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"Community Response to Political Communication Behavior of Mayoral Candidates in the 2024 Local Election (A Political Communication Study in Bukit Sukabumi Indah Housing Complex)

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Abstract

This study investigates community responses to the political communication behavior of mayoral candidates in the lead-up to the 2024 regional elections, specifically within the Bukit Sukabumi Indah Housing Complex. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research explores how local citizens—including community leaders, religious figures, and youth representatives—perceive and interpret political messages delivered by candidates through various channels. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and field observations. The findings reveal that political communication is often perceived as transactional, image-centric, and lacking in substantive engagement. Citizens are generally aware of candidates' campaign strategies, including the use of social media, public appearances, and symbolic gestures; however, skepticism persists regarding the authenticity of political promises. The study highlights the need for more dialogic, participatory, and culturally grounded political communication that fosters genuine community engagement. This research contributes to the discourse on political communication in emerging democracies by emphasizing the importance of communication ethics, credibility, and the role of local culture in shaping political perception.

Keywords: political communication, community response, local elections, participatory democracy, urban voters.

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is a natural need for every human being to survive. From birth, humans require communication to convey their intentions and desires, just as a baby cries to communicate with its parents when it is hungry, thirsty, hot, needs to use the bathroom, or has other needs. As the baby grows, its ability to communicate and interact with its surroundings also develops (Rustan dan Nurhakki, 2019).

Political communication plays a critical role in shaping democratic engagement, especially in urban communities where information is abundant yet fragmented. In the context of Indonesia's regional elections (*Pilkada*), candidates often rely on a mixture of traditional and digital media to deliver campaign messages. However, questions remain about how these messages are perceived and interpreted by various segments of society.

This study focuses on the 2024 mayoral election campaign in Bukit Sukabumi Indah, an urban housing complex in Sukabumi City. As a microcosm of Indonesia's urban electorate, this community comprises diverse stakeholders including neighborhood leaders (RT/RW), religious figures, youth representatives, and residents. Their interpretations of political communication provide valuable insight into the strengths and shortcomings of campaign strategies deployed by candidates.

The preliminary observation reveals that most political messages tend to be symbolic, superficial, and one-directional. Citizens express skepticism toward campaign promises, especially when such messages are disseminated only via broadcast media or social platforms without direct engagement. In this setting, trust-building, authenticity, and participatory interaction become critical factors in communication effectiveness.

By exploring how different community groups respond to political communication behavior, this research seeks to illuminate the gap between message delivery and message reception, and to identify cultural and ethical factors that influence voter perception.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in several key theories within the field of political communication and social psychology. These frameworks offer insights into how political messages are constructed, transmitted, received, and interpreted by different segments of society.

1. Political Communication Theory

Political communication refers to the exchange of information and messages between political actors and the public, aimed at shaping opinions and behaviors. According to McNair

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(2011), effective political communication requires transparency, engagement, and credibility. In a democratic context, the way candidates communicate can significantly affect trust, voter mobilization, and legitimacy.

2. Lasswell's Communication Model

Harold D. Lasswell's classical model — *"Who says what, in which channel, to whom, and with what effect"* — serves as the foundation for analyzing communication flow in this study. It emphasizes the role of the communicator (candidate), the message (campaign content), the medium (e.g., social media, direct visits), the audience (urban voters), and the outcomes (e.g., trust, support, or apathy). The model helps dissect not just what is communicated, but how and with what result.

3. Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) Model

This behavioral model views communication as a stimulus that triggers psychological processing within individuals (organism), resulting in specific reactions (response). In the context of this study, political messages are stimuli; citizens interpret these messages through moral, cultural, and emotional lenses before deciding to accept, reject, or remain indifferent. This framework is particularly relevant in understanding how religious figures and youth respond differently to the same message.

4. Social Perception Theory

This theory posits that individuals construct meaning based on prior experiences, social values, and collective norms. Political messages are not received uniformly; rather, they are filtered through community expectations and credibility assessments. The role of trusted intermediaries such as local leaders and religious figures becomes essential in shaping how messages are understood and whether they are accepted.

5. Group Communication Theory (optional)

Urban communities often rely on collective discussions — in religious gatherings, youth forums, or neighborhood meetings — to interpret political information. This theory highlights how group interaction can reinforce or challenge individual interpretations. It provides insight into how political perception becomes a shared social construct rather than merely a private opinion.

Together, these theoretical lenses provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between political actors and the urban electorate, emphasizing the complexity of communication in contemporary democratic settings.

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a **qualitative descriptive method**, aimed at capturing the depth of public perception and the interpretive dynamics surrounding political communication during the 2024 mayoral campaign in Indonesia. Qualitative research is appropriate in this context, as it allows for rich, contextual insights into community values, beliefs, and reactions that are not easily measurable through quantitative approaches.

Research Location

The study was conducted in **Bukit Sukabumi Indah**, a modern housing complex located in Sukabumi City, West Java, Indonesia. This urban area is socially diverse and represents a microcosm of Indonesia's urban electorate, making it an ideal site for exploring how political communication is received in varied community layers.

