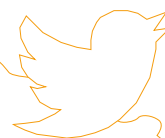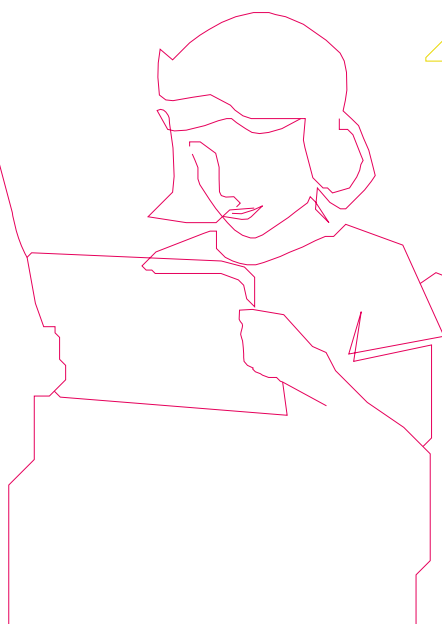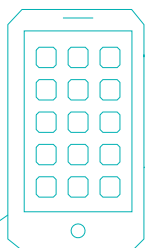# THE NEXT DIGITAL DECADE:

CASE STUDIES FROM ASIA

VOLUME 1 – TRACES AND DIVIDES

THE NEXT DIGITAL DECADE:

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VOLUME 1 – TRACES AND DIVIDES

FOREWORD

We're thrilled to launch a 2-part series, *The Next Digital Decade: Case Studies from Asia*. Volume 1, titled '*Traces and Divides*', reflects the path these case studies take: tracing the impact of the Internet on society, politics, and life in Asia, while identifying the many divides that persist. Asian societies are increasingly "digitally transformed", but the effects are unequally distributed, and often amplify long standing power imbalances along multiple axes.

At the heart of this project is the intention to find work on the region from within it, and to expand the discourse to include emerging scholars with unique vantage points. In this publication you will find a wide range of themes and authors from over 10 different countries in Asia, featuring established scholars and practitioners, as well as early career academics.

Asia has often been framed as a recipient of knowledge, a passive beneficiary of global best practices, and a target of development. This volume celebrates a more circular, bi-directional exchange. The "Western" English majority Internet is no longer the dominant paradigm. Local communities, governments, and companies are developing new applications and innovations, embedding local cultures and ideas in governance frameworks, e-commerce, and social media, and de-centering online spaces away from the global North.

The case studies were accepted in 2020, edited across 2021 – in "pandemic time" - and are being published now. Each piece went through rigorous editing process, including anonymous peer review by senior scholars and practitioners, who helped mentor these pieces towards readiness. Due to the longer than expected publishing cycle, some of the pieces – such as those which assess the early responses to COVID-19 by Asian governments, serve as a unique snapshot of a very particular moment, rather than a definitive or up-to-date analysis. We opted to preserve this "fly in amber" characteristic.

These works would not see light of day without the support of our partners, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Singapore. We are grateful to Christian Echle, Katharina Naumann and Ming Yin Ho for being outstanding collaborators whose investment in the vision for this project never wavered. We are also grateful to our editor, Ruchika Chanana, and the design team at yellow too, for shaping the final outputs. Above all, we thank all of our authors, whose work we are proud to share.

We hope you enjoy the rich diversity of this collection, and we invite you to dip into "*Volume 2: Spaces and Futures*" next.

Malavika Jayaram
Executive Director
Digital Asia Hub

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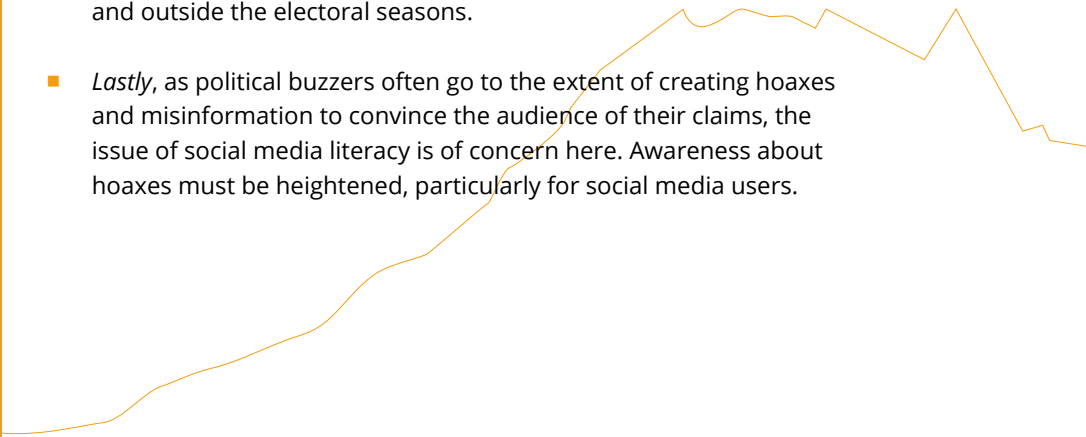
THE INDUSTRY OF POLITICAL BUZZING IN INDONESIA AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIAL MEDIA GOVERNANCE: EXAMINING VIRAL TWEETS

Dr Mirta Amalia
Klara Esti
Mohammad Rinaldi Camil

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- In the past few years, we have seen a surge in the use of buzzers on social media for promoting political agendas in Indonesia. A political buzzer is regarded as an individual who owns social media account(s) with thousands or millions of followers, and is assigned by the running candidates to amplify certain political issues by creating viral posts on social media.

- Political buzzing in Indonesia nowadays bears a negative connotation, as buzzers often craft opinions based on hoaxes and misinformation. Such practices deteriorate public conversation on social media, further perplexing social media governance.

- Issues concerning the ecosystem of political buzzing and its link with social media governance are underexplored. This qualitative study attempts to address this gap by exploring the actors behind the industry of political buzzing, examining buzzing strategies and investigating the virality of a message.

- This study finds three major players behind the political buzzing industry: (1) politicians and political parties as the clients; (2) marketing agencies as the mediators who maintain a central role in connecting the demand and supply of buzzers; and (3) the buzzers themselves whose target is to create viral posts. Understanding the logic of each actor is key to improving social media governance.

- Our findings shed a light on at least three aspects that should be considered for promoting social media governance in the context of political buzzing.

