Digital Campaign Strategy: TikTok Content Analysis of Candidate No. 1 Eri Armuji on Voters' Preferences in the 2024 Surabaya regional election

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Abstract

The use of social media in political campaigns is increasing, especially on video-based platforms like TikTok. In the 2024 Surabaya Election, candidate pair (Paslon) number 1, Eri Armuji, utilized TikTok as one of their digital campaign strategies. This study examines the influence of TikTok campaign content from Paslon number 1 on voter preferences in the 2024 Surabaya Election. It examines how content strategy influences voter perceptions and decisions, employing a qualitative approach and assessing the effectiveness of political communication through agenda-setting and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). Data was collected through content analysis of a TikTok campaign video by the Eri-Armuji team. The findings indicated that emotional content and local issues had a stronger influence on voter preferences than just campaign promises. Additionally, engagement via likes, comments, and shares boosted the candidates' popularity among young voters.. This study concludes that the digital campaign strategy through Tiktok can be an effective tool in influencing voter preferences, especially by utilizing relevant narratives and readily accepted by digital audiences. This study also emphasized the importance of adaptation of political communication strategies in the digital era to increase the effectiveness of the campaign.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology in the last decade has fundamentally changed the landscape of political communication in Indonesia. This transformation occurs along with the increase in internet penetration, the development of the social media ecosystem, and the shift in people's preferences in consuming political information, consistent with the global trend of social media's significantly growing role in political campaigns over the past two decades (Firdauz & Sobari, 2024). If in the previous era political campaigns relied more on conventional media such as television, radio, billboards, and newspapers, then in the digital era, social media has become the main tool in political campaign strategies. Ease of access, high interactivity, and the ability to reach large audiences at relatively lower costs make social media the main choice for politicians and campaign teams.

One of the latest phenomena in digital political communication is the increasing use of TikTok as a campaign platform. TikTok comes with a short video format that is dynamic, interactive, and has high viral potential. The platform's algorithm allows content to reach a wide audience quickly, without even requiring a large number of followers. Unlike other social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram that are more text-based and imagebased, TikTok offers a more engaging audio-visual based experience, especially for the younger generation who tend to prefer light, entertaining, and easy-to-understand content.

In the context of Indonesian politics, the use of TikTok as a campaign tool is increasing in various election events, including the 2024 Presidential Election. The three main candidates, Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, and Ganjar Pranowo, used different communication strategies in utilising TikTok. Anies Baswedan adopts a dialogic approach through his 'Desak Anies' programme, which involves interactive discussions with the public. Prabowo Subianto, despite not having an official account, still managed to build a popular image through viral content created by his supporters, such as memes and 'gemoy' cartoons. Meanwhile, Ganjar Pranowo uses a more relaxed and informal strategy through 'Malmingan Ganjar' and 'Ganjar Menjawab' sessions that allow voters to interact directly with him. This trend was also seen in the 2024 regional elections in various regions, including Surabaya. The candidate pair for Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Surabaya, Eri Cahyadi and Armuji (Eri-Armuji), actively used TikTok as a campaign medium to attract voters, especially the younger generation. They utilised the platform to convey their vision, mission and work programme in a lighter format that was easily accepted by the audience. Some of the strategies used include making short videos in a relaxed style, using music and viral trends, and direct interaction through the live streaming feature.

This phenomenon reflects a shift in political communication strategies that emphasise more on audience engagement and the use of narratives that are in line with digital trends. Whereas in the previous era, political campaigns focussed more on one-way messaging, in the digital era, campaigns have become more interactive and based on public participation. TikTok, with its unique algorithm, allows politicians to build closer relationships with voters, especially the younger generation who tend to be more active on social media. However, the effectiveness of TikTok content in shaping voter preferences is debatable. Not all content uploaded by campaign teams succeeds in attracting attention or directly influencing voters. Some factors that influence the effectiveness of digital campaigns through TikTok include the quality of the content, relevance to emerging issues, and the distribution strategy used. In addition, the phenomenon of misinformation and disinformation is also a challenge in digital political

campaigns. Content that is manipulative or spreads inaccurate information can negatively impact public opinion and create polarisation in society.

