POLITICAL LABELING ON SOCIAL MEDIA: A NETNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF "SDM RENDAH" IN INDONESIA'S 2024 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION ON X (TWITTER)

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ABSTRACT

The 2024 presidential election campaign in Indonesia has produced various unique phenomena, including the emergence of the "Low Human Resources'' (SDM Rendah) label directed at the supporters of candidate pair 02 by the supporters of candidate pairs 01 and 03. The existence of this label has become a spotlight because it reflects the dynamics of politics and social interaction within the community. In conducting the netnographic research strategy in this study, the primary focus is on gaining a deep understanding of the underlying reasons for this labeling, as well as how it affects public perception and the overall political dynamics. The social media platform X was selected as the research subject due to its crucial role in facilitating communicative interaction, including the labeling process, especially in the increasingly digitized political context. It is expected that the results of this research can provide deeper insights into the phenomenon of labeling in the political realm on the X social media platform, as well as provide a better understanding for politicians and the public regarding the importance of using social media platforms wisely in the political context. Furthermore, this research also has significant academic implications in the field of communication science, particularly in the theory of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), which can contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of social media in contemporary politics. The practical implications cannot be overlooked either, especially in the efforts to raise awareness of the power and impact of social media platforms in the political context during the 2024 presidential campaign in Indonesia.

KEYWORDS	*Labeling, CMC, Social Media, Netnography, Politics.*

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INTRODUCTION

Along with the development of information technology, social media has emerged as a new place to communicate. Social media has become popular because of its various functions, from sharing information, communicating, to expressing oneself. This opens the possibility for everyone to get the same rights and opportunities if they cannot do it in real life. Therefore, the function of social media has also moved to become a forum for discussion, speeches, and promotion. This convenience is also utilized by all people in the world, including Indonesia. According to GoodStats, there is a huge opportunity in the use of social media, where in 2023 there will be at least 167 million social media users or equivalent to 79.5% of the total population in Indonesia (Yonatan, 2023). Behind the development and convenience offered, there are a handful of people who also utilize social media for certain interests and at certain times.

Indonesia in 2024 is entering the era of presidential elections. Social media is also present in this contestation as an introductory media. It is recorded that social media occupies the first position as the media with the largest consumption of Indonesian people to find out information about general elections, which is 31.9% (Sakti, 2023). With this extraordinary enthusiasm, many supporters of each candidate pair also expressed on social media to support their candidate pairs. One of them is the phenomenon that occurred to supporters of candidate pair 02 Prabowo-Gibran who had to receive unfavorable treatment from other X social media users by being labeled "Low HR".

The labeling of "Low Human Resources" stems from a snippet of *Podcast* video featuring Ridwan Kamil who was talking about his views on the 2024 Presidential Election. Ridwan Kamil mentioned that the majority of Prabowo-Gibran supporters in West Java came from the lower middle-educated group in December 2023 (Rosmini, 2023). But surprisingly Ridwan Kamil's words were edited, cut, and used as material to make fun of supporters of candidate pair number 2. The edits and cuts from this video were widely spread on the Internet, one of which was on TikTok social media and spread to X social media. As one of the largest political communication media platforms in Indonesia, X can easily attract the attention of the wider community through keywords and *hashtags* that make it easy for users to chat (Lind, 2012). In turn, the video piece immediately went viral and managed to attract the attention of the wider community, and many supporters other than candidate 02 were also provoked and voiced the mockery.

Example of platform X users referring to supporters of candidate pair number 2 with the label "Low HR"

This has provoked people who use the X platform to create labels and terms for supporters of candidate pair 02 as "Low HR". Even this keyword has become a new terminology to refer to supporters of candidate pair 02, which happens to always be a *trending topic* on X (Politik, 2023). Although some of them are just following the habit and want to be *trending* so they also use the term in their conversations. This condition is exacerbated by the emergence of a number of *buzzers* who deliberately followed the flow of this labeling and ended up in the less commendable act of creating and encouraging the *labeling* of "Low HR" on supporters of candidate pair 02, Prabowo-Gibran. So this *labeling* has the potential to become a new color in seeing the dynamics of interactions that occur on the Internet, and unconsciously create new terms on the internet.