- *First*, the regulatory framework is the primary aspect to be addressed.

- *Second*, state capacity must be improved to enforce the laws, within and outside the electoral seasons.

- *Lastly*, as political buzzers often go to the extent of creating hoaxes and misinformation to convince the audience of their claims, the issue of social media literacy is of concern here. Awareness about hoaxes must be heightened, particularly for social media users.

Indonesia first saw the massive spread of political buzzing on social media in the 2012 Jakarta Gubernatorial Election. Political buzzing refers to an act of amplifying political issues. The term 'political buzzer' itself resonates with terms like 'trolls' in the Philippines,[1] and 'cyber troops' widely used in the US and the UK.[2]

During the 2012 election, buzzers were recruited by the running candidates to raise the public's awareness of the candidates and their programmes.[3] They were paid to post frequent updates on social media (mainly on Twitter) around issues relevant to the candidates. They were also often involved in offensive debates intended to smear the opponents' image.[4] While this practice is nothing new in politics, the use of hoaxes and misinformation to craft arguments attracted controversy.[5] Such practices distinctly deteriorated public debate, particularly on social media in Indonesia,[6] and contributed to bringing the issue of social media governance into the spotlight.

1 Ong, Jonathan Corpus and Jason Vincent A. Cabañes. 2018. "Architects of Networked Disinformation: Behind the Scenes of Troll Accounts and Fake News Production in the Philippines." (https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1075&context=communication_faculty_pubs).

2 Bradshaw, Samantha and Philip N. Howard. 2017. "Troops, trolls and troublemakers: A global inventory of organized social media manipulation." Computational Propaganda Research Project, Working Paper no. 2017.12.

3 "Complex vibrations: What drives political buzzers." Tempo, 6 December 2019. (https://en.tempo.co/read/1280726/complex-vibrations-what-drives-political-buzzers).

4 Lim, Merlyna. 2017. "Freedom to hate: social media, algorithmic enclaves, and the rise of tribal nationalism in Indonesia." Critical Asian Studies 49, 3.

5 Potkin, Fanny and Agustinus Beo Da Costa. 2019. "In Indonesia, Facebook and Twitter are 'buzzer' battlegrounds as elections loom." Reuters, 13 March. (https://www.reuters.com/article/us-indonesia-election-socialmedia-insigh/in-indonesia-facebook-and-twitter-are-buzzer-battlegrounds-as-elections-loom-idUSKBN1QU0AS).
Board, Jack. 2019. "Inside Indonesia's 'fake news' war room, fighting political hoaxes in election season." Channel News Asia, 13 April. (https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/indonesia-election-fake-news-war-room-fighting-political-hoaxes-11439398).
Lamb, Kate. 2018. "'I felt disgusted': Inside Indonesia's fake Twitter account factories." Guardian, 23 July. (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/23/indonesias-fake-twitter-account-factories-jakarta-politic).

6 Mohamad, Paramita. 2020. "Can think tanks save public debates from political buzzers?" Communication for Change, 12 June. (https://communicationforchange.id/can-think-tanks-save-public-debates-from-political-buzzers/).

Globally, a number of countries have drafted laws and regulations to address hate speech and fake news. These include Germany[7], Singapore[8], and Thailand[9]. However, the notion of governance is understood as broader than regulation and policy, stretching to the stakeholders participating in the process.[10] There is very little research that examines the ecosystem of political buzzing and its link with social media governance. This study attempts to address this gap by shedding light on the actors in the political buzzing industry and the buzzing strategies in Indonesia.

It is worth noting that this research was conducted in 2017.[11] The increasing use of social media in Indonesia has led to the growth of the political buzzing ecosystem. A recent report has revealed increased government spending on hiring influencers, from 17,6 billion Rupiahs (equivalent to US$ 118.000) in 2017, to 90,54 billion Rupiahs (equivalent to US$ 609.000) in 2020.[12] The term 'influencers' was specifically used as distinct from the term 'buzzers'. It is thus necessary to understand the characteristics of buzzers and influencers, which will be elaborated in subsequent sections of this paper. ∎

7   Echikson, Wiliam and Olivia Knodt. 2018. "Germany's NetzDG: A key test for combating online hate." CEPS Policy Insight, 22 November. (https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3300636).

8   Singapore Legal Advice. 2020. "Singapore Fake News Laws: Guide to POFMA (Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act)." (https://singapore-legaladvice.com/law-articles/singapore-fake-news-protection-online-falsehoods-manipulation/).

9   Ganjanakhundee, Supalak. 2020. "Social Media and Thailand's Struggle over Public Space." ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute Perspective 2020, No. 67.

10   Napoli, Philip M. 2015. "Social media and the public interest: Governance of news platforms in the realm of individual and algorithmic gatekeepers." Telecommunications Policy 39, 9.

11   Camil, Rinaldi, Natasha H. Attamimi, and Klara Esti. 2017. "Di Balik Fenomena Buzzer: Memahami Lanskap Industri dan Pengaruh Buzzer di Indonesia" (Behind the Scenes of the Buzzer Phenomenon: Understanding the Landscape of the Industry and the Influence of Buzzer in Indonesia). Jakarta: Centre for Innovation Policy and Governance.

12   Moch, Fiqih Prawira Adijie. 2020. "Jokowi administration spends Rp. 90.4 billion on 'influencers': ICW." The Jakarta Post, 20 August. (https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/08/20/jokowi-administration-spends-rp-90-4-billion-on-influencers-icw.html).

This study employs a combination of three methods to collect its data. The *first* is desk study, which helps identify the key events and the actors involved in the political buzzing industry. Because academic research on the political buzzing phenomenon is limited, we also turn to grey literature such as blogs and presentations.

The *second* method is semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The interviews are directed to reveal the emergence of the buzzer and the working mechanism of the buzzing industry. From February to April 2017, we conducted a total of ten individual, in-depth interviews, which consisted of five influencers, two public relations agencies, two social media experts, and one academic. Although the number of interviewees was small, our aim was to gain in-depth insights from experts who represent different groups of actors in the industry. We used snowball sampling in our attempts to harness more insights. During our interviews, we learned that political buzzing is a sensitive topic. Therefore, the names of interviewees presented here are not their real names.

