furthermore, the graph illustrates that PKS stands as the most popular party on twitter based on cumulative number of followers, regardless of being the second tier of the party-size hierarchy. On the other hand, as the largest party, PDIP only stands in fourth position, owning 9% total followers of all followers combined.

Table 4. Most Popular Politicians

No	Name	Party	Followers
1	Anang Hermansyah	PAN	1270000
2	Tifatul Sembiring	PKS	1160000
3	Budiman Sudjatmiko	PDIP	563000
4	Edhie Baskoro Yudhoyono	Demokrat	551000
5	Ruhut Poltak Sitompul	Demokrat	546000
6	Hidayat Nur Wahid	PKS	544000
7	Fadli Zon	Gerindra	470000
8	Taufik Kurniawan	PAN	450000
9	Fahri Hamzah	PKS	412000
10	Dede Yusuf Macan Effendi	Demokrat	276000
11	Prananda Surya Paloh	NasDem	205000
12	Meutya Hafid	Golkar	188000
13	Zulkifli Hasan	PAN	172000
14	Mahfudz Siddiq	PKS	168000
15	Akbar Faizal	Nasdem	140000

(Source: Twitter data analysis, 2018)

From the table we see that the most popular member of DPR is a politician with celebrity background (musician) and then followed by PKS member. Furthermore, out of 15 most followed politicians, 4 of them are PKS politicians, whereas some parties are not represented at all at the ranks.

The findings of this study emphasize that Twitter adoption among Indonesian legislators (DPR) is large but mostly superficial. With 78% of DPR members owning a Twitter account, the platform can be an indication of presence although does not reflect active or strategic engagement of its operation. Male politicians dominate both offline and online representation, with female politicians forming only 18% of Twitter users.

This mirrors their underrepresentation in parliament. Similarly, Twitter use is most common among politicians aged 46–55 and those with master's degrees, suggesting that both age and education may play a role in digital adoption and confidence. This correlation is also evident geographically, as provinces with higher internet penetration and electoral weight (especially Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi) are the main contributors of Twitter-active representatives. Interestingly, while party size in parliament corresponds with the number of Twitter accounts, it does not necessarily align with the percentage of members online, where smaller parties like PKS and NasDem outperform larger ones in proportional Twitter presence.

Beyond mere presence, Twitter is increasingly used by politicians for self-branding and strategic communication. The surge of account creation around election years, particularly in 2013 before the 2014 elections, highlights that electoral incentives drive digital engagement. However, popularity on Twitter (measured by followers) is not merely a function of party size or gender but is best predicted by activeness (tweet frequency), indicating that consistent and visible engagement fosters online influence. The analysis confirms that activeness is the strongest predictor of popularity, while other variables such as education and party affiliation have limited explanatory power. Notably, PKS, despite being a mid-sized party, demonstrates strong digital performance both in presence and popularity, an indication of solid digital communication strategy.

Meanwhile, celebrities or politicians with entertainment backgrounds often enjoy disproportionate followers, highlighting more of personal branding rather than institutional efforts. Overall, while Twitter provides a low-cost, high-reach tool for political branding and communication, its actual impact varies significantly depending on how actively and strategically it is used by individual politicians.

Television has been accused of eroding public interest in politics due to the mediatization of politics where media logic dominates the political discourse at the expense of true public deliberation over issues that interest them. In this situation, political institutions, such as Mazzoleni & Schulz (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999) emphasize increasingly rely on and shaped by the mass media. Politics has succumbed to the political-economic interest of the media. Consequently, politics are highly personalized where media serve not by civic consideration, but by their best interest in political contestation leading to "the crisis of public communication" (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995). In today's new hybrid media system with massive internet penetration, new hope is rising for democracy.

There are different thoughts on the impact of adoption of communication technology into politics. These differences are rooted in the normative approach to the digitally mediated public sphere. Debates concerning the differences can be categorized into three perspectives, namely: dystopian, neo-futurist, and technorealist (Wilhelm, 2002). The dystopian advocates see digital technology as disrupting social and political life in a way that can dominate social actors and create alienation, whereas the neofuturists embrace the new technology as tool to create a hopeful future applying novel technologies as the embodiment of human creativity and progress. The technorealists, standing in between the two paradigms before, take a critical approach to technology in that technologies are not neutral, and internet is revolutionary but not utopian (Wilhelm, 2002).