Therefore, a more in-depth analysis of the digital campaign strategy applied in the 2024 Surabaya Regional Election is needed, especially in seeing the extent to which the TikTok content of candidate number 1, Eri-Armuji, affects voter preferences. This study is not only important to understand the effectiveness of digital campaigns in the context of the Surabaya regional election, but also to provide greater insight into the role of social media in Indonesia's overall political dynamics. By understanding the pattern of political communication in the digital era, it is expected that the campaign strategy can be structured more effectively and in accordance with the characteristics of modern voters

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive study type to understand how the TikTok campaign content of candidate number 1, Eri-Armuji, influences voter preferences in the 2024 Surabaya regional head election. This approach was chosen to explore the communication strategies used and their impact on voters' perceptions, especially the younger generation who are active on TikTok. The focus of this research is to analyse the digital campaign strategy in the TikTok content of candidate number 1, including the political communication elements used, audience interactions such as likes, comments, and shares, and how voters interpret the campaign messages. The data in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through content analysis of TikTok campaign videos as well as in-depth interviews with voters who actively followed the candidate's digital campaign. Secondary data came from campaign documentation, literature review, and political communication theories such as agenda setting and elaboration likelihood model (ELM). Data collection was conducted using content analysis, in-depth interviews, and participatory observation of TikTok users' interactions in the paslon campaign. The data obtained was then analysed using thematic analysis, where the data was categorised based on emerging themes, then interpreted with relevant theories. To ensure data validity, this research applied triangulation of sources, methods, and theories. Analysed results were compared with voter interviews and campaign documentation, while a combination of data collection techniques was used to strengthen findings. With this method, this research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of digital campaigns through TikTok as well as how political communication strategies continue to evolve in the digital era.

DISCUSSION

Social Media and Shifting Patterns of Political Communication

In today's digital era, social media has become an inseparable part of the layers of people's lives, including in politics. The development of information technology has driven significant changes in the way candidates communicate with voters. If previously political campaigns were mostly carried out through mass media such as television, radio and newspapers, now social media is the main tool in reaching and influencing public opinion. Since the last few years platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube have been used as a means of digital campaigns by various political candidates. But the recent emergence of TikTok as one of the fastest growing social media platforms has brought new dynamics to political communication. TikTok offers a more interactive and trend-based approach allowi ng candidates to deliver political messages in a more creative and engaging

way. As a short video-based platform, TikTok has several advantages that make it effective in political campaigns. The short and easy-to-consume video format makes political messages more quickly conveyed and more easily accepted by voters, especially the younger generation. TikTok's interest-based algorithm also allows political content to reach a wider audience even outside of the candidate's circle of account followers. This is in contrast to other platforms that rely more on friendship relationships or number of followers to determine content reach. In addition, TikTok allows direct interaction between candidates and voters. The commenting, duetting and stitching features allow voters to provide responses to issues raised by candidates, thus creating a closer relationship between them. Candidates who are able to actively interact with voters through this platform can build a more positive image and increase public engagement in political campaign.

This change in political communication patterns is also driven by the increasing use of social media among young voters. Millennials and Gen Z tend to be more active on social media than previous generations. They are more interested in visually appealing and trendbased content so candidates who are able to adapt campaign strategies to the preferences of digital audiences have a greater chance of gaining attention and support. Not only that, the model of political communication has now also shifted from one-way communication to more interactive two-way communication. If previously voters only received information passively through television or newspaper advertisements, now they can actively participate in political discussions through social media. TikTok with its interactive features, allows voters to express their opinions, ask questions directly to candidates, or even respond to campaign promises in a creative way.

This shift in political communication patterns marks a new era in campaign strategy where candidates no longer rely solely on conventional means, but must be able to adapt to digital dynamics. By utilising TikTok as a campaign medium, candidates can deliver political messages in a more effective way, reach a wider range of voters, and build closer engagement with the community. Therefore, in today's digital era, the success of political campaigns depends heavily on candidates' ability to optimise social media as a strategic and relevant political communication tool.

