

Election Communication: The Existence Of Campaigns In The Digital Era

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Abstract

This article examines electoral communication and the effectiveness of digital campaigns in the new media era thru a literature review approach. The development of digital technology has changed the patterns of political communication, particularly in campaign strategies that now utilize social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube as the main means of reaching voters. The research method used is a literature review by analyzing various scientific sources, such as books, national journals, and official reports relevant to political communication and digital campaigns. Digital campaigns have a high effectiveness in increasing communication reach, engagement, and influencing voter attitudes and behaviors. This is supported by the interactive, participatory, and real-time characteristics of digital media. In addition, the use of creative strategies such as visual content, storytelling, and the utilization of social media trends has proven to enhance the appeal of campaign messages. Data shows that the high internet usage in Indonesia strengthens the chances of success for digital campaigns in shaping public opinion and increasing political participation. However, digital campaigns also face various challenges, such as the spread of misinformation, information overload, political polarization, and the technological access gap in society. Therefore, appropriate communication strategies are needed, including audience segmentation, message consistency, and the use of suitable media to ensure the campaign runs optimally. The conclusion of this research emphasizes that digital campaigns have become an important instrument in electoral communication in the digital era, provided they are conducted adaptively, innovatively, and ethically to support the quality of democracy.

Keywords: Political Communication, Digital Campaign, Effectiveness, Election, Digital Era

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INTRODUCTION

Elections (PEMILU) are a form of democratic event in determining choices and nominating several qualified candidates to lead a region. The community that has met the requirements and age must certainly contribute to determining their choice. Elections are a political process conducted regularly every five years, as stipulated by Article 22 E paragraph 6 of the 1945 Constitution, which essentially explains that the purpose of these elections is to elect members of the People's Representative Council (DPR), Regional Representative Council (DPD), Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), as well as the president and vice president. The principles applied in the conduct of elections are direct, universal, free, secret, honest, and fair. This aims to maintain the integrity and quality of the

electoral process. To determine their choice, the public must be more prudent in selecting candidates, ensuring that the candidates' backgrounds align with the community's expectations and that their vision and mission can contribute to the development of the region. With the alignment between the vision-mission and the hopes of the community, the shared goals of the election can be achieved. Political communication is not a standalone function, but rather a process of conveying messages that occurs during the six stages (socialization, political recruitment, interest formulation, interest aggregation, rule-making, rule application, and rule adjudication) while other functions are being carried out (Mukarom, 2016). In the Digital Era, candidates choose media as a promotional platform, allowing the reach of their campaigns to be widespread, along with their vision, mission, and work programs if elected.

The Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) plays a crucial role in ensuring the continuity of democracy and the legitimacy of election results. With the enactment of Law Number 7 of 2017 on General Elections, the Election Supervisory Body is expected to carry out its duties effectively in addressing various violations, including those occurring in the digital realm (Raihan et al.: 2024). The fact shows that the youth, who will dominate 60% of the votes in the 2024 elections, are very close to the digital world. This creates both opportunities and risks for the integrity of the election, especially concerning the spread of disinformation and manipulation of public opinion thru digital media. The use of internet media in political communication has become a new phenomenon that is interesting for contemporary study. Entering the reform era, the phenomenon of growth and development of democracy in the homeland is progressing positively, having placed the principles of a democratic state more firmly. Those principles are the sovereignty of the people, freedom of expression, the supremacy of law, and the enforcement of human rights. Bawaslu has shown awareness of the importance of adapting to the digital era. This institution has begun developing innovations such as the Election Supervision System (Siwaslu) application and Gomaslu to enhance the effectiveness of supervision (Mahdi: 2024). The increase in campaign activities on social media has brought about significant changes with the development of social media and other media platforms. This article will focus on discussing the opportunities and challenges faced by both voters and candidates.

In this study, the author uses a qualitative approach to analyze and understand electoral communication in the digital era. The qualitative method can provide the author with an in-depth understanding to discuss various social and communication phenomena in elections, exploring various digital campaign activities. The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the landscape of political communication. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), and TikTok have become dominant channels for political actors to engage directly with voters without the mediation of traditional mass media. This shift marks a transition from conventional campaign strategies toward more interactive, personalized, and data-driven communication models. In this context, digital campaigns are not merely tools for information dissemination but also instruments for shaping political narratives, constructing candidate images, and mobilizing voter participation.

From a theoretical perspective, electoral communication in the digital era can be understood through the lens of mediatization and network society theory. The concept of mediatization emphasizes how media logic increasingly influences political processes, while the network society highlights the role of digital connectivity in restructuring social and political interactions. These frameworks suggest that political campaigns are no longer confined to physical spaces but extend into virtual environments where information flows rapidly and continuously. As a result, candidates must adapt their communication strategies to align with the dynamics of digital audiences, who tend to prefer concise, visual, and engaging content.