The *third* method is social network analysis (SNA). For the purposes of this study, SNA helps to understand the spreading of a message and the typology of the messages that attracted the public's attention within a network. We took two Twitter networks from two influencers' accounts (i.e. @nukman & @ulinyusron) as our case study. We obtained their Twitter network data on 19 April 2017 for 24 hours; this was the day the 2017 Jakarta Gubernatorial Election took place. We retrieved tweets, converted data into Excel spreadsheets and extracted each user's data manually. We then categorized each user based on the reply, retweet and mention options in Twitter. As a result, we found 505 users in @nukman's network and 1,255 users in @ulinyusron's network. We applied the Kamada-Kawai graph partitioning algorithm[13] to generate the network layouts and analysed the spread of information within each network.

Although this research was conducted in 2017, it remains relevant in the current context as understanding buzzing is critical for developing regulatory frameworks of social media governance. ◾

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13 *Kamada-Kawai is an algorithm for drawing general undirected graphs. Kamada, Tomihisa and Satoru Kawai. 1989. "An algorithm for drawing general undirected graphs." Information processing letters 31, 1.*

WHAT CHARACTERISES A POLITICAL BUZZER?

Very little literature has specifically covered the discourse of political buzzing. As such, to construct our understanding, we draw from the literature of marketing, the practice from which buzzing originates.

Buzz marketing is defined as "the amplification of initial marketing efforts by third parties through their passive or active influence".[14] Buzzing is seen as an intensified form of word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing.[15] That is, two or more individuals exchange comments and thoughts about a certain product or service,[16] mostly through informal conversation.[17] Firms recruit people – some are paid, while others are volunteers– to go out and actively talk about a brand, a product or a service.[18] Those recruited people are referred to as 'buzzers' – the focal actors in the industry.

The aspect of influence as understood by Thomas[19] perhaps finds its root in a study of personal influence by Katz and Lazarsfeld.[20] Their studies found that 'opinion leaders' were more influential than mass-media on affecting people's voting decisions during the 1940 US Presidential Election. Katz and Lazarsfeld argue that being influential highly depends on one's structural position in a network: individuals may become opinion leaders if they have a strategic position that gives them an advantage for disseminating information and exerting personal influence.[21]

14 Thomas Jr., Greg Metz. 2004. "Building the buzz in the hive mind." Journal of Consumer Behaviour: An International Research Review 4, 1.

15 Carl, Walter J. 2006. "What's all the buzz about? Everyday communication and the relational basis of word-of-mouth and buzz marketing practices." Management Communication Quarterly 19, 4.
Kirby, Justin and Paul Marsden. 2006. Connected marketing: the viral, buzz and word of mouth revolution. London: Elsevier.
Rosen, Emanuel. 2002. The anatomy of buzz: How to create word of mouth marketing. New York: Doubleday.
Dye, Renée. 2000. "The buzz on buzz." Harvard business review 78, 6.

16 Arndt, Johan. 1967. "Word of mouth advertising: A review of the literature." Advertising Research Foundation.

17 Cross, Robert L. and Andrew Parker. 2004. The hidden power of social networks: Understanding how work really gets done in organizations. Boston: Harvard Business Press.

18 Kirby, Justin and Paul Marsden. 2006. Connected marketing: the viral, buzz and word of mouth revolution.

19 Thomas Jr., Greg Metz. 2004. "Building the buzz in the hive mind."

20 Katz, Elihu and Paul Lazarsfeld. 1955. Personal influence. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.
Keegan, Brendan J., Jennifer Rowley and Jane Tonge. 2017. "Marketing agency–client relationships: towards a research agenda." European Journal of Marketing.

21 Katz, Elihu and Lazarsfeld, Paul.1955. Personal influence.
Katz, Elihu. 1957. "The two-step flow of communication: An up-to-date report on an hypothesis." Public opinion quarterly 21, 1.
Keegan, Rowley, and Jane Tonge. 2017. "Marketing agency–client relationships: towards a research agenda."

Burt suggests that opinion leaders are basically brokers who carry information across social boundaries, between groups.[22] Subramani and Rajagopalan attest that they are mere knowledgeable helpers.[23] The emphasis tends to be on the function they perform, and their position in a relational network. They spread influence by giving advice and recommendations, serving as role models, persuading others, or by contagion – a process where ideas or behaviours are spread with neither initiator nor recipient being aware of any intentional attempt at influence.[24] These ways of influencing others then determine the nature to the type of relational network in which the opinion leaders are operating. For example, in a socio-centric network, influence is created by contagion,[25] whereas in an egocentric network, opinion leaders are deemed influential to their followers as they tend to possess a similarity of thought.[26]

In buzz marketing, agencies play a central role.[27] They are the matchmakers between the supply and demand for buzzing, and profit from it.[28] They are contacted by the clients and recruit the buzzers,[29] and also design, execute, monitor and evaluate the campaign.

The rapid growth of social media attracted the attention of agencies and buzzers alike. With user-generated content as its lifeblood, social media has to some extent changed the ways we communicate,[30] and the practice of buzz marketing follows suit.[31]

22 Burt, Ronald S. 1999. "The social capital of opinion leaders." The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 566, 1.

23 Subramani, Mani R. and Rajagopalan, Balaji. 2003. "Knowledgesharing and influence in online social networks via viral marketing." Communications of the ACM 46, 12.

24 Weimann, Gabriel. 1994. The influentials: People who influence people. New York: State University New York Press.

25 Burt, Ronald S. 1987. "Social contagion and innovation: Cohesion versus structural equivalence." American journal of Sociology 92, 6.

26 McPherson, Miller, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and James M. Cook. 2001. "Birds of a feather: Homophily in social networks." Annual review of sociology 27, 1.

27 Keegan, Rowley and Jane Tonge. 2017. "Marketing agency–client relationships: towards a research agenda."

28 Balter, David and John Butman. 2005. Grapevine: The new art of word-of-mouth marketing. New York, NY: Portfolio. Dye, Renée. 2000. "The buzz on buzz." Godin, Seth and Malcolm Gladwell. 2001. Unleashing the Ideavirus: Stop Marketing AT People! Turn Your Ideas into Epidemics by Helping Your Customers Do the Marketing Thing for You. New York: Hachette Books. Rosen, Emanuel. 2002. The anatomy of buzz: How to create word of mouth marketing.

