THE INDONESIAN CONSTITUTIONAL COURT'S REPUTATION CRISIS OVER NEWS ON PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE AGE LIMIT DECISION

Reza Praditya Yudha[1*], Herna[2], Pipit Fitriyah[3], A. Rahman Hakim[4]

[1,2,3,4]Faculty of Communication Science, Gunadarma University

*Corresponding author, **E-mail:** rezapraditya@staff.gunadarma.ac.id

Abstract

The news about the Constitutional Court's (MK) decision regarding the age limit lawsuit for presidential and vice-presidential candidates became a crucial political issue at the end of 2023. The media dialectic presents diverse public opinions, including expressions of discontent towards the MK, which became a popular topic on social media. This research examines the MK's reputation in relation to the coverage of this decision in mass media and social media. The researchers adopt a Communication Studies perspective, employing Agenda Setting Theory and Crisis Management Theory. A qualitative approach with desk research is used. Data collection is limited to digital mass media and social media platforms X and Instagram. Brand24 is utilized as a digital tool to map actors, issues, trends, and public sentiment. Data was collected from October to November 2023, and triangulation was conducted to ensure the study's validity. The findings indicate that public discussions focus on the MK's decision, MK judges, the political system, and governance. The public tends to hold negative sentiment regarding the MK's decision, the background of MK judges, distrust in the political system, and government authorities. The study concludes that coverage of this decision articulates a close relationship between the government and the MK. The MK's reputation is in a state of crisis due to the dominance of negative discourse in digital media. The reputation crisis reflects public awareness of potential power abuse for personal interests.

Keywords: *Agenda Setting Theory, Digital Media, Indonesian Constitutional Court, News Coverage, Reputation Crisis*

INTRODUCTION

The formation of a person's or organization's reputation is closely linked to media coverage (Jonkman, et al., 2019). Positive news coverage can enhance reputation, while negative-sentiment news can damage it. News in mass media not only provides knowledge but also has the potential to alter public perception, attitudes, and even behavior (Liao, 2023) regarding an individual's or institution's reputation. Similarly, inclusive and interactive public discussions on social media can either strengthen or harm reputations, creating a snowball effect and viral spread due to the inherently viral nature of social media platforms. The creation of a collective narrative, such as a continuously shared positive or negative post, can shape collective perceptions and gain significant attention, further reinforcing public perceptions and accelerating reputation changes. On a personal level, every social media user can quickly add reviews, comments, or reactions, which may strengthen or harm a reputation, depending on the prevailing narrative. Discussions on social media play a significant role in shaping and even altering the reputation of individuals, organizations, or brands.

The integration of media with digital technology has created a convergence of news formats (Prayogi, Sjafirah, & Dewi, 2020). Media on digital platforms offers more personalized and practical features of interaction and accessibility. Users can access and disseminate news anytime and anywhere.

News formats have become more engaging by incorporating text, audio, and video elements. This convergence allows information and news from mass media and social media to move fluidly across platforms. As a result, public discussions and issues are no longer confined to specific digital media, transcending boundaries across various digital platforms.

In Indonesia, social discussions related to religion and politics are sensitive issues. One example is the phenomenon of the Constitutional Court (MK) decision which began with public discussion regarding the kinship of the Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court Anwar Usman and President Joko Widodo. Rohmah & Ilmiyah (2024) examined how public discussions were concerned that the family relationship could influence the decisions of state institutions, especially concerns about the loss of the Constitutional Court's independence. Following this issue, public attention to the Constitutional Court's decision became increasingly significant in relation to the last case at the end of 2023 regarding the age limit for presidential and vice-presidential candidates. This issue received significant attention due to the threat to the President's personal interests and criticism from academics and scholars. Furthermore, members of the Constitutional Court's Honorary Council suspended Anwar Usman as Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court because he was involved in the decision regarding the lawsuit regarding the age limit for presidential and vice-presidential candidates.