This shows that social media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing people's perspectives, especially during political moments. The characteristics of this platform are that it allows rapid communication and direct interaction between users, which can be an effective tool for spreading negative information. In the context of *computer-mediated communication* (*CMC*), the "Low HR" *labeling* of supporters of candidate pair 02 can be seen as an attempt to delegitimize, discredit, and influence public perception of the group. Users feel safe expressing themselves on the Internet because of the anonymity that makes them feel free from social consequences.

A person confidently performs all actions because of the lack of immediate feedback, which results in users thinking they do not have to behave properly and can become more aggressive. In addition, through the internet users can also reduce social cues such as faces, expressions, and body language so that they can interact without having to meet face to face. This clearly gives an advantage to the 'unscrupulous' who utilize the internet for negative purposes. Moreover, not only labeling is possible, but also other actions such as *hate speech, hoaxes,* and *cyberbullying.* The long impact of

this *labeling* can also be used to assassinate the character of a character which leads to a decrease in the electability of the candidate (Wahyudi, 2019).

Starting from this, the researchers sought to dig deeper into the phenomenon of labeling 'Low HR' that occurred through the X platform in the 2024 presidential election contestation. In this study, the researchers will focus on the reasons behind the *labeling* of supporters of candidate pair 02 with the aim of making fun of both supporters and candidate pairs, through the characteristics of CMC theory that allows for fast communication and direct interaction between users, thus allowing for wide and rapid dissemination of content, as well as anonymity that makes users feel free from social consequences so that social media users tend to be bolder in labeling or verbal attacks on supporters of political opponents or even other candidate pairs literally. By understanding the phenomenon of political *labeling* on social media through the CMC framework, this research can reveal the dynamics of political communication that occur in the digital space, as well as its implications for the democratic landscape. The CMC approach offers a comprehensive perspective to analyze the interaction, motivation, and impact of political *labeling* practices in the digital era.

This research aims to explore how users of social media platform X create labeling and the dynamics of labeling for supporters of presidential candidate pair 02. The study's objectives are to explain the labeling process and its effects on the political campaign. Academically, this research contributes to the field of communication, particularly in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), by examining labeling phenomena during political contests on social media. Practically, it provides insights for politicians to be cautious in their social media statements, as irresponsible labeling can influence public opinion and incite negative actions. It also raises awareness about the power of social media and the need for the public to be more discerning about labeling.

Literature Review

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) refers to the exchange of messages between individuals through the use of digital technologies like social media platforms. CMC encompasses various forms such as text messaging, email, and social media, facilitating both personal and mass communication (High et al., 2023). It has evolved significantly since its inception, and today plays a pivotal role in modern social interactions, particularly on platforms like X (formerly Twitter) (Pertiwi & Palupi, 2022).

Labeling

Labeling is a communication process in which individuals or groups are named or categorized based on specific traits. This concept often influences social perception and can have a significant impact on how individuals see themselves and others (Zhang, 2023). Labels can be applied in various contexts, including interpersonal communication, media, and politics. The labeling process involves dynamics of social

power and resistance, where more dominant groups or institutions often label less dominant ones (Laughey, 2010).

Social Media

Social media platforms like X provide digital spaces for users to communicate asynchronously, fostering interactions between individuals and groups. Social media is characterized by user-generated content, instant feedback, and interaction patterns that often form echo chambers, reinforcing users' existing beliefs and biases. Through social media, communication is amplified, and messages can rapidly spread, increasing their impact and visibility (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Labeling in Social Media X

Social media platform X is widely used for interpersonal and mass-personal communication. Like offline interactions, online interactions on X can lead to behaviors such as trolling and hate speech, which often result in labeling (Aroyehun & Gelbukh, 2018). Labels applied on X are frequently negative and contribute to social polarization, stereotyping, and misinformation. These labels, such as "criminal" or "deviant," are often based on assumptions or prejudices, impacting social perceptions and behaviors (Mensah et al., 2022).

Labeling in the Context of Politics on Social Media X

In political discourse, labeling is a strategy used to demean opponents and influence public perception (Mensah et al., 2022). Social media platforms like X have become battlegrounds for political debates, where labeling is employed to reduce the electability of opposition candidates. These labels are often confrontational and used to trigger negative emotions, framing political opponents in a negative light to sway voters (Wahyudi, 2019).