29 Carl, Walter J. 2006. "What's all the buzz about? Everyday communication and the relational basis of word-of-mouth and buzz marketing practices." Management Communication Quarterly 19, 4.

30 Baruah, Trisha Dowerah. 2012. "Effectiveness of Social Media as a tool of communication and its potential for technology enabled connections: A micro-level study." International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications 2, 5.

31 Taufique, Khan and Faisal Mohammad Shahriar. 2011. "Online social media as a driver of buzz marketing: Who's riding?" International Journal of Online Marketing (IJOM) 1, 2.

Another stakeholder in the political buzzing industry is the politician. Political parties and figures recognise the need to market themselves,[32] and buzzing on social media helps them achieve this goal. Social media platforms offer opportunities for politicians to profile themselves.[33] Twitter, in particular, has been used actively by politicians, candidates and voters alike to generate a lot of buzz.[34]

Before we delve into the discussion, we first need to have a firm understanding of the characteristics of a political buzzer. We found none in the available literature, and so we conducted expert interviews. There are several uptakes from these interviews.

First, a buzzer possesses the ability to communicate their messages to their followers. This is important as buzzing requires exchanges of comments and thoughts.[35] Our interviews suggest that most buzzers have a journalistic background and are either bloggers or journalists. It makes them skilful and familiar with the entire process of content production. They also need to have a distinct and unique point of view which makes them stand out from the crowd and be followed by others, as the audience views the buzzers as 'knowledgeable helpers.[36]

The *second* characteristic is their ability to influence others. Although the majority of our expert interviewees suggest that a buzzer can indeed influence their followers, it is interesting to note that not all of the interviewed experts agree with this. One expert states that buzzers are simply a type of commercial service, actually powerless and with no influence on the audience, merely drawing their attention.[37] This suggests that, recalling Thomas'[38] defini-

32 Scammell, Margaret. 1999. "Political marketing: Lessons for political science." Political studies 47, 4.
O'Cass, Aron. 1996. "Political marketing and the marketing concept." European Journal of Marketing European Journal of Marketing 30, 10/11.
Lock, Andrew and Phill Harris. 1996. "Political marketing-vive la différence!" European Journal of Marketing 30, 10/11.

33 Kruikemeier, Sanne, Guda van Noort, and Rens Vliegenthart. 2013. "The relationship between campaigning on Twitter and electoral support: Present or absent." Conference papers: International Communication Association: Annual Meeting Vol. 2013.

34 Murthy, Dhiraj. 2015. "Twitter and elections: are tweets, predictive, reactive, or a form of buzz?" Information Communication & Society 18, 7.

35 Arndt, Johan. 1967. "Word of mouth advertising: A review of the literature."

36 Subramani, Mani R. and Balaji Rajagopalan. 2003. "Knowledgesharing and influence in online social networks via viral marketing."

37 Enda Nasution, Social Media Expert, interview, 24 February 2017.

38 Thomas Jr., Greg Metz. 2004. "Building the buzz in the hive mind."

tion, buzzers exert "passive influence". It differentiates them from 'influencers', i.e. trusted individuals with a large social network who "supply the authority that allows a message to be conveyed quickly and reliably through WOM techniques".[39] As indicated by the term, it is the 'influencers' who exercise a more "active influence".

The *third* characteristic is they are known for having a vast network of social media followers. The attention of a large audience needs to be drawn for a buzz to be created. Otherwise, the logic of buzz marketing to amplify a message, as suggested by Thomas[40], will likely fail.

Our analyses suggest that a buzzer signifies the characteristics of an 'opinion leader'. However, given that they are merely exercising passive influence, they are deemed rather as – borrowing from Burt[41] – 'opinion brokers', who carry information across social boundaries. It is the 'influencers' whose opinions are sought, implying they are the 'opinion leaders'.

To put it simply, the objective of buzzers is to solely stimulate a buzz, i.e. "contagious talk" about a certain issue.[42] In our specific context, a political buzzer is therefore seen as an individual or an online account with the capability to amplify messages by drawing the netizen's attention, and create conversations on anything that relates to politics. In the social media realm, being 'contagious' means going viral.[43] As such, examining the aspect of virality is key to investigating the practice of buzzing. ◼

39 *Kiss, Christine, and Martin Bichler. 2008. "Identification of influencers – measuring influence in customer networks." Decision Support Systems 46, 1.*

40 *Thomas Jr., Greg Metz. 2004. "Building the buzz in the hive mind."*

41 *Burt, Ronald S. 1999. "The social capital of opinion leaders."*

42 *Carl, Walter J. 2006. "What's all the buzz about? Everyday communication and the relational basis of word-of-mouth and buzz marketing practices." Management Communication Quarterly 19, 4.*

43 *Berger, Jonah. 2016. Contagious: Why things catch on. New York: Simon and Schuster*

The industry of political buzzing has further complicated social media governance. This section explores the actors behind the industry of political buzzing, examines their buzzing strategies and investigates the virality of a message.

1. The Context

Indonesia is an archipelagic country located in South-East Asia, inhabited by over 260 million people spread across 17,000 islands. In 2019, its GDP was around US$ 1 trillion, making it the 16th largest economy in the world.[44] There were 175.4 million internet users in Indonesia by January 2020, of which 160 million are social media users.[45] Economic activities mostly take place in the island of Java, particularly in Jakarta – the capital of Indonesia.

Indonesia has had a multi-party political system since 1999, with 9 parties represented in national and regional legislatures and 11 additional parties only represented in regional legislatures. These parties and political figures indeed use the media – both conventional and digital – for political communication, but regulations and the state capacity to govern the practice are not well integrated.

There are three laws related to our discussion. One, there is the General Election Committee Regulation no. 23/2018 on electoral campaigns, including the use of social media during campaigns. Two, with regard to advertisements, there is the Indonesian Broadcast Law no. 32/2002 supported by the Indonesian Code of Ethics for Advertisers. However, advertising for politics is not specifically mentioned here. Three, one law governs the use of the Internet, i.e. the Indonesian Law for Electronic Information and Transaction no. 11/2008. Again, the issue of social media governance is not specifically addressed. There is thus a clear lack of integrated regulatory frameworks for social media governance.