The reputation of the Constitutional Court (MK) is a fascinating subject of study in Communication Science. As a high state institution, the MK holds judicial power within Indonesia's constitutional system. This means that the MK holds the highest authority in constitutional disputes. It has the power to uphold laws and policies in accordance with Indonesia's supreme law, the 1945 Constitution.

Moreover, if there is any suspicion of constitutional violations, the MK is authorized to decide on the eligibility of impeaching the president as the executive leader of the government. The MK's decisions are also final, meaning they cannot be appealed or taken to a higher legal authority. Therefore, the reputation of the MK as an independent institution consistently upholding the constitution is crucial to maintaining social stability.

Previous research shows that reputation is closely linked to the quality of media coverage and public opinion on social media. Particularly in the digital era, social media has become a critical channel for institutions to interact with their audience and manage their reputation (Bell, Broklyn, & Olukemi, 2024). The study by Bell, Broklyn, & Olukemi (2024) discusses sentiment analysis as part of natural language processing (NLP) to measure the emotional tone in online discussions. Using machine learning algorithms, institutions can analyze social media data to understand public sentiment and detect potential issues. The study emphasizes the importance of continuous social media monitoring to maintain a positive brand image.

In Indonesia, research on the Constitutional Court's (MK) reputation crisis related to media coverage has not yet been conducted using desk research methods and the Meltwater application. The researcher hopes that the findings of this study will enrich academic and practical discourse on reputation management, particularly concerning the media. The researcher believes that Indonesia, as one of the largest media user countries, will present various interesting dynamics to explore.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This study aims to examine the reputation of the Constitutional Court (MK) in relation to media coverage of the ruling on the age limit for presidential and vice-presidential candidates.

This research reinforces the argument made by communication scholars that media coverage is intertwined with the reputation of both individuals and institutions (Jonkman, et al., 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In research examining the reputation of the Constitutional Court (MK) regarding media coverage of the ruling on the age limit for presidential and vice-presidential candidates, integrating Agenda Setting Theory and Crisis Management can provide a comprehensive perspective. Agenda Setting Theory, first introduced by McCombs and Shaw (1972), explains that the media has the power to shape the public agenda by emphasizing certain issues. Through this process, the media can influence what the public thinks about and pays attention to, including their perceptions of institutions. In addition to agenda-setting, McCombs and Shaw also introduced advanced concepts such as framing and priming, which clarify how the media can frame an issue with specific narratives, thereby shaping public interpretation of events or decisions being discussed (Littlejohn & Foss, 2022).

Framing is highly relevant in understanding how media coverage of the Constitutional Court's (MK) ruling on the age limit for presidential and vice-presidential candidates has been presented. The media has highlighted specific aspects of the MK's decision, such as alleged conflicts of interest or the familial relationship between a constitutional judge and one of the vice-presidential candidates. With a strong negative framing, the media has the power to reinforce public perceptions that the ruling is unethical, directly damaging the MK's reputation.

Priming plays a crucial role in amplifying this perception. Through repeated exposure to news focusing on alleged "dynastic politics" or "conflicts of interest," the public becomes more inclined to view the MK as a biased and corrupt institution. Over time, public opinion may be shaped by these recurring narratives, placing the MK in a reputational crisis.

Littlejohn and Foss (2022) explain that the media does not operate in a vacuum, meaning that the media agenda can also be influenced by the public agenda, which depends on public news consumption patterns and market research. Media outlets tend to tailor their content to what audiences want to see and read, thereby presenting issues that are seen as interesting and relevant. In relation to this research, media coverage of the Constitutional Court (MK) and alleged conflicts of interest may become "headlines" due to public interest in the issue.

Actors such as politicians and public relations (PR) practitioners play a significant role in shaping the media agenda. Politicians and PR teams often leverage the media to steer public discourse in directions that align with their interests. In the context of this research, various parties may be attempting to influence the coverage of the MK's ruling, highlighting or downplaying certain aspects to suit their goals. This dynamic interaction between media, public opinion, and political actors is crucial for understanding how the MK's reputation is being shaped in the current discourse.

