

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract : In the digital era, political communication has undergone a significant transformation, particularly in campaign strategies that utilize social media. Through this communication approach, political actors deliver messages, build images, and foster public engagement within the digital space. This study employs a literature review method to analyze how political communication adapts within the context of viral campaigns in digital media. The findings reveal that political communication is not merely an instrument for conveying information, but also a strategic tool capable of shaping public opinion, expanding campaign reach, and strengthening political legitimacy. This research offers valuable insights into the relationship between digital communication and political influence in the modern era.

Keywords: Communication Strategy, Politics, Digital Era

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Introduction

The development of digital technology has transformed the nature of political communication in society. Today, social media and online platforms have become the primary channels for politicians to interact directly with the public, replacing the dominance of conventional media, which previously served as the main intermediary for political information (Suryanto, 2020). Digital political communication enables rapid and widespread dissemination of messages and allows engagement with a highly diverse audience (Purnama, 2024). Political campaign strategies have adapted to this new reality, including the use of viral content to capture attention and shape public perception (Yaqin & Assajad, 2024).

In the context of political campaigns, digital communication functions not only as an informational medium but also as an instrument of persuasion and mobilization (Irawan et al., 2025). A politician's image today can be shaped through video posts, campaign hashtags, and interactions in the comments section. This process demonstrates that political communication in the digital era is participatory and interactive, in which the public is no longer merely a message recipient but also plays an active role in shaping political narratives through their reactions and online participation (Heryanto, 2018).

However, this transformation also brings challenges, such as the spread of misinformation, manipulation of public opinion, and political polarization (Zuhdan & Enitasari, 2024). While viral political campaigns can effectively reach mass audiences, they also risk exacerbating disinformation and polarization if not managed ethically (Vinanda et al., 2025). Therefore, it is essential to develop a deeper understanding of how political communication operates in the digital era and how political actors can strategically use social media without compromising democratic values and ethical standards in communication.

This study aims to examine the dynamics of political communication in the digital age, focusing on viral political campaigns as a case study. Through a literature review approach, the author seeks to identify the role of digital media in shaping public opinion and political legitimacy, and to analyze how viral communication strategies can serve as a powerful new force in contemporary politics.

Suryanto (2020) defines political communication as the exchange of messages related to issues of power and governance in order to achieve specific political goals. In the digital context, such communication evolves more dynamically due to direct interaction between political leaders and citizens. Pureklolon (2018) argues that political communication plays a crucial role in democratic systems by fostering public participation and open dialogue between political elites and the people.

The *Hipotesa Journal* reveals that political communication via digital media significantly influences governmental legitimacy due to the speed at which information spreads and its impact on public perception. Sulaiman (2013) also highlights the important role of mass media in the democratization process by distributing information that shapes public opinion. In the digital era, social media has become an extension of mass media's function, with even greater viral power than ever before.

Moreover, Sitompul (2020) emphasizes that the digital age creates a more complex communication landscape. Political campaigns are no longer one-way but rather two-way and real-time, requiring politicians to engage in authentic and responsive communication. This highlights the importance of understanding the

dynamics of political communication in the digital era as a foundation for effective policymaking and political strategy.

Research Methodology

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using the method of library research. The literature review is conducted by examining various relevant sources, such as books, scholarly articles, academic journals, and other digital materials that discuss political communication in the digital era, particularly in the context of viral political campaigns. The aim of this method is to analyze and formulate a conceptual understanding of how patterns of political communication have evolved under the influence of digital media, as well as to explore the strategic use of viral campaigns on social media platforms. Data is collected through a critical and thematic review of the literature to identify patterns and relationships between the phenomenon of viral campaigns, the shaping of public opinion, and the establishment of political legitimacy.

Results and Discussion

The development of digital technology has driven a major transformation in the practice of political communication. One of the most prominent phenomena is the emergence of viral political campaigns that utilize social media as the primary medium for disseminating political messages. These viral campaigns are characterized by the rapid and widespread distribution of messages, involving active participation from internet users. In this context, virality becomes a new force in shaping public opinion and influencing voter behavior.

Findings indicate that viral political campaigns are highly effective in reaching the younger voting demographic and active social media users. For instance, the use of short videos on TikTok, political memes on Instagram, or campaign hashtags on Twitter can successfully capture public attention and create a broad political discourse. This strategy differs from conventional political communication, which tends to be one-way and centered on traditional mass media.

Virality in political campaigns also enables the emergence of "new communicators" who do not come from political elites but rather from ordinary citizens such as influencers, content creators, or even anonymous accounts. This development makes political narratives more inclusive and dynamic. However, this dynamic also presents challenges such as the spread of hoaxes, disinformation, and public opinion polarization. Viral political campaigns not only serve to promote candidates or political parties but also to shape political image and legitimacy. Through attractive and easily shareable posts, politicians can build emotional closeness with their audiences. On the other hand, this strategy demands that politicians remain consistent and responsive in building authentic digital communication so as not to lose public trust.

A relevant case study is the viral political campaign of the Indonesian presidential and vice-presidential candidates in the 2024 election, Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka. Their campaign went viral on various platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, especially through the circulation of videos of Prabowo dancing at campaign events. These videos quickly spread, resulting in multiple remix versions, memes, and reinterpretations by netizens. This strategy successfully built

Prabowo's image as a more relaxed figure, close to the younger generation, and open to popular culture.