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44 *World Bank. 2020. "Indonesia – Data." (https://data.worldbank.org/country/indonesia).*

45 *Datareportal, 2020. "Digital 2020: Indonesia." (https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-indonesia).*

In terms of state capacity, there is the Indonesian Election Supervisory Board which supervises the conduct of elections, including the practices of political parties. However, the Board only operates during electoral seasons. Anything that happens outside the electoral season is practically under-supervised.

2. Characterising the Network

Making a message or tweet go viral is crucial for online influencers and buzzers alike. Investigating the virality of a message could shed light on the strategy undertaken by influencers to create a viral message and the characters of the network. Here, we examine viral tweets from two influencers during the 2017 Jakarta Gubernatorial Election date.

Within a day (19 April 2017), Nukman produced nine tweets, triggering a total of 511 responses (488 retweets, 12 replies, 11 mentions) from 505 accounts.

Figure 1: The Network of @nukman, 19 April 2017.
Network Measures: N=505; d=0.01248505; 4-core.
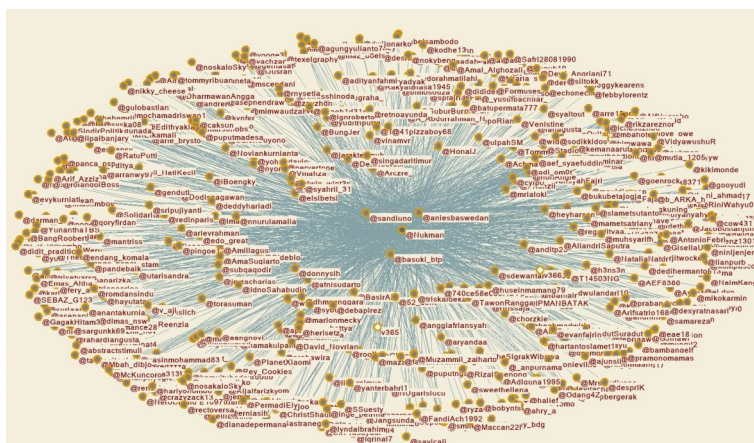
Source: Camil et al (2017)

Illustrated in Figure 1, Nukman's network demonstrates a strong egocentric pattern with limited interaction between nodes. Nukman himself had become the primary core and remained the core source of information. Every interaction in the network had a direct connection to Nukman without any discussion among users. It represents a two-step flow of information in which an opinion leader spreads information from the media to a wider population.[46]

Figure 2: The Network of @ulinyusron, 19 April 2017. Network Measures: N=1,255; d=0.00366597; 8-core.
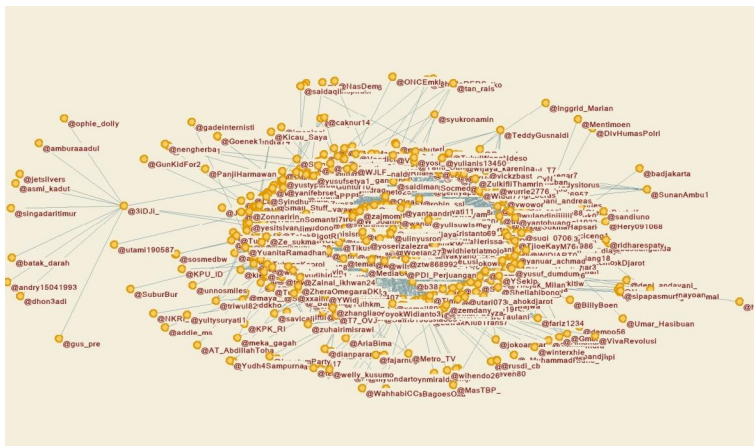
Source: Camil et al (2017)

On the same day (19 April 2017), Ulin Yusron produced 14 tweets via Twitter with the highest response tweet (331 retweets and 120 likes) attached with photos and text. In one day, the interaction generated by Ulin successfully invited a total of 1,584 responses (1,411 retweets, 131 replies, and 42 mentions) from 1,255 accounts.

Depicted in Figure 2, Ulin's network shows heterogeneous interactions with reactions from its audience ranging from agreement to strong disagreement toward the message. This creates a socio-centric network which represents a high intensity of message/

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46 *Katz, Elihu. 1957. "The two-step flow of communication: An up-to-date report on an hypothesis." Public opinion quarterly 21, 1.*

content distribution across a network. Borrowing the idea of Burt (1987), this socio-centric network shows a contagion process, which generates adoption behaviour within groups. This inter-action and network structure affects the concentration of power as people begin to argue and address the content. It means that he has the ability to spread word about the issue, and likewise, spread information, access new ideas, and trigger discussion. The key characteristic of this network is the influencer's ability to create a discourse by becoming the centre of the issues' polarity as well as an important hub in the network.

3. How the Tweets Went Viral

We also examine the tweets from both influencers that went viral, i.e. tweets receiving the highest responses.

Figure 3: Tweet from @nukman That Earned the Highest Responses on 19 April 2017

	English translation:
Nukman Luthfie @nukman	"Salute to @basuki_btp. A 70% satisfaction level is an extraordinary achievement. Hopefully it becomes an encouragement for @aniesbaswedan and @sandiuno."

Source: Camil et al (2017)

In a tweet from Nukman (depicted in Figure 3) that earned the highest responses, he strategically embeds an online news link on which he based his opinion and mentions three Twitter accounts that belong to the competing candidates. His tweet has a positive tone, appreciating the late governor (@basuki_btp), while encourag-ing the newly elected candidates to work.

Figure 4: Tweet from @ulinyusron That Earned the Highest Responses on 19 April 2017

English translation:

"The tour of fraud* was caught by the authorities. Anis Sandi are found guilty (of election fraud)."