When continuous media coverage of the Constitutional Court's (MK) ruling leans towards a negative narrative, the MK may face a reputational crisis. This is where Crisis Management Theory becomes relevant. Coombs (2015) posits that crisis management is a communication strategy employed by institutions or organizations to navigate crises and minimize negative impacts on their reputation.

However, in the context of crisis management, an institution's reputation plays a crucial role in determining public trust. Institutions need to manage their reputation

when facing adverse situations, primarily through communication and media monitoring. Effective communication and media utilization are also the initial steps in addressing a reputational crisis. Institutions that successfully recover their reputation from a crisis are those that respond promptly to issues, communicate clarifications professionally, are quick to explain the facts, and demonstrate social sensitivity. By taking these actions, they can rebuild trust and maintain their credibility in the eyes of the public.

In the case of the MK, implementing strategic communication practices during periods of negative media attention could help mitigate the potential damage to its reputation and reinforce its commitment to upholding constitutional integrity. Effective crisis management involves proactive communication to address public concerns, clarify misinformation, and restore trust.

METHODOLOGY

As a study in Communication Science, the researcher employs a qualitative approach and desk study to analyze findings in depth. The researcher utilizes the Meltwater application to curate, analyze, and visualize digital data concerning actors, issues, trends, and emerging public sentiment in discussions across various media. The data collection is limited to digital mass media, social media platforms such as X, and Instagram. These media outlets generally serve as channels for information, mobilization, and open discussions among the public on social and political issues (Jaidka, Zhou, Lelkes, 2019; Ferreira, 2021; Prawitasari, Susanto, Ardiyanto, 2020). The digital data from Meltwater is then compared and deepened with relevant academic literature concerning news regulation and reputation management.

RESULTS

The research found an increase in media engagement related to the keyword search for the MK ruling from October 1 to November 30. The highest engagement, as shown in **Figure 1**, occurred when Chief Justice Anwar Usman read the ruling on the judicial review concerning the minimum age limit for presidential and vice-presidential candidates. This engagement peaked and subsequently declined but rose again on November 7, 2023, coinciding with the Constitutional Court's Honorary Council's ruling that Anwar Usman had committed serious ethical violations.
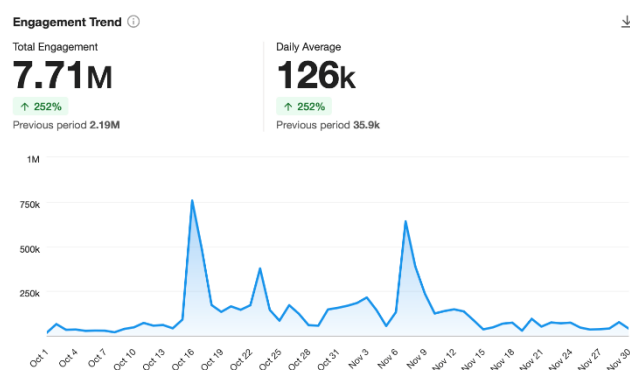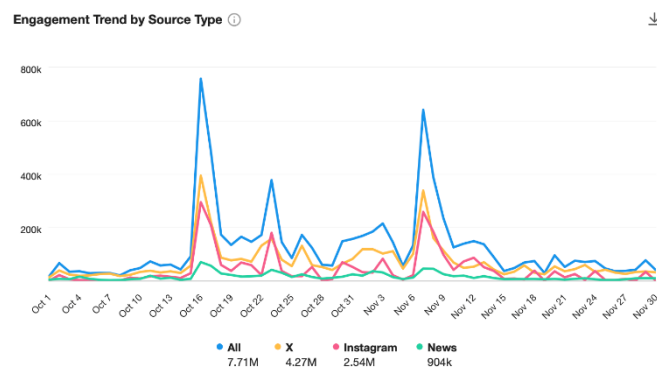

Source: Research Data

Figure 1: Media Highest Engagement

Both events sparked public discussion on platforms like X and Instagram. Similarly, mass media displayed a trend of increased coverage related to these two events, as shown in **Figure 2** below. The findings of this research reinforce previous studies that assert mass media, X, and Instagram are popular public platforms for social and political discussions.