TikTok Campaign Content Strategy for Candidate Pair Number 1 (Eri-Armuji)

In the 2024 Surabaya regional election, candidate number 1 Eri-Armuji utilised TikTok as one of the main strategies in their digital campaign. This platform was used to deliver political messages in a more relaxed, creative way, and in linewith the growing trend among social media users, especially young voters. With this approach, the Eri-Armuji campaign did not only focus on delivering political promises but also tried to build closeness with the community through local issues and emotional touches in every content. One of the characteristics of their digital campaign is the use of various types of content tailored to the characteristics of TikTok as a short video-based platform. The content uploaded is not only limited to the presentation of the vision and mission, but also covers various aspects of the lives of the people of Surabaya. For example, they often share videos that raise local issues such as infrastructure improvements, health programmes and education that are their priorities. In this way, they try toshow that their campaign is not just a promise but is rooted in the real needs of Surabaya residents.

The campaign also featured a strategy of direct interaction with voters. Through the feature, Eri-Armuji's comments open a two-way communication space with the community. Voterscan provide responses to the issues raised or ask directly about the candidate's work programme. This kind of interaction not only increases engagement but also strengthens EriArmuji's image as a leader who is close to the people. Another approach they used was to follow the viral trend that was developing on TikTok. Some campaign videos were made in a more light-hearted and entertaining format, such as using popular music that was going viral. Although contains political messages the content packaged in this way is more easily accepted by audiences, especially the younger generation who are the main users of TikTok. In terms of narrative the Eri-Armuji campaign balances the delivery of political promises and relevant local issues. They understand that voters are more interested in relatable content and touch their daily lives. Therefore, they not only deliver promises explicitly, but also build a narrative that connects their work programme to the reality of Surabaya society. For example instead of just saying that they will fix the roads and sidewalks, they uploaded a video showing the condition of the damaged roads and featured testimonials of affected residents. This approach makes the message stronger and convincing.

Emotional elements are also an important part of the campaign. Several videos feature stories of people struggling with various challenges in the city, then end with solutions offered by Eri-Armuji. This storytelling strategy aims to build an emotional connection with voters and create a sense of hope and trust in the candidate. Not only that, the campaign also showcases the human side of both candidates. Videos showing spontaneous moments, such as Eri Cahyadi chatting casually with traders or Armuji attending community events, became content that attracted voters' attention. By presenting their personalities in a more natural way, the campaign seeks to create the impression that Eri-Armuji is not just a politician, but also a part of Surabaya society who understands and cares about the problems of its citizens. Another effective approach is the use of local cultural elements in their campaign. Videos in Javanese Timuran, references to Surabaya's city icons, and support for local MSMEs are strategies that strengthen their identity as leaders who truly represent the people of Surabaya. These regional sentiments played an important role in building voter loyalty and increased the appeal of their campaign at the local level. With a content strategy that combines programme information, interaction with voters, social media trends, and emotional elements, the TikTok Eri-Armuji campaign succeeded in creating political communication that is closer and more easily accepted by the public. This approach demonstrates that political campaigning in the digital era depends not only on how often a message is delivered, but also on how the message is packaged to connect with the audience effectively. Through the utilisation of TikTok as a campaign tool, Eri-Armuji was able to build a strong image and increase voter engagement in the 2024 Surabaya regional election.

Effectiveness of TikTok Campaign Content on Voter Preferences

In the digital era, the effectiveness of political campaigns is not only determined by how often messages are delivered, but also by how they are received and responded to by voters. The TikTok campaign conducted by candidate number 1 Eri-Armuji, in the 2024 Surabaya Regional Election shows how this short video-based platform can influence voter preferences through relevant content, user engagement, and intense digital interaction. One of the main factors that made this campaign effective was the use of local issue-based content and emotional elements. Voters tend to be more interested in videos that highlight real problems around them,