However, the expansion of digital campaign practices also raises critical concerns regarding the quality of democracy. The proliferation of misinformation, echo chambers, and algorithm-driven content distribution can distort public perception and polarize society. In many cases, political messages are simplified or manipulated to attract attention rather than to educate voters. This phenomenon challenges the normative ideals of democratic communication, which emphasize rational deliberation and informed decision-making. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of digital electoral communication becomes essential for evaluating both its benefits and its potential threats to democratic processes.

In the Indonesian context, the integration of digital media into electoral campaigns reflects broader socio-political transformations driven by technological adoption. With high internet penetration and active social media usage, Indonesia represents a fertile ground for digital political engagement. Nevertheless, disparities in digital literacy among voters remain a significant issue, affecting their ability to critically evaluate political information. This condition underscores the importance of strengthening digital literacy and ethical political communication to ensure that technological advancements contribute positively to democratic consolidation.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method to analyze electoral communication in the digital era. The qualitative approach was chosen because it can deeply explore social and communication phenomena, particularly related to political communication practices and digital campaigns. Literature study is the collection of data and information thru books, papers, the internet, and other scientific works in order to obtain information related to theories and concepts that pertain to the research problem (Qaiyim;2018).

Thru a literature review, the researchers collected and examined various academic sources such as books, scientific journals, and relevant official reports to understand the values, norms, and communication patterns that develop in the context of elections. The research design used is descriptive qualitative, with the aim of systematically describing and interpreting the phenomenon of electoral communication and the effectiveness of digital campaigns. This research focuses on identifying patterns, strategies, opportunities, and challenges of digital

campaigns based on a literature review. Thus, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how digital media transforms political communication and influences voter behavior.

The subjects of this research are not humans, but rather documentation sources in the form of academic references relevant to the research topic. The data collection technique was carried out thru documentation, namely by identifying, selecting, and reviewing relevant literature. The collected data is then analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis techniques thru the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, resulting in systematic, interpretative findings based on a strong theoretical foundation (Sugiyono: 2018).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Elections

Elections are a democratic process in which citizens directly choose their representatives or government officials. The determination of citizens and the policies to be implemented (Aggi et al.: 2024), elections are an important mechanism in the modern democratic system. The main purpose of elections is to provide the community with the opportunity to discuss their rights and choose representatives who uphold moral principles and can select candidates or political parties. Furthermore, elections are used to select political officials at the national, regional, and city levels. The use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter allows candidates to reach voters more broadly and directly. digital campaigns can reach various demographics, from young people to adults. Political communication on social media networks (especially Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, etc.) is facilitated by the interconnectedness of visual, textual, and verbal images (Tosepu, 2018).\

The 2024 Indonesia Digital Report shows that Indonesia is experiencing rapid development in the use of digital technology. The population reached approximately 278.7 million people, with 185.3 million internet users or about 66.5% of the total population. In addition, there are around 139 million social media users, which is equivalent to almost half of the national population. The use of digital devices is also very high, marked by 353.3 million mobile connections, which exceeds the population because many individuals have more than one device. In general, Indonesian society uses the internet for various needs, such as seeking information, communication, entertainment, and keeping up with news developments. The high usage of social media indicates that digital platforms have become an important part of daily life and a primary means of communication, including in the context of campaigns and political communication in the digital era (We Are Social & Hootsuite (2024):

From this data, the Indonesian society spends part of its time in the virtual world, whether to find information, build relationships and connections with family or friends, or use media as entertainment to watch videos and monitor the development of ongoing trends. Social media also provides a platform for direct interaction between candidates and voters. Candidates can answer questions, listen to complaints, and receive real-time feedback. This creates a more personal relationship and increases public trust. The impact of political communication strategies used on social media is also the focus of analysis. The research found

that effective strategies can have a significant impact on voter opinion and behavior. Concrete data evidence shows that high engagement in political campaigns on social media can increase political awareness and voter participation (Williams & Gulati, 2020).

Digital Campaign

In the context of Indonesian society, the term campaign is often associated with political activities. Based on the definition in the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language (KBBI), a campaign is defined as an activity carried out by political organizations or competing individual candidates to obtain a specific position, such as in parliament, with the aim of gaining support from the voting public in an electoral process (KBBI;2016). Digital campaign or digital campaign is a series of marketing activities conducted online to promote products, services, or brands. Digital campaigns include several elements, such as social media, online ads, email campaigns, and others. The function of a digital campaign is to increase brand awareness, expand reach, enhance audience engagement, provide flexibility, boost customer loyalty, and increase traffic to websites and social media (Khina Januar n.d).

Digital campaigns are often more economical compared to traditional methods such as banners or television ads. By leveraging viral content and online campaigns, candidates can save costs without reducing the effectiveness of the message conveyed. Data Analysis and Targeting. The digital era enables in-depth data analysis. Candidates can leverage demographic and user behavior data to target their messages more precisely, thereby increasing the chances of attracting relevant voters.

