

Identification of Digital Political Strategies in Regional Head Elections in the Era of Social Media

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the digital political strategies implemented by the 2024 Manado Mayoral and Deputy Mayoral candidate pair, Andrei Angouw and Richard Sualang (AARS), particularly in constructing political image, disseminating campaign messages, and mobilizing voter support through social media platforms. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through systematic observations of their digital activities, in-depth interviews with campaign team members and volunteer coordinators, as well as documentation of online campaign materials distributed throughout the election period. Thematic analysis was carried out using open and axial coding to identify recurring patterns, strategic frameworks, and message orientations. The findings reveal that AARS adopted a highly coordinated and multi-layered digital communication strategy, integrating daily content scheduling, narrative framing aligned with local issues, collaboration with influencers and content creators, production of slogan-based campaign songs, and optimization of Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to target diverse voter demographics. These efforts not only enhanced the visibility and relatability of the candidate pair but also strengthened emotional engagement among supporters, increased political participation among younger voters, and contributed to significant improvements in public perception. Overall, the study concludes that AARS's digital campaign strategy played a substantial role in shaping voter attitudes and positively influencing electoral outcomes in the 2024 Manado local election.

Keywords: Digital Political Strategy, Social Media, Regional Elections, Political Image, Voter Participation.

A. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology and social media over the past two decades has introduced new dynamics into electoral political practices in Indonesia, not only at the national level but also within the realm of local politics. Digital disruption marked by the emergence of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X (Twitter) has fundamentally transformed the ways political actors communicate with the public. Before the digital era, political campaigns relied heavily on conventional methods such as television advertisements, billboards, face-to-face meetings, and the distribution of printed materials. Today, these methods are gradually being displaced by digital campaigns that offer wide reach, cost efficiency, interactivity, and real-time capacities for shaping public opinion (Chadwick, 2017; Tufekci, 2015). Thus, digital spaces have become a new arena where political identities, public perceptions, and electoral support are actively and strategically constructed.

In a society that is increasingly digitized, politics can no longer be separated from algorithmic logic, networked culture, and drastically shifting patterns of information consumption. Castells (2012) explains that communication within the network society produces new forms of power centered on the production and reproduction of digital information. This condition requires political candidates to maintain a strong, consistent, and engaging digital presence in order to build a positive image and emotional connection with the public. Social media is no longer merely a channel for disseminating messages but has become a space for two-way interaction, enabling the public not only to receive information but also to respond, debate, and even influence campaign narratives (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012). Consequently, digital political strategies are no longer supplementary but have become a decisive factor in electoral contests.

Local elections (Pilkada) as arenas of local democracy have also undergone significant transformation due to advancements in digital technology. Political competition at the regional level is now shaped not only by candidate popularity and local issues but also by the candidates' abilities to strategically manage digital communication. Campaigns through social media enable candidates to reach urban voters and younger generations with high levels of digital literacy. Content visualization (short videos, reels, animations), storytelling, the use of local influencers, and rapid responses to public issues have become increasingly prominent elements in local elections (Lim, 2017; Nugroho et al., 2019). Such communication patterns provide competitive advantages because they foster emotional closeness, authenticity, and consistent political messaging through formats that are lightweight and easily shareable.

Manado City, the capital of North Sulawesi Province, is one of the regions with high internet penetration and intensive social media use in Eastern Indonesia. This condition makes it a relevant site for examining digital campaign practices in the 2024 Manado local election. With its urban, heterogeneous population that is active in digital spaces, candidates in Manado's election face demands to design political messages aligned with fast-paced, visually driven media consumption patterns. At the same time, Manado's political dynamics are often influenced by identity, social relations, and the candidates' track records, requiring political communication to be packaged in ways that resonate with different voter groups.

The urgency of this research arises from the limited empirical studies on digital political strategies in the context of local elections in Eastern Indonesia. Most previous studies have focused on digital political communication at the national level, presidential elections, or legislative contests. In reality, local political dynamics have distinct characteristics from social bases and networks of political actors to the ways social media is used as a tool for mobilization. The candidate pair Andrei Angouw and Richard Sualang (AARS) in the 2024 Manado election represents one of the political actors who utilized digital strategies intensively and systematically. Their approaches include daily content scheduling, collaborations with local creators, the creation of campaign songs, and multi-platform optimization. These practices demonstrate that digital campaigns were not conducted sporadically but were designed as well-planned communication strategies.