Research Framework

This research focuses on how CMC on social media X facilitates labeling, specifically the label "Low Human Resources" applied to supporters of presidential candidate pair 02. The study examines how CMC enables expressive communication that fosters both positive and negative exchanges, including political labeling aimed at lowering opposition electability (Mensah et al., 2022; Wahyudi, 2019).

The purpose of using CMC as the main theory is the existence of CMC which allows expressive communication in all forms of computer-mediated communication or systems, one of which is social media. This expressive communication can also take the form of positive or negative things such as the emergence of *labeling*, with various contexts, which in this case is the political context. The researchers will focus on the reasons behind the "Low HR" labeling of supporters of candidate pair 02. The research framework can be seen further in the following figure.
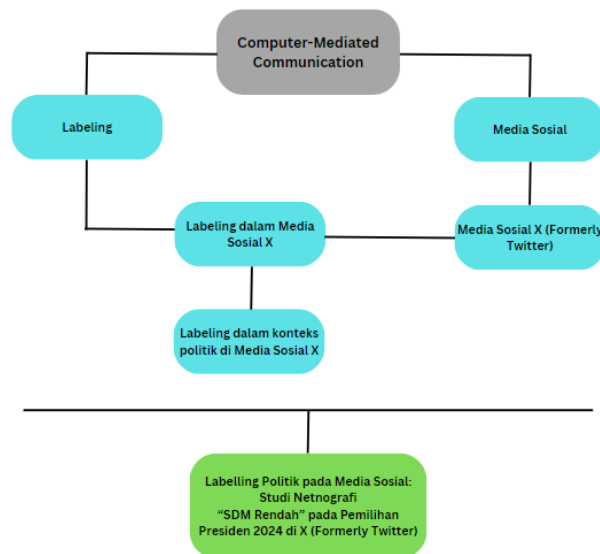
Figure 2. Research framework

RESEARCH METHOD

The research employs a constructivist paradigm, which emphasizes that individuals construct their own understanding based on the information they receive (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). This paradigm is suitable for analyzing the labeling of "Low HR" for supporters of candidate pair 02 on social media platform X, as it helps in understanding how users give meaning to social interactions and labeling (Adom et al., 2016). The qualitative approach used in this study aims to describe and analyze the labeling process, focusing on user behavior in the digital space, particularly through netnography, a method that explores online community interactions (Kozinets, 2019; Sabrina & Vera, 2023).

The research focuses on keywords used in X, specifically related to the labeling of "Low HR" for candidate pair 02's supporters. The study identifies relevant tweets using the "Low Human Resources" keyword and analyzes the conversations surrounding this label from December 2023 to April 2024. Through digital observation and a literature study, data was gathered and filtered based on inclusion and exclusion criteria to focus on 478 relevant tweets (Irfandianto & Supyandi, 2020). This selection allows for a deeper understanding of how political labeling shapes online interactions and perceptions during the 2024 presidential election.

Data analysis in this research follows a netnography approach, focusing on interpreting online interactions and labeling dynamics. The analysis included identifying patterns in 1109 tweets and narrowing them down based on relevance and time frame to understand how the "Low HR" label influenced public opinion (Mulawarman et al., 2021). To ensure validity, the credibility of the data was tested through triangulation, comparing findings with previous studies and scientific journals (Moleong, 2017). This approach confirms the reliability of the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Research Results

In the 2024 Presidential Election, social media platform X played a crucial role in the dynamics of political labeling. Users actively participated in defending or attacking presidential candidates, with labeling often reflecting polarized discussions. Supporters of candidate pair 02 were labeled "Low HR," and their defenders responded by highlighting positive attributes, sharing testimonials, and using facts to counter attacks. These actions aimed not only to promote the candidate but also to shape a favorable public opinion amidst a highly polarized digital environment.

In contrast to defense, offensive strategies were also prevalent, where users attacked opposing candidates with derogatory comments, often lacking concrete evidence. These attacks, aimed at damaging reputations, spread rapidly due to sensationalism and contributed to political polarization. Speculative claims and rumors further fueled distrust among voters, creating a toxic information environment where distinguishing fact from fiction became increasingly difficult. This misinformation, often spread by anonymous accounts, undermined the credibility of political discourse and voter confidence.