The digital era has created new spaces for interaction between organizers and organizers, organizers and citizens, as well as among citizens. Citizens can freely report electoral violations thru the provided platforms, such as the Gowaslu platform (Mahpudin, 2021). There are several main challenges in digital campaigns, one of which is information overload. Voters are often faced with many competing messages, which can lead to confusion and uncertainty. Competing candidates need to convey clear and consistent messages, as fake news and misinformation can harm those trying to deliver positive messages. Candidates need to be proactive in countering hoaxes and providing accurate information so that voters are not influenced by false information.

Regulation and Ethics The issue of ethics among election organizers has been a strong topic of discussion in recent years. This is not unrelated to the overlapping authority among election organizing institutions in handling election violation cases (Surbakti & Fitrianto, 2015). With the increasing use of social media, regulations related to digital campaigns have become stricter. Candidates must understand and comply with existing regulations, including restrictions on the use of political advertisements and transparency of funding sources. Ethics in digital campaigns are also a major concern, especially in maintaining message integrity and access limitations. Although internet access continues to increase, there are still segments of society that are less connected. Candidates must continue to consider traditional campaign methods to reach voters who are not active on digital platforms, such as direct campaigns to present their vision and mission and listen to the aspirations and complaints of the people.

Effectiveness of Digital Campaigns

The effectiveness of digital campaigns is fundamentally determined by the ability of the conveyed message to reach, capture attention, and influence audience behavior. In the era of new media, the characteristics of communication that are interactive, participatory, and real-time provide great opportunities for campaigners to build closer relationships with the audience. Digital platforms like Instagram and TikTok enable the widespread dissemination of messages at relatively low costs, while also providing analytical features to measure audience responses directly. Effective communication is the process of delivering a message that can bring about a change in attitude in the parties involved. In this process, the communicator and the communicant exchange information, ideas, beliefs, feelings, and attitudes, both individually and in groups, with results that align with the expected goals. Thus, communication is said to be effective if the message conveyed can be well understood by the communicator and encourages them to act according to the communicator's intended purpose (Muhith & Siyoto, 2018).

From the perspective of communication theory, the effectiveness of a digital campaign can be analyzed thru the Uses and Gratifications approach, where the audience is viewed as an active party in selecting and using media according to their needs (Daryanto & Muljo; 2025). In this context, a successful digital campaign is one that can meet the audience's needs for information, entertainment, and social identity. Relevant, engaging content that aligns with the preferences of the target audience tends to generate higher levels of engagement, such as likes, comments, and shares, which can ultimately influence attitudes and behaviors.

The findings indicate that creativity and innovation are central factors in enhancing the effectiveness of digital campaigns. Engaging visual content, storytelling techniques, and the use of trending topics significantly increase message attractiveness and audience attention. Platforms such as Instagram and YouTube enable the integration of visual and narrative elements, which strengthens message delivery and helps build a strong public image. As a result, campaigns that employ creative and communicative approaches tend to generate higher audience engagement, reflected in increased interactions such as likes, comments, and shares (Zaki et al., 2025). Furthermore, the study finds that the success of digital campaigns is not solely dependent on message content, but also on how the message is delivered. Strategic communication elements such as audience segmentation, appropriate media selection, and message consistency play a crucial role in ensuring campaign effectiveness. Campaigns that are well-targeted and tailored to specific audience characteristics are more likely to influence public perception and behavior.

However, the findings also highlight several challenges in digital campaigns. The high volume of information in digital media environments leads to audience selectivity and content saturation, making it difficult for messages to stand out. Repetitive and less innovative content tends to be ignored by audiences. Therefore, continuous creativity, interactive content, and adaptive strategies are necessary to maintain audience interest and participation. These findings support previous studies (Majid et al., 2023) that emphasize the importance of creative and

interactive political communication strategies in increasing audience engagement in the digital era.

Additionally, the findings reveal that the effectiveness of digital campaigns is also influenced by the ability to adapt to rapidly changing digital trends and audience behavior. Campaigns that are responsive to real-time issues, utilize data-driven insights, and continuously evaluate their performance tend to be more successful in maintaining relevance and competitiveness. This adaptive approach allows campaign actors to refine their strategies, optimize content distribution, and better align messages with audience preferences. Consequently, flexibility and responsiveness emerge as crucial elements in sustaining audience engagement and ensuring long-term campaign effectiveness in the dynamic digital landscape.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that election communication in the digital era has great potential to enhance campaign effectiveness. Thru the use of social media and digital platforms, mayoral candidates can reach voters more broadly, interact directly, and convey messages more cost-effectively. Data analysis allows them to target the audience precisely, increasing the likelihood of engagement and support. However, the challenges faced are also significant. Excessive information and fake news can confuse voters, while strict regulations require candidates to have a good understanding of ethical and transparent campaign practices. Moreover, the digital divide remains an issue, where some voters may not have adequate access to technology. Candidates who can integrate digital communication strategies with traditional methods, and who are proactive in countering misinformation, will have a competitive advantage. It is important for candidates to continuously adapt to technological developments and voter dynamics, as well as to build strong and transparent relationships with the community. Overall, effective communication in the digital era is key to achieving success in elections and strengthening democracy at the local level. This research provides valuable insights for candidates and political parties in designing better campaign strategies in the future.

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