*) The term "tour of fraud" symbolizes the many frauds that have been allegedly committed by one of the candidates.
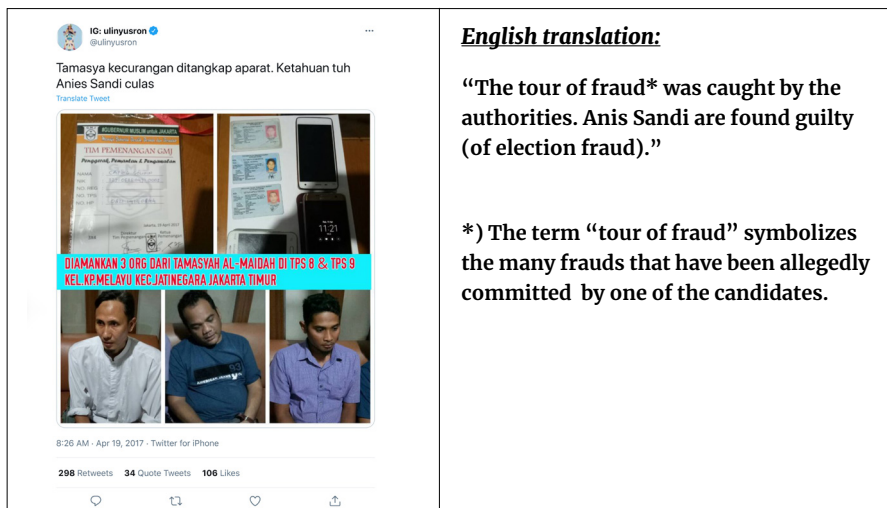
Source: Camil et al (2017)

On the other hand, Ulin's tweet with the highest response (illustrated in Figure 4) attached a photo collage and a text "Three people were arrested from Al-Maida tour (of cheat/fraud) at polling station 8 and 9 in Kampung Melayu, Jatinegara, East Jakarta". This provocative tweet triggered other accounts to express their opinions. Ulin became the centre of issues polarity and one of the most primary hubs of all. In Ulin's network, people were still concentrated to him, but they also engaged with other accounts.

From these two instances, we learn that there are numerous ways to make a tweet go viral, an important method of creating a buzz on Twitter. Considering its importance, we explore the different strategies of making tweets viral in the following section.

4. The Strategies of Political Buzzers

With the increasing users and conversations on social media, political buzzers need to strategise so as to generate a buzz. As one of our interviewees reveals,

❝The intention is indeed to draw people's attention by making noise. The noise is like a lure, when noise is huge, people get curious, 'What is this sudden noise?' They click and see, 'Oh, it's about this [issue].' So, the primary function of buzzer is to create noise, a lot."[47]

A buzzer's success is often measured by making a certain issue a trending topic, as it means they reach a wider audience[48] and people begin talking about it,[49] thereby implying that a buzz is happening. This study finds that buzzers employ three key strategies.

First, a unique hashtag (#) is created with a catchy phrase designed to deliver the message. A team of buzzers usually agrees upon the hashtag then tweets it at the same time according to the schedule. An organised deployment speeds up the hashtag to become a trending topic. Hashtags are used as a means to coordinate a distributed discussion, as suggested by Bruns and Burgess.[50]

Second, a buzzer often embeds a link or a screenshot from a news portal to make his/her tweets look credible – thus, more convincing.[51] Some even go further by creating a fake news portal and linking click-bait, which are common practices for spreading misinformation on Twitter.[52] Messaging applications help spread provocative content easily. Buzzers usually join several chat groups, each with hundreds of members, and circulate the content from their own circles.

47 *Edo, Buzzer, interview, 22 February 2017.*

48 *Chang, Hsia-Ching. 2010. "A new perspective on Twitter hashtag use: Diffusion of innovation theory." Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology 47, 1.*

49 *Arndt, Johan. 1967. "Word of mouth advertising: A review of the literature."*

50 *Bruns, Axel and Jean E. Burgess. 2011. "The use of Twitter hashtags in the formation of ad hoc publics." Proceedings of the 6th European consortium for political research (ECPR) general conference 2011.*

51 *Gupta, Aditi and Ponnurangam Kumaraguru. 2012. "Credibility ranking of tweets during high impact events." Proceedings of the 1st workshop on privacy and security in online social media, Volume April.*

52 *Shao, Chengcheng et al. 2017. "The spread of fake news by social bots." Indiana University. (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318671211_The_spread_of_fake_news_by_social_bots).*

Finally, buzzers may create conversation by splitting the team into two opposing groups. Each group then develops the content accordingly, agreeing upon a specific hashtag and tweeting schedule. These groups – which actually belong to the same buzzing team working for the same agency and client – will then initiate a discussion or start a Twitter war about the issue. Such a strategy can provoke curious netizens to get involved, as the issue receives wider attention. As suggested by many scholars[53], these conversations serve as the basis for a buzz to happen.

The above-mentioned strategies ride on a Twitter algorithm, as suggested by Lotan[54], that favours a sharp spike rather than gradual sustained growth. This means that for a topic to become a trend, it has to be popular – a lot of people tweeting about it in a short period of time. It can be a new topic that has never been popular before, or a recurring topic that is picked up by a new group of people. So the abovementioned effective strategies revolve around increasing the reach of the message – in other words, making the message viral.

5. The Actors Within the Industry of Political Buzzing

The preceding section demonstrates that for buzzers to succeed, they cannot operate on their own. While buzzers are on the front line, there are other important actors that carry out the work of the industry. Social media governance requires in-depth insights about the actors involved in the industry.

In the buzzing industry, as depicted in Figure 5, there are three actors. Clients procure the buzzing service through a marketing agency, who then hire buzzers to carry out the required tasks. This section will elaborate on each of these actors.

53 Carl, Walter J. 2006. "What's all the buzz about? Everyday communication and the relational basis of word-of-mouth and buzz marketing practices."
Cross, Robert L. and Andrew Parker. 2004. The hidden power of social networks: Understanding how work really gets done in organizations.
Arndt, Johan. 1967. "Word of mouth advertising: A review of the literature."

54 Lotan, Gilad. 2015. "#FreddieGray – is not trending on Twitter?" Medium, 24 April. (https://medium.com/i-data/freddiegray-is-not-trending-on-twitter-9e4550607a39).

Figure 5: Workflow in the Commercial Buzzing Industry

Workflow in the Buzzing Industry

→ Flow of money

Corporate
I want to promote my product! *I want people to know my brand!* *I want to boost my sales!*

Political Party/Figure
I want to promote my myself! *I want people to know me!* *I want to boost my popularity!*

Agency
Media Monitoring   Content Writer
Internal Buzzing Team

Buzzer– Influencer – Key Opinion Leader

Working as a team	Working individually
Lead Buzzer Buzzer Buzzer Buzzer Buzzer	Buzzer Buzzer Buzzer Buzzer

Source: Camil et al (2017)

5.1 The Clients: Political Parties and Figures

In the industry of political buzzing, the politicians act as the clients.