Informants and Sampling

A total of **six key informants** were purposively selected to represent different social roles within the community:

- 1 Neighborhood Head (RT)
- 1 Community Coordinator (RW)
- 1 Religious Leader
- 1 Youth Leader
- 2 General Residents (male and female)

The selection was based on their active involvement in neighborhood affairs and their access to campaign-related information during the election period.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were gathered through:

- **In-depth interviews**, using semi-structured interview guides
- **Field observations**, noting community reactions during campaign events
- **Documentation**, including pamphlets, social media posts, and campaign materials

All interviews were conducted face-to-face in an informal setting to ensure comfort and openness, and were audio-recorded with the participants' consent.

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Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and meanings from the interview transcripts. The data were coded based on themes aligned with the theoretical framework, including communication credibility, ethical perception, personal engagement, and message reception. Triangulation was used to ensure validity by cross-verifying information from different informants and data sources.

This methodology allows for an in-depth understanding of how political communication is filtered through community dynamics, social roles, and cultural expectations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of interview data revealed three key themes that define how the urban community in Bukit Sukabumi Indah interprets and responds to the political communication strategies of mayoral candidates. These themes revolve around credibility and engagement, cultural-moral filtering, and channel relevance and generational dynamics.

Perceived Credibility and Personal Engagement

Informants across social roles consistently expressed a preference for direct, personal communication over mediated or indirect approaches. Community leaders (RT/RW) reported that candidates rarely visited residents directly, delegating communication to campaign teams instead. This practice reduced trust and failed to create emotional resonance with voters.

"We only saw the candidate's team. If they came in person, even for a short dialogue, it would have built more trust," – Neighborhood Head (RT).

This aligns with Lasswell's model, where the "communicator" plays a vital role in determining message impact. The absence of personal presence weakens the "who" dimension and diminishes the intended effect.

Moral and Ethical Interpretation

Religious leaders played a significant role in filtering political messages through ethical and spiritual values. Campaign gestures that appeared superficial or exploitative of religious symbolism were viewed with skepticism.

"We are cautious when religion is used for political gain. What matters is honesty, not just appearances," – Local Religious Leader.

This finding reflects the S–O–R model, where the community (organism) processes political

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messages (stimuli) through deeply held moral lenses before reacting. Religious figures function as ethical interpreters, guiding collective perceptions and reactions.

Generational Sensitivity and Media Relevance

Youth informants revealed a nuanced understanding of political content on social media. While they appreciated digital outreach, they criticized overly stylized or superficial content that lacked substance or direct interaction.

"We want real conversations, not just TikTok dances or Instagram posts. It's easy to spot when they're just performing," – Youth Leader.

This supports Social Perception Theory, in which young voters evaluate not just the message but the intention behind it. Generational expectations shape how different channels are received, reinforcing the need for tailored communication strategies across age groups.

Moreover, Group Communication Theory emerged in observations of communal forums, such as religious gatherings or youth events. These spaces act as filtering grounds where political messages are debated, questioned, and socially constructed — influencing how individuals ultimately vote or engage.

Synthesis with Theoretical Perspective

Overall, the findings illustrate that political communication in this urban setting is not passively consumed but actively interpreted, filtered, and evaluated through social trust, cultural identity, and generational expectations. Candidates who rely on broadcast messages or purely digital presence without grounding their communication in authentic relationships risk being dismissed or mistrusted.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study explored how urban communities in Bukit Sukabumi Indah perceive the political communication practices of mayoral candidates during the 2024 local elections. The findings suggest that political messaging is often perceived as impersonal, symbolic, and lacking in substance, especially when not accompanied by direct engagement or sincere dialogue.

Community leaders expect candidates to be physically present and emotionally involved. Religious figures act as ethical gatekeepers, interpreting messages through spiritual values, while youth express skepticism toward content that appears superficial or overly performative. These varied perspectives indicate that political communication must go beyond surface-level strategies

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and be grounded in authenticity, cultural awareness, and relational trust.

By applying communication theories such as Lasswell's Model, the S–O–R Framework, and Social Perception Theory, this study underscores the complexity of message reception in urban democracies. It demonstrates that effective political communication is not solely about disseminating information but about building trust and fostering participatory civic culture.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several practical and scholarly recommendations can be offered:

1. **For political candidates**: It is essential to adopt communication strategies that emphasize personal presence, community immersion, and genuine dialogue. Relying solely on digital media or campaign teams can create distance and mistrust among voters.
2. **For campaign managers and strategists**: Segmentation strategies should consider the diverse needs of different voter groups. Messages for youth, religious communities, and civic leaders should be adapted to reflect their values and communication preferences.
3. **For local communities**: Citizens are encouraged to become more proactive in evaluating political communication, not just in terms of content, but also in the integrity and consistency of the messenger.
4. **For future researchers**: Further studies could explore communication patterns in comparative urban settings or apply quantitative methods to measure the impact of specific communication styles on voter behavior.

Ultimately, political communication must be seen not just as a campaign tool but as a **democratic bridge** — connecting leaders and citizens in a relationship based on mutual respect, trust, and shared goals.

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