Satire and humor were commonly used to critique candidates or their supporters subtly. Memes and caricatures proved effective in delivering criticism, as they entertained and reached wider audiences. These forms of expression often gained more attention than direct criticism, allowing users to convey their political messages without provoking strong backlash. Creativity in labeling, such as visual art or animated videos, also showcased unique forms of political expression, drawing attention to political messages in a crowded social media landscape.

The heated political context of the 2024 election fostered divisive interactions on social media, with supporters of different candidates engaging in hostile exchanges. Social media became a battleground for competing narratives, where assumptions about opponents' competence or integrity were often publicized without verification, reinforcing divisions. As a result, meaningful dialogue between supporters diminished, escalating conflict and narrowing the space for constructive political discourse.

Amidst these interactions, stakeholders played a significant role in shaping public opinion. Apologists defended their candidates by spreading positive narratives, while neutral parties sought to provide objective perspectives in the polarized environment. Accusations, often unsupported by evidence, circulated widely and damaged the reputation of political figures. As the election neared, the role of social media in influencing voter perceptions and decisions became increasingly prominent, underscoring the need for critical engagement with political content on digital platforms.

4.2 Analysis

Data analysis in this study was carried out using a qualitative approach through a netnography strategy. The data obtained and through the process of *open coding*, *axial coding*, *selective coding* revealed several important aspects related to the

dynamics of political *labeling*, political context, and the role of stakeholders in political discourse on social media X during the 2024 Presidential Election.

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Explanation
Tindakan pengguna yang secara aktif membela calon tertentu, sering kali dengan menyebutkan pencapaian atau kualitas positif (n=78)		
Komentar atau unggahan yang secara langsung menyerang atau merendahkan pihak lawan (n=68)		
Klaim yang tidak didukung oleh bukti konkret, seringkali berisi spekulasi atau rumor (n=18)	Dinamika Labelling	Bagaimana berbagai bentuk interaksi di media sosial, seperti pembelaan, penghinaan, dan sindiran, mencerminkan dinamika labelling politik dalam diskusi tentang Pemilihan Presiden 2024
Unggahan yang menyindir pihak tertentu secara tidak langsung, menggunakan humor atau sarkasme (n=100)		
Berbagai bentuk labeling yang tidak termasuk dalam kategori spesifik lainnya (n=56)		

Figure 6. *Labeling* dynamics

The data above shows that the dynamics of political *labeling* that occurred on social media X during the 2024 Presidential Election are in line with the concept of *Computer-Mediated Communication / CMC*. In the context of CMC, political interaction and communication in the virtual world have distinctive characteristics compared to face-to-face communication. One of them is the existence of anonymity and psychological distance that can encourage users to be more open in expressing their political opinions and attitudes, including through *labeling* that tends to be bolder and more expressive.

The research findings reveal that X social media users perform various forms of *labeling*, ranging from defending certain candidates by highlighting positive aspects, to directly attacking or denigrating political opponents. This condition reflects how CMC facilitates political polarization and reinforces users' tendency to engage in political discourse that tends to be confrontational and discredit each other. In addition, the ease of spreading information that is not supported by concrete evidence, in the form of speculation or rumors, is also one of the characteristics of CMC seen in the dynamics of political *labeling* on social media X . Then, the use of humor, sarcasm, and satire in political *labeling* on this platform also reflects the nature of CMC that allows users to convey criticism or disagreement indirectly, but still influence the developing political discourse. Thus, the concept of CMC provides a relevant framework of understanding to analyze the complex dynamics of political *labeling* on social media, including on X during the 2024 Presidential Election.

Interaksi antara pendukung berbagai pasangan calon yang saling mengejek atau merendahkan (n=66)		
Persepsi dan asumsi yang dibentuk oleh pendukung tentang lawan politik mereka (n=74)	Konteks Politik	Bagaimana konteks politik dan persepsi antar pendukung calon presiden mempengaruhi dan membentuk labelling di media sosial, serta bagaimana kekecewaan dan persaingan politik tercermin dalam diskusi online
Ekspresi ketidakpuasan terhadap calon tertentu (n=14)		