In other words, technologies do create positive changes in social and political life, although at some points or contexts it brings consequences within it. These various standpoints continue to overshadow the latest debate on the impacts of technologies in modern politics. In the context of new media, there are three main streams of arguments in assessing the contribution of new media technology into politics, namely (1) equalization; (2) normalization; (3) mobilization (Carlson & Strandberg, 2008). Equalization proponents believe that the internet equalizes the playing field by providing more opportunity for powerless political actors or parties. Normalization argues that the use of internet in

politics changes nothing other than merely bringing the same domination by powerful actors in regular politics into online domination. And the mobilization suggests that either way holds true, the internet surely would best be used for mobilizing citizens to participate in politics via various features and platforms at their disposal for almost free.

Nevertheless, some politicians are already popular prior to the election. Legislators like Anang Hermansyah, Dede Yusuf, and Taufik Kurniawan are already popular before contesting the election. This could give them a leverage of pre-formed personal brand than as the result of institutional brand of their respective parties. This nuance may complicate the equalization-normalization debate where celebrity politicians introduce personalized equalization. In personalized equalization, the benefit of platform utilization accrues not to the disadvantaged actors as the equalization claim nor to the powerful party as the normalization claim, but to individuals whose advantage was built outside of politics. In the meantime, we also see in PKS case that a party organized a coordinated institutional branding strategy, whereas in PAN case there is an indication of parasitic branding pattern where party benefits from one or two existing popular individuals. The trend puts the party at risk once the celebrity legislator decides to leave the party.

By way of simple observation, most of those highly active on twitter at least by the year 2018 are still holding powerful position in politics today six years on such as ministers, members of parliament, and party elites. This gives an indication that, being online with strong branding strategies, politicians could leverage their opportunities to stay in power.

Conclusion

Politicians could benefit from using social media for their political communication with the public, but the opportunities might be hindered by personal challenges. This article was set to analyze the use of Twitter by Indonesia's DPR members of 2014-2019 periods for their political communication purposes. The findings first and foremost show online legislators are predominantly male (82%), middle-aged (mean = 51, SD = 9), and university educated (predominantly master's degree). Furthermore, based on party affiliation, PDI-P has the highest members on twitter relative to the other parties. But, PKS has the highest percentage (100%) of twitting members during the time sampled. Most members of the DPR who twitter represent West Java province, East Java, and Central Java, as top three electoral districts.

The findings also show that the adoption of twitter by members of DPR started in 2009, the year of the second direct election held since 2004 for the earliest and ended in 2016 for the latest. However, most members of the DPR on twitter created their twitter accounts in 2013 and 2014 (53% out of total) indicating the steep increase of adoption in welcoming the election year in 2014. And the adoption is determined by two main factors, namely level of education and party size where the politicians belong.

The use of Twitter for personal branding was minimalist. The result shows that members of DPR did not maximize the use of twitter for political branding. Only basic creation of profile picture replacing the default is embraced by 94% of the politicians. In the meantime, informing position at own party and showing personal website are two the less used features for branding on twitter. A PDI-P politician appears to be the most actively tweeting politician among all members of DPR, followed by PKS-member at second. A tweet could make layers of answer-question threads creating communication network which could make a politician strong influencer. From the network analysis, a Gerindra politician obtains the role as an influencer for being the central in the whole network of online members of DPR interactions.

Lastly, the popularity of members of DPR on twitter is valuable for visibility and likeability during non-electoral period. The popularity here is measured by the simplest indicator of the number of followers that a politician has on twitter. The collective followers of certain party's members create the popularity of the party. The most popular party on twitter is PKS. Out of 15 DPR members with the highest number of followers, four of them are PKS members. The analysis shows that the best predictor for popularity on twitter is activeness. In other words, politicians who actively twit will attract or maintain more followers.

Some limitations of this study are worth highlighting. First, the huge volume of data on twitter precludes a more focus analysis on the type and topic of contents that are exchanged by the politicians. And it calls for a more specific and advanced methodological approach such as the application of machine learning. Second, the true adoption (intensity of twitting) was not revealed here by calculating

the total number of tweets by politicians compared to their timespan on twitter. Third, the reasons as to why and why not, members of DPR intensively use twitter as their communication tools with citizens is still an interesting field to investigate with other suitable approaches such as case study or survey.

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