Source: Research Data

Figure 2. Media Engagement Trend

In digital algorithms, the increased use of hashtags, keywords, tagging, or mentions of account names is directly proportional to recommendations from digital platforms. This means that if an account mention or hashtag is used more frequently, digital algorithms will position it higher on the most searched and trending lists. Account names or hashtags that we frequently review will also be recommended on our social media feeds. This functionality of digital search engines is leveraged by some individuals to shape or even alter the direction and sentiment of public discourse.

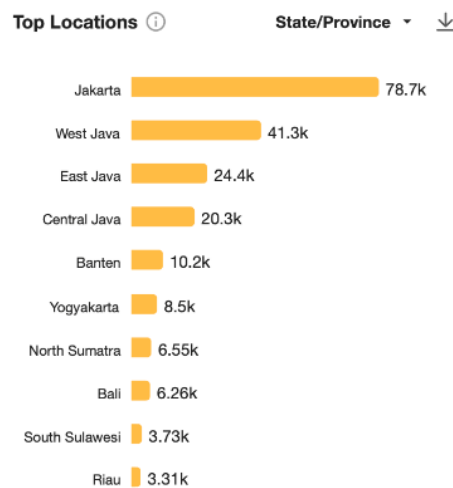Source: Research Data

Figure 3. Mention Trend

In this study, the findings indicate a rise in mentions of the keyword "Putusan MK" by up to 400%, as illustrated in **Figure 3** above. According to the data presented in Figure 4, the platform where users most frequently mention or use keywords related to "Putusan MK" is X.

As previously discussed, the features and user interactions on X facilitate easier engagement in text format. Consequently, X users have a greater potential to interact with and produce mentions, as well as the use of the hashtag "Putusan MK." The data also reveal that Instagram users do not utilize keyword mentions. The use of hashtags does not appear to be a common practice or form of interaction among Instagram users.

The researcher acknowledges that digital media serves as a communication channel that transcends space and time. However, analytically, digital applications can curate and map the mobilization of user locations. As shown in **Figure 4**, the largest concentration of users is in Jakarta. This reflects the high level of digital literacy in Jakarta, which has a score of 3.59, ranking it the 8th highest in the nation. This score is also above the national average of 3.54 (Survei katadata.co.id, 2022). In the political context, katadata.co.id has reported that the number of registered voters in Jakarta is the 6th highest in the nation for 2024, with a total of 8.25 million people.

Top Locations ⓘ   State/Province ▾   ⤓

Location	Value
Jakarta	78.7k
West Java	41.3k
East Java	24.4k
Central Java	20.3k
Banten	10.2k
Yogyakarta	8.5k
North Sumatra	6.55k
Bali	6.26k
South Sulawesi	3.73k
Riau	3.31k

Source: Research Data

Figure 4. Top Media User's Location

Public discussions related to the Constitutional Court (MK) include keywords as illustrated in **Figure 5** below. The public is discussing hashtags and keywords such as "kode etik" (code of ethics), "batas usia" (age limit), "kepala daerah" (regional heads), and "wakil presiden" (vice president) in connection with "Putusan MK" (MK ruling). Notable figures such as Chief Justice Anwar Usman, Gibran, Jokowi, and Prabowo also emerge in these discussions.