Figure 7. Political Context

The characteristics of CMC are very visible in the data above. One aspect that stands out is the interaction between supporters of different candidate pairs, where they mock or denigrate each other *online*. This phenomenon reflects the polarization among groups of supporters who maintain their own political views and preferences, triggered by the nature of CMC that encourages the formation of *echo chambers* and socially isolated groups. In addition, this research also reveals that supporters of candidate pairs tend to form negative perceptions and assumptions towards their political opponents through interactions on social media. The characteristics of CMC that allow for strategic impression and image formation, yet limited information, seem to encourage the formation of perceptions and assumptions that are often not based on facts. Furthermore, there were also expressions of dissatisfaction with certain candidates, which shows how CMC facilitated criticism and disappointment from some users towards candidates competing in the presidential election. These characteristics illustrate how computer-mediated political communication (CMC) can create a complex and polarizing political context on social media, where users tend to engage in discourses that reinforce their own views and sharpen differences with opponents.

Pengguna yang membela pemangku kepentingan tertentu (n=2)		
Pengguna yang menunjukkan sikap netral atau tidak memihak (n=1)	Pemangku Kepentingan	Bagaimana berbagai pemangku kepentingan, baik yang membela maupun yang tidak berpihak, serta yang memberikan tuduhan, mempengaruhi dinamika labelling politik di media sosial
Pengguna yang menuduh pemangku kepentingan tertentu (n=1)		

Figure 8: Stakeholders

The data on stakeholders also provides important insights into how computer-mediated political communication (CMC) influences the engagement of different parties in political discourse on social media X during the 2024 Presidential Election. The data shows that there are users who actively defend certain interests, such as

supporting or promoting certain candidates or political issues. CMC characteristics that facilitate the rapid and widespread dissemination of information and views seem to be utilized by these groups to strengthen their positions and agendas. On the other hand, there are also users who show a neutral or impartial attitude, who may be trying to remain objective and unaffected by the polarization. The presence of this group reflects how CMC can encourage the formation of a more diverse and balanced public opinion. However, this study also uncovered users who accused certain stakeholders, suggesting that CMC also provides space for accusations and suspicions among stakeholders involved in political discourse. Overall, these findings illustrate how CMC characteristics, such as the speed of information dissemination and the ability of stakeholders to actively engage, shape the dynamics and complexity of political discourse on social media.

Discussion

This research reveals how the dynamics of political *labeling* and political context are formed in discourse on social media X during the 2024 Presidential Election. One interesting finding is the use of satire with humor or sarcasm as one of the most widely used forms of political *labeling* by users. This strategy seems to be a way for them to convey criticism or disapproval of the opposing party without having to make a frontal attack.

Based on the data obtained through the *open coding* process, there are various examples of the use of satire and sarcasm by X users in the political context of the 2024 Presidential Election. One example is an upload that satirizes political opponents by using *memes* or funny pictures that mock certain candidates. For example, a user uploads a caricature image of a candidate with a negative image, accompanied by a caption containing sharp innuendo. While not a direct attack, this kind of satire clearly aims to discredit and demean the unsupported candidate. In addition, some users also use humor or sarcasm to satirize their political opponents, such as posting *tweets* with sarcastic comments about one of the candidates, with the aim of making fun of and satirizing him. These comments may not be explicitly offensive, but use sarcastic humor to satirize a particular candidate and indirectly support another candidate.

Satire, humor, and sarcasm in political labeling are the main strategies among X social media users. The distinctive characteristics of social media that allow indirect and more relaxed message delivery encourage users to express criticism or disagreement on political issues. Instead of making direct attacks, they prefer subtle but still effective forms of labeling in conveying political views and preferences. Through posts containing *memes*, sarcastic humor, or hidden innuendo, users can channel political expression in a way that is in line with the norms and culture of *online* communication. This strategy appeals to users because it allows them to criticize and express themselves more freely and casually in a political landscape that is often contentious and tense.

On the other hand, the research findings also reveal how the political context was shaped on X social media during the 2024 Presidential Election. One aspect that stands out is the interaction between supporters of different candidate pairs who mock or

denigrate each other. This phenomenon reflects the polarization between groups of supporters who maintain their respective political views and preferences. Interestingly, the way political *labeling* is applied in these inter-supporter interactions tends to be more direct and vulgar compared to other users. For example, supporters of one candidate often *post* comments that openly attack or denigrate the opponent. This kind of attack not only demeans the intended candidate, but also reflects the tension and hostility between different groups of supporters, thus muddying the political discourse on social media.