> ❝ *... Politics enter that field because a number of researches tell that social media conversation and positive sentiment determine someone's electability. That's why we see the emergence of agencies undertaking social media surveys, such as Sentigram and Politicawave. This ecosystem has pushed political entities to use buzzers. Buzzer that was previously used to promote products, now has moved to politics."* [55]

As implied in the above interview, buzzing is a way to market the politicians' image and to make their programmes known to the public. [56] As illustrated in Figure 5, politicians contact and pay marketing agencies for buzzing services. We, however, did not interview any political actors for this study. Therefore, many areas, including how and when they procure the buzzing service, or the evaluative mechanisms they use need to be explored further from their perspective.
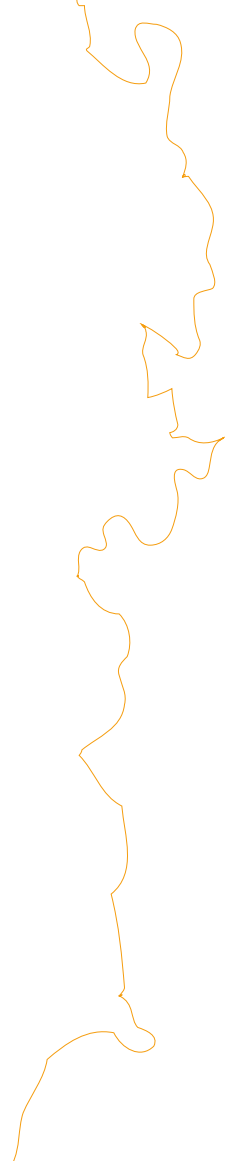
5.2 The Agency: A Mediating Actor

Another actor in the political buzzing industry is the marketing agency. As implied in Figure 5, agencies act as intermediaries between politicians and buzzers. [57] They are responsible for buzzer recruitment, content strategy, and execution. Their main purpose is to market the image of the politician.

One crucial step undertaken by the agency is to match the influencers and the issue. In the realm of Twitter, the agency does this by carefully looking into the timeline history. Frequently, the agency acquires assistance from buzzer scouts or head-hunters who specialise in mapping buzzers/influencers. The characteristics of the clients and their target audience affect the choice of social media to be used as the buzzing platform.

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55 *Ujo, Buzzer-Online Influencer, interview, 27 March 2017.*

56 *Scammel, Margaret. 1999. "Political marketing: Lessons for political science." O'Cass, Aron. 1996. "Political marketing and the marketing concept."*

57 *Confirming, among others Balter, David and John Butman. 2005. Grapevine: The new art of word-of-mouth marketing; Dye, Renee. 2000. "The buzz on buzz."; Godin, Seth and Malcolm Gladwell. 2001. Unleashing the Ideavirus.*

Our study further reveals that not all of the agencies operate legally. There are some agencies who work 'under the shadow', and are often linked with negative or black campaigns. These agencies work to improve and maintain their client's image by constantly defaming their clients' competitors.[58] They are able to recruit massive numbers of voluntary buzzers. Messaging applications play a central role in the recruitment and coordination process. The agencies create chat groups for these purposes, consisting of individuals who are willing to quickly engage in discussion and in spreading the issue. In order to build discourse and draw the public's attention, the agencies often create an online news portal. They recruit individuals to write articles, often with bombastic titles as click bait. One of our interviewees shares this basic process of hoax production.

> ❞❞*The package might include creating fake online media, along with numbers of accounts to spread the content from that fake online media. Short information, teasers are spread through social media accounts, but the longer information is provided on the web, it appears like coming from a reputable online media..."*[59]

The abovementioned instances are evidence that a blueprint of regulation for social media governance cannot but address the crucial role of marketing agencies in the industry of political buzzing.

5.3 The Buzzers: How They Came About
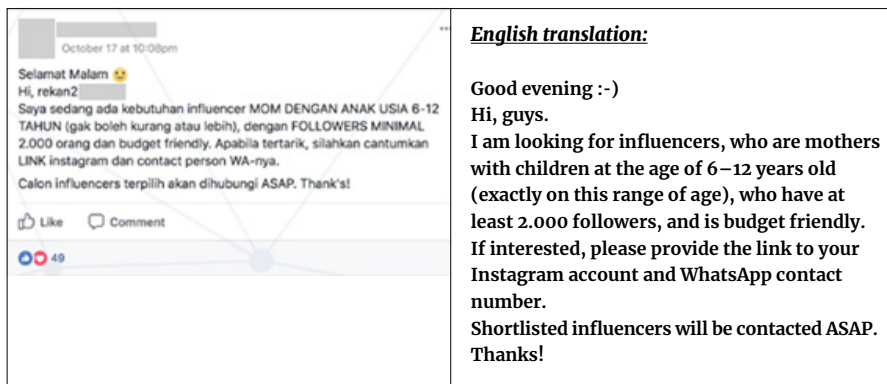
The other actors are the buzzers themselves. A buzzer is enlisted through open recruitment and scouting. For the first, the agency representatives announce the need for buzzers/influencers with specific criteria (Figure 6 illustrates an example of the announcement).

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58 *Rahman, Media Consultant, interview, 9 March 2017.*

59 *Yogi, Media Consultant, interview, 16 March 2017.*

Figure 6: A Facebook Post in a Closed Group (17/10/2017) Announcing the Need for Influencer Mom

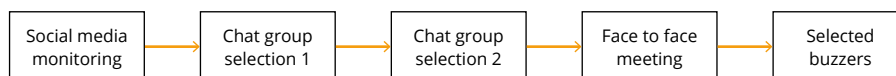|	
October 17 at 10:08pm Selamat Malam 😊 Hi, rekan2 Saya sedang ada kebutuhan influencer MOM DENGAN ANAK USIA 6-12 TAHUN (gak boleh kurang atau lebih), dengan FOLLOWERS MINIMAL 2.000 orang dan budget friendly. Apabila tertarik, silahkan cantumkan LINK instagram dan contact person WA-nya. Calon influencers terpilih akan dihubungi ASAP. Thank's! 👍 Like 　💬 Comment 😊❤️ 49	*__English translation:__* **Good evening :-)** **Hi, guys.** **I am looking for influencers, who are mothers with children at the age of 6 – 12 years old (exactly on this range of age), who have at least 2.000 followers, and is budget friendly. If interested, please provide the link to your Instagram account and WhatsApp contact number.** **Shortlisted influencers will be contacted ASAP. Thanks!**

Source: Camil et al (2017)

In terms of scouting, a direct approach and tiered selection are common practices to recruit political buzzers. A marketing agency might directly approach a buzzer, as explained by one of our interviewees below.