Source: Research Data

Figure 5. Public Discussion Topics

The use of hashtags, keywords, or mentions of notable figures by the public is evident in specific topics. As shown in **Figure 6**, the topics of public discussion encompass the judicial realm, the executive branch of government, social media, and increasingly focus on discussions surrounding governance, the legal system, news, and politics.
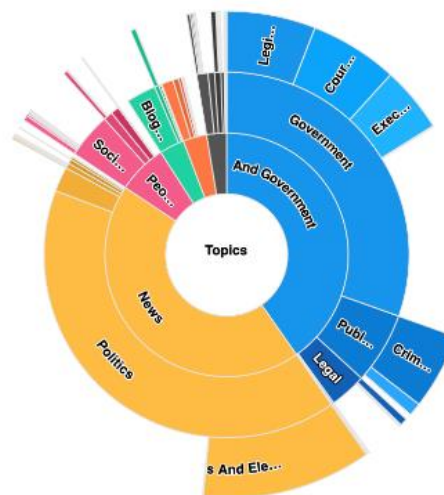

Source: Research Data

Figure 6. Topics Breakdown

Digital analysis indicates that public sentiment regarding the Constitutional Court's (MK) ruling is predominantly negative. As shown in **Figure 7** below, positive sentiment accounts for approximately 16% of all data, while discussions with negative sentiment reach 84%.

![KONFERENSI PENYIARAN INDONESIA 2024 - INDONESIA BROADCASTING CONFERENCE]

Konferensi Penyiaran Indonesia 2024
Indonesia Broadcasting Conference 2024
Vol. 1 No. 1 Maret 2025 pp. 263-274
P-ISSN , E ISSN

Source: Research Data

Figure 7. Public Sentiment

Furthermore, **Figure 8** below illustrates public sentiment concerning specific discussions. Positive sentiment in public discussions is related to hopes for new "presidential" and "vice-presidential" candidates. Members of the public who are dissatisfied with the current president or vice president desire a different spirit or form of governance. Some members of the public are also optimistic about the experience and achievements of the individuals who are the next presidential or vice-presidential candidates.
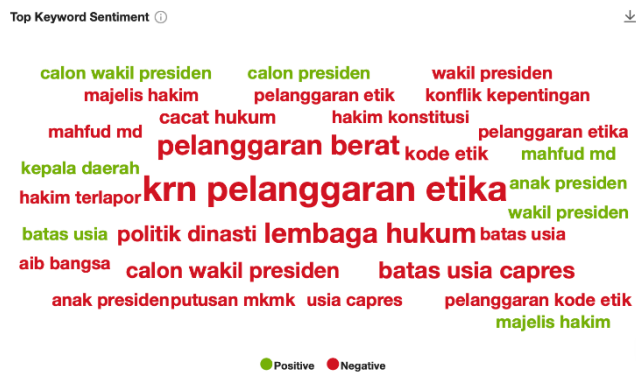

Source: Research Data

Figure 8. Top Keyword Sentiment

Some members of the public also discuss individuals with achievements despite their young age. This sentiment frames the context of "age limits" in a positive light. Additionally, the public views one of the vice-presidential candidates, Gibran, who happens to be the "president's son," as privileged and destined for success. Many people recognize and highlight Gibran's accomplishments as a previous "regional head." Likewise, there are many other "regional heads" who are young and have demonstrated notable achievements.

Other segments of the public also positively support the statements and persona of "Mahfud MD." Several times, Mahfud MD has clarified the position, authority, and impact of the Constitutional Court's (MK) rulings through the media. Although Mahfud MD is participating in the electoral contest, his explanations come from the perspective of a

constitutional law expert and former Chief Justice of the MK. This has garnered positive sentiment from the public regarding discussions surrounding the MK's rulings.

Public negative sentiment in the media regarding discussions about the "ethical violations" of MK judges when making the "age limit" ruling is evident. The familial relationship of one of the "constitutional judges" with a "vice-presidential candidate" leads some members of the public to suspect the presence of "dynastic politics" in the ruling.

As a "legal institution," the public also holds a negative view of the MK for allowing one of the "judicial councils" to participate in the decision-making process regarding the "age limit" for presidential and vice-presidential candidates. This ruling constitutionally benefits the "president's son," who is also a vice-presidential candidate. The familial connection between the judge and the president raises suspicions of a "conflict of interest" in the MK's ruling. Some members of the public also consider the ruling to be "legally flawed" due to a lack of adherence to the "code of ethics."