The formation of negative perceptions and assumptions by supporters towards their political opponents is an issue that is closely related to the dynamics of political *labeling* that occurs on X social media. The research data reveals how users tend to form bad views of parties that are not in line with their political preferences. These negative assumptions are then manifested in the form of *labeling*, ridicule and attacks directed at candidates and their supporters. This situation ultimately deepens divisions and worsens the quality of political discussions on social media, where each group is increasingly trapped in their own views and reluctant to accept different perspectives.

While there are many examples of *labeling* and attacks between candidate supporters, this research did not find many stakeholders directly involved in the political debates in X. The data shows that most stakeholders, such as political parties, community organizations, or public figures, tend to show a neutral or impartial stance in the political discourse. Only a small number of stakeholders are seen to defend certain interests. However, in contrast to the *labeling* done by supporters, posts from these stakeholders tend to be more formal, informative, and do not contain words that denigrate or insult the opposing party.

This finding is interesting because it illustrates the different approaches between stakeholders and supporters groups in expressing their political preferences on social media. While supporters tend to engage in *labeling* battles that attack each other, stakeholders seem to prefer to maintain a neutral and professional stance in responding to the ongoing political contestation.

The characteristics of CMC that tend to form *echo chambers* and socially isolated groups are thought to be one of the factors that encourage polarization among supporters of different candidates (High et al., 2022). In these situations, they tend to engage in discussions that reinforce their own views and widen the distance with the opposing side. They actively seek out, consume and share content that matches their beliefs, while rejecting or even attacking contrary information. This process deepens differences and increases polarization among support groups, creating a deepening chasm in digital political discussions. Instead of finding common ground or trying to understand other perspectives, social media users are increasingly caught up in reinforcing their own positions and demonstrating superiority over dissenters. Stakeholders such as political parties, community organizations, or public figures, often show a different approach when expressing themselves on social media compared to candidate supporters. As entities with broader political interests, they tend to maintain a more formal and objective stance in responding to *online* political discourse. They try to avoid polarization that could harm their position. In addition,

computer-mediated political communication (CMC), which enables strategic impression and image formation, also encourages them to be more cautious in responding to political debates on social media. In contrast to the more frontal and vulgar approach of candidate supporters, stakeholders consider the impact and implications of each of their statements to maintain professionalism and credibility.

The overall results of this study illustrate how the characteristics of computer-mediated political communication (CMC) shape the dynamics of political labeling and the complex political context on social media X during the 2024 Presidential Election. Users widely used satire, humor, and sarcasm as strategies in labeling, taking advantage of the more relaxed nature of CMC and allowing indirect messaging to convey criticism or disapproval of parties they do not support. This phenomenon becomes a way for users to voice their political preferences without having to engage in direct attacks. On the other hand, polarization and the formation of negative perceptions between supporters of candidates also shape the political context on social media, where groups of supporters mock and denigrate each other, and form bad assumptions about their political opponents. The characteristics of CMC that encourage the formation of *echo chambers* and socially isolated groups are believed to be one of the factors that trigger this dynamic, where users engage in discourse that reinforces their own views and exacerbates differences with opponents.

CONCLUSION

The dynamics of political labeling on social media platform X during the 2024 Presidential Election illustrate the nature of computer-mediated communication (CMC). Users engage in promoting their preferred candidates while attacking their opponents through abusive language or unsupported claims, contributing to a toxic information environment. Satire, humor, and sarcasm were also prominent tools used to criticize opposition candidates, highlighting the platform's role in shaping polarized political discourse. The open and bold self-expression fostered by CMC creates an environment where political labeling becomes more complex and divisive.

The political context on social media during the election reflected fierce competition, with verbal battles between supporters of different candidates. Negative assumptions and taunts further heightened tensions, contributing to a contentious digital atmosphere. Expressions of dissatisfaction with certain candidates, combined with labeling tactics, added layers of complexity to the digital political landscape, making it challenging for stakeholders to maintain objectivity and credibility amid the polarization.

In this environment, stakeholders played a critical role, ranging from active defenders of candidates to neutral figures attempting to provide balanced information. Some stakeholders sought to bolster their political agendas by spreading positive narratives or countering criticisms, while others accused opponents, fostering mutual distrust. This dynamic interaction on social media shaped public opinion, demonstrating the powerful influence of CMC in political communication during the 2024 election.

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