> ❝ *Usually, the agency or the (candidate's/party's) communication team contacts me. They give me the concept, then we discuss the range of services, the payment, and the time period. I execute that concept in various tweets in a certain period of time based on what we have agreed. That's all. I set my rate, for them to see how much I want to be paid to do this [service]."* [60]

Agencies also recruit large numbers of political buzzers through tiered selections. In such a process, the agency monitors social media accounts that have actively retweeted, shared, and liked certain issues. Those active accounts are then admitted to a chat group. As the process moves along, individuals who quickly engage in the discussion and spread the issue are then admitted to another chat group and eventually get invited to meet the 'lead buzzer' (Figure 7

60 *Ariel, Buzzer, interview, 14 March 2017.*

illustrates the process). A lead buzzer is responsible for coordinating a team of fellow buzzers during a certain campaign. Even though it is not a formally assigned role, only seasoned buzzers occupy such a position, thus receiving higher payment.

Figure 7: The Political Buzzers Tiered Selection

| Social media monitoring | → | Chat group selection 1 | → | Chat group selection 2 | → | Face to face meeting | → | Selected buzzers |

Source: Camil et al (2017)

This understanding of how a buzzer comes about sheds a light on some of the critical issues of political buzzers as a profession. In Indonesia, political buzzing is yet to be acknowledged as a legitimate profession, thus complicating its accountability.

Our findings and analysis are evidence that the industry of political buzzing has formed a complex and rich ecosystem. These accounts also display the complexity involved in social media governance. Nevertheless, efforts to govern social media should be carried out promptly, before the growth of the industry increases the entanglements. ■

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Many experts and the civil society have expressed their apprehensions about how political buzzers have deteriorated the quality of public debate. Indonesian society has experienced how political buzzers can leverage the convenience of social media to disseminate their propaganda. This phenomenon further adds to the complexity of social media governance.

The efforts to govern social media, specifically in the context of political buzzing, can happen on multiple dimensions. Our findings have shed light on at least three aspects of this. *First*, a regulatory framework is perhaps the primary aspect to be addressed. For this, regulators must have a firm definition of what characterises a buzzer.

Understanding other actors involved in the industry is crucial to discern their roles in it, and thus to govern them. Ethics directives must also be imposed to safeguard the public. Having in-depth insights into the strategies enacted by political buzzers would help to rectify the practice. Our findings particularly reveal that some political buzzers went to the extent of creating fake news portals in order to convince the public of their claims. Regulators should therefore also address the issues of eradicating hoaxes and misinformation.

The analysis of the virality of a message can be employed to understand how influential a buzzer's account is, and its role in the network. Authorities could map the key accounts associated with certain political party, figure or campaign. This could in turn offer useful insights for investigations into cases of black campaigns and the spreading of hoaxes and misinformation.

The *second* effort concerns improving state capacity. When the regulations are in place, there should be an assigned authority to enforce the laws, within and outside the electoral seasons. The need to have a state board to supervise the conduct of political parties, including their use of political buzzers, is imperative to have as part of the social media governance.

Lastly, as our findings reveal that political buzzers go to the extent of creating hoaxes and misinformation to convince the audience, the issue of social media literacy[61] is of concern here. Awareness of hoaxes needs to be improved, particularly for social media users. That way, they will have better judgment while deciding which claims are based on true evidence and which are not, thus limiting the spread of false information and news.

These findings highlight the importance of social media governance, particularly in the context of curbing political buzzers. Experts, civil societies, and members of the public alike should be summoned to work along with the authorities for this task. This is, at the very least, necessary to halt the deterioration of public debate. ▪

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61 *Or 'information literacy', as suggested by Jones Jones-Jang, S. Mo, Tara Mortensen, and Jingjing Liu. 2019. "Does media literacy help identification of fake news? Information literacy helps, but other literacies don't." American Behavioral Scientist.*

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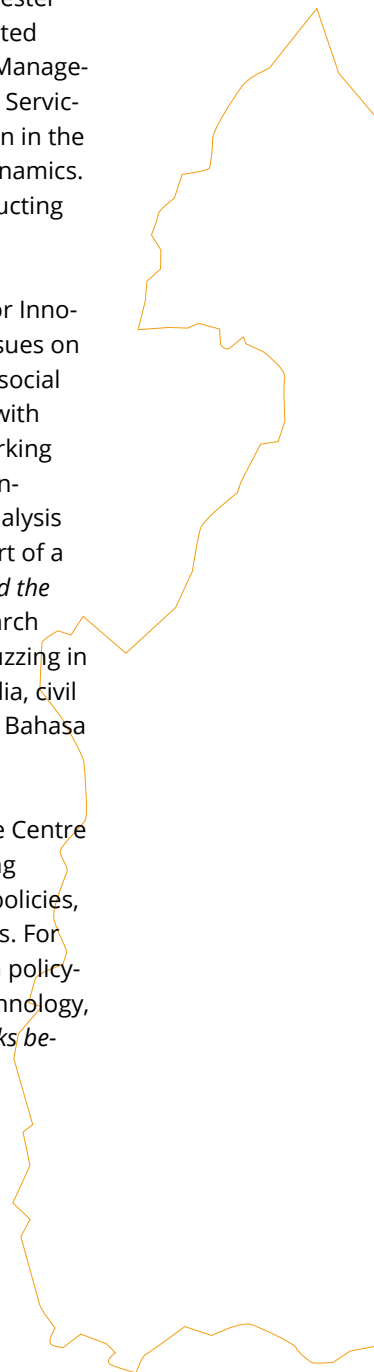
hind the Buzz: Unravelling the Industry of Noise in Indonesia – one of the pioneer studies on political buzzing in Indonesia which received extensive attention from the media, civil society and members of the public alike (Research report in Bahasa Indonesia is available at https://cipg.or.id/buzzer/).

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