Several public assumptions also highlight the privilege of being the "president's son" as being used in an unconstitutional manner. Additionally, the familial relationship between the president, as the executive institution, and the MK, as the judicial institution, is seen as a setback for the democratic system and constitutional governance. Some members of the public have even circulated the phrase "aib bangsa" (national disgrace) to express their discontent with both the MK's ruling and the MK itself. Various negative issues and criticisms from the public through the media have placed the MK's reputation in a state of crisis.

DISCUSSION

The researchers argued that media possess specific characteristics - or digital algorithms in the context of social media- that shape user culture (Meyrowitz, 2019). Likewise, users leverage specific media features to highlight particular issues (Gavra, et al., 2020). For instance, the thread feature on X facilitates the exploration of conversations between accounts, encouraging users to create posts in the form of text and interconnected comments, which aids in analyzing group coalitions. In contrast, the visual format on Instagram encourages users to upload more photos or videos. Many influencers or content creators highlight issues or persuade their followers by showcasing event footage, nature videos, or live occurrences (Rachmawati, 2022).

However, mass media does not frequently use hashtags or account mentions due to the one-way nature of communication (Hongcharu, 2024). Mass media platforms have incorporated comment features or hashtags. Therefore, digital data still analyzes the presence of communication forms involving hashtags or related keywords. Mass media facilitates interaction among readers and establishes communication channels between readers and the institution. This one-way communication nature actually becomes a strength for mass media in highlighting specific issues and steering the public discussion agenda. This means that mass media creates an impression that the information presented is more important than other news. Additionally, mass media often provides little space for interaction, especially for audiences holding differing views from the prevailing sentiment in the coverage.

In the discussion of reputation, a crisis occurs when there is a mismatch between public expectations and the institution's actions. An institution that is slow to respond or inadequately addresses public issues or criticisms will find its reputation in a state of crisis. In the context of the MK's reputation crisis, responsive actions, providing clarifications, and ensuring transparency of

information can help alleviate public dissatisfaction.

One of the characteristics of the MK's reputation crisis is the increasing uncertainty and distrust among the public. When a decision or action taken by an institution is perceived as opaque or unjust, the public tends to respond with skepticism and dissatisfaction. In the context of this research, the Constitutional Court's (MK) ruling regarding the age limit for presidential and vice-presidential candidates serves as a concrete example of an institution experiencing a reputation crisis, particularly among segments of society that feel the decision does not reflect public interests.

Additionally, another characteristic of the MK's reputation crisis is the rise of criticism and negative speculation in the media, both in mass media and on social media. As news of the MK's ruling spreads, critiques regarding the integrity and objectivity of the MK judges emerge rapidly. Media, as information dissemination agents, play a crucial role in shaping public opinion; when media highlight negative aspects of the ruling, it further tarnishes the MK's image. According to crisis management theory, the presence of dominant negative information can create a narrative that is difficult to reverse, requiring the institution to work diligently to restore its image after its reputation has been sullied.

The third characteristic of the MK's reputation crisis is the shift in public focus from the main issues to more personal elements, such as the character and background of the individuals involved. In the case of the MK, the public is not only concentrating on the legal decision but also beginning to question the credibility of the judges involved. This negative perception is often fueled by information circulating on social media, which can accelerate the spread of rumors and prejudices. When the public feels that the decisions made are not independent, it further contributes to the overall distrust of the institution.

CONCLUSION

Institutions experiencing a reputation crisis are characterized by public distrust, a dominance of negative criticism in the media, and a shift in attention from broader issues to the individual characteristics of those involved. In today's digital era, these challenges have become increasingly complex, given the potential of social media to accelerate the spread of information and public opinion. Therefore, a deep understanding of crisis management becomes crucial for effectively managing an institution's reputation.

The researcher recommends that institutions facing a reputation crisis take proactive steps to manage public perceptions. All members of the institution need to understand the importance of reputation management and ensure professionalism that aligns with public expectations. Institutions can leverage media platforms to share news about their achievements, the welfare of their members, or social programs.

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274