The viral campaign attracted widespread public attention, even from those previously apathetic about politics. Through this strategy, Prabowo-Gibran not only reached young voters but also created a new, more fluid and participatory political discourse. Short videos that are easy to share and enjoy foster emotional proximity between politicians and the public, while also strengthening their symbolic legitimacy in the digital sphere.

However, this phenomenon also draws criticism. Some observers argue that such viral political campaigns tend to oversimplify important issues, turning them into mere entertainment. Additionally, the risk of spreading disinformation remains high, as viral content often emphasizes sensationalism over substance. Viral political campaigns not only serve to promote candidates but also function as tools for shaping public opinion and image. In this regard, social media plays a dual role as both a space for political discourse and a medium for forming political identity. This demonstrates that political communication in the digital era is no longer a one-way process, but rather interactive, visual, and network-based. Key Findings from Political Communication Studies in the Digital Era :

1. **The Role of Social Media as the Primary Channel of Political Communication**
Suryanto (2020) states that social media has become the main medium for conveying political messages due to its ability to reach the public widely and instantly. This is evident in the current context of the 2024 presidential election campaigns, where candidates extensively use platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter. The Prabowo-Gibran campaign featuring viral dance videos serves as a concrete example of how social media can shape public perception and significantly influence the political image of a candidate.
2. **Two-Way and Participatory Political Communication**
Sitompul (2020) emphasizes that political communication in the digital era is no longer one-way, but interactive and participatory. In practice, the public is not merely a recipient of information but also a producer of political content—for example, through comments, reposts, memes, or reaction videos. This enhances public engagement in the political process but also introduces new challenges such as polarization and inter-supporter conflict.
3. **Virality as a New Political Instrument**
Jurnal Hipotesa (2023) notes that the virality of political content can accelerate legitimacy due to the snowball effect in information dissemination. Viral content like #GemoyPrabowo serves not only as entertainment but also strengthens the emotional branding of a candidate. However, virality is also prone to being exploited to spread disinformation, which can manipulate public opinion and damage the quality of democracy.
4. **Ethical Challenges and Digital Literacy**
Pureklolon (2018) underscores the importance of ethical standards in political communication to ensure that information shared is not misleading or provocative. In today's digital era, where anyone can create and disseminate content, the greatest challenge lies in maintaining the quality of information. The spread of hoaxes and smear campaigns on social media highlights weak ethical controls and low levels of digital literacy among the public.

5. The Transformation of Political Image through Content Visualization

Sulaiman (2013) mentions that mass media traditionally shapes public opinion through visual representation and constructed narratives. In the digital era, this role has been taken over by social media, where the visualization of political content (such as reels, stories, or TikTok videos) has more impact than long-form texts. Political candidates compete to adapt their communication style so it is easily consumed and shared by netizens.

Analysis and Impact

Based on the points above, it can be concluded that viral political campaigns represent a form of modern political communication that cannot be ignored. These campaigns emerge as a response to the shifting media landscape and the increasingly fast, concise, and visually-oriented information consumption patterns of the public.

On one hand, viral campaigns significantly expand public access and participation. Citizens are now more easily connected to political issues and can become part of the political narrative through simple acts like liking, sharing, or commenting on social media content.

On the other hand, such campaigns also bring serious consequences. First, political issues may become oversimplified into symbols or slogans that attract attention but lack substantive policy discussion. This can degrade the quality of political discourse and lead the public to make political choices based on emotional or aesthetic factors rather than rational consideration.

Second, this phenomenon strengthens digital identity politics, where communities are formed based on emotional and ideological affiliations created online. This leads to increased social division and heightened conflict in the virtual space, especially in the form of hate speech or personal attacks between supporters. Over time, this can erode social solidarity and weaken the deliberative foundations of democracy.

Third, virality increases vulnerability to disinformation. In a competitive digital ecosystem, provocative or sensational content tends to spread more quickly than educational content. As a result, the public can easily be misled by inaccurate or manipulative narratives, shaping public opinion that is not grounded in fact.

Politicians who are adept at leveraging these trends, even with minimal substantive ideas, stand a strong chance of gaining popularity and public support. This creates an unhealthy democratic condition, where political competition becomes more of a popularity contest than a contest of visions and programs. Therefore, it is essential to promote digital literacy so that society can critically evaluate information and understand political communication strategies. In addition, ethical regulations for digital campaigns must be enforced, including monitoring the spread of hoaxes, bot usage, and smear campaigns.

A healthy political campaign must continue to uphold democratic values, transparency, and accountability of information, even when carried out in a fast-paced and dynamic digital environment.

Conclusion

Political communication in the digital era has undergone a fundamental transformation, marked by the emergence of viral political campaigns as a new form of message delivery. These campaigns leverage the power of social media to reach a

broad audience and foster more interactive and emotional engagement. This study demonstrates that virality in political campaigns can serve as an effective strategy to shape public image, strengthen legitimacy, and mobilize support. However, behind its positive potential, viral political campaigns also pose serious challenges such as issue simplification, social polarization, and the spread of disinformation. This phenomenon highlights the need for a balance between innovative digital communication strategies and strong ethical responsibility and digital literacy.

Therefore, the success of political communication in the digital age does not solely depend on the ability of political actors to create engaging content, but also on the public's readiness to receive information critically and wisely. Political education, digital literacy, and the strengthening of ethical regulations are strategic steps to ensure that viral campaigns do not become tools of manipulation, but rather serve as healthy and democratic platforms for political participation.

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