such as the poor state of infrastructure, health services that still need to be improved or the empowerment of local MSMEs. By featuring these issues directly in their videos, Eri-Armuji managed to show that they understand the needs of the community. More than just conveying the work programme, this campaign also relies on storytelling that is able to arouse voters' emotions. For example, some videos show the story of a small trader struggling in the midst of difficult economic conditions, then end with concrete solutions offered by the candidate. This approach not only makes political messages easier to digest but also creates a deeper emotional connection between voters and candidates. Apart from user engagement content on TikTok also plays an important role in building candidate popularity. Campaign videos that get a lot of likes, comments, and shares show that the message conveyed successfully attracts attention and gets a positive response from the audience. The number of likes can be an early indication that a video is favoured by voters, while comments reflect their level of participation in political discussions. The Eri-Armuji campaign often responded to voters' comments, either in the form of direct replies or by creating response videos, thus creating the impression that they were leaders who were open to people's aspirations. Moreover, the high number of shares shows that the campaign message spread widely among TikTok users reaching voters who may not have actively followed political developments before. When a video is shared repeatedly it is not only because the content is interesting, but also because the audience feels the message is worth other people knowing. This suggests that social media-based campaign strategies not only serve as a communication tool but also as a mechanism to expand political influence among a wider range of voters.

Intense digital interaction through TikTok also contributes tovoting decisions. Voters who frequently view content from a particular candidate tend to be more familiar with that person and the programmes they offer. The more often someone is exposed to interesting political content, the more likely they are to consider the candidate when making a choice. In addition, voters' involvement in discussions on social media is also a factor that strengthens their preferences. When voters actively discuss in the comment section or even create content responding to the Eri-Armuji campaign, they are indirectly engaged in a deeper political process. These interactions create a sense of belonging and closeness to the candidate, which can influence their decision when voting takes place.

Another important factor is social influence in the digital media ecosystem. On TikTok, trends and public opinion can develop quickly, especially when many people collectively support or discuss a candidate. In the case of Eri-Armuji, a viral video that gets a lot of support from netizens can create a psychological effect for voters who are still undecided. When they see that the candidate has received a lot of attention and positive responses, they are more likely to consider the candidate as a viable option. Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of TikTok campaigns depends not only on how often candidates upload videos, but also on how the content resonates with voters, the level of engagement generated, and how digital interactions shape their opinions and political decisions. Digital campaigns that are able to utilise emotional narratives, local issues, and active engagement of voters prove to be more effective in building preferences and strengthening political support in this digital era.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this article emphasises that the use of TikTok as a digital campaign strategy by candidate pair Eri-Armuji in the 2024 Surabaya Regional Election showed

significant effectiveness in influencing voter preferences, especially among the younger generation. The campaign succeeded in creating political communication that is closer and more easily accepted by the public by paying attention to the characteristics and habits of TikTok users who tend to like content that is relaxed, creative, and trend-based. One of the main findings is that campaign content that raises local issues and has emotional elements tends to be more attractive to voters. In this context, Eri-Armuji presented a video that did not only explain the vision and mission of the campaign, but also touched on real problems faced by the people of Surabaya, such as the condition of infrastructure, health services, and empowerment of MSMEs. In this way, they are able to show that their work programme is rooted in the real needs of the citizens, so that the message delivered feels more relevant and convincing.

The level of user engagement on TikTok was a key factor in increasing the effectiveness of the campaign. Content that gets a lot of likes, comments, and is shared widely shows that the message conveyed successfully attracts the attention of the audience and creates a positive response. These interactions not only increase candidates' visibility on the platform but also strengthen their image as responsive leaders who are close to the people. Through the comments feature, Eri-Armuji opened a space for the public to interact directly, providing responses to the issues raised and asking for more information about their work programme. Overall, this research highlights the importance of adaptive and audience-oriented political communication strategies in the digital era. By understanding the behavioural patterns of voters on social media, candidates can craft campaigns that are not only effective in delivering messages but also able to build strong engagement with the public. Therefore, the utilisation of social media, especially TikTok, serves not only as a communication tool but also as a mechanism to expand political influence and create deeper connections with voters. In the face of evolving political dynamics, candidates who are able to adopt innovative and relevant approaches to a digital audience will have a greater chance of gaining support in the upcoming election.

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