This research aims to identify the forms and characteristics of the digital political strategies implemented by candidates and to analyze how political narratives are constructed through social media. Digital strategy is understood as a series of actions involving content management, platform selection, message framing, public interaction management, and the use of algorithms to increase visibility (Koc-

Michalska & Lilleker, 2017). In addition, this research examines how interaction patterns between candidates and voters are formed through social media both direct interactions such as comments, direct messages, and live chats, and indirect interactions such as content dissemination, public responses, and digital conversations appearing in online spaces.

This study also assesses the extent to which digital strategies can shape public perceptions and mobilize electoral support. In the post-truth era, perception formation relies not only on message content but also on the consistency of image-building, emotional appeal, and the dynamics of digital community support (Sunstein, 2018). Mobilizing electoral support through social media involves generating engagement, transforming sympathizers into digital volunteers, and leveraging public momentum to strengthen the candidate's position (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). The success of digital strategies can be observed through increased content visibility, positive public sentiment, and tangible influence on voting behavior.

From a policy perspective, this research aligns with the National Research Master Plan (RIRN) in Social Sciences and Humanities particularly themes on socio-cultural development and political systems that adapt to technological change. It also corresponds to the seventh agenda of Asta Cita, which emphasizes political modernization, transparency in public communication, and increased public participation through digital tools. By understanding the dynamics of digital campaigning in Manado, this study contributes to the development of political communication strategies that are more effective, inclusive, and suited to the needs of a digital society.

Through this research, it is expected that a comprehensive understanding will be gained regarding how digital political strategies are designed, executed, and received by the public in the 2024 Manado local election. This study not only contributes academically to the field of digital political communication but also offers practical recommendations for candidates, political parties, election organizers, and other stakeholders in designing political communication strategies that align with the demands of the digital era.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Political Strategies in Electoral Contexts

Studies on digital political strategies show that the success of campaigns in the social media era depends greatly on a candidate's ability to manage content systematically. Adnan and Mona emphasize that consistent posting schedules, the selection of relevant hashtags, and the construction of structured narratives are key factors determining the effectiveness of digital campaigns. These strategies allow candidates to maintain visibility, expand the reach of political messages, and sustain consistent communication rhythms across digital platforms. In this context, content management functions not only as a method of message dissemination but also as an instrument for building symbolic and emotional closeness with voters.

Social Media as an Instrument of Political Branding

Firmansyah asserts that social media plays a strategic role in shaping political branding, especially for candidates seeking to reach younger voter segments who are active in digital spaces. Digital political branding is constructed through visual image-building, repetition of political messages, the use of symbols, and the development of an authentic public persona. Through features such as short videos, campaign photos, and narrative content, candidates can present a consistent and aesthetically appealing self-representation. This digital branding strengthens a candidate's position in the minds of voters, differentiates them from competitors, and increases the potential for mobilizing electoral support.

Mediatization of Politics and the Transformation of Communication Logic

The theory of mediatization of politics explains that the development of digital technology has transformed traditional political logic into media logic, in which political strategies are adjusted to the public's consumption patterns of fast, visual, and interactive information. In this context, media are not merely intermediaries but become structures that shape how political actors craft messages, choose

communication styles, and build public images. This transformation demands that candidates adapt political messages to the rhythms of digital media, including the use of concise visual formats, emotive narratives, and rapid responses to public issues. Consequently, political processes become more performative, competitive, and dependent on the dynamics of digital platforms.

Digital Engagement as an Interactive Candidate–Voter Relationship

The concept of digital engagement highlights the importance of interactive relationships between candidates and constituents in digital spaces. Engagement is manifested not only through quantitative indicators such as likes, comments, and shares, but also through the quality of interactions built between candidates and voters. Forms of interaction such as live streaming, Q&A sessions, online polling, and the use of direct messages create emotional closeness and a more personal sense of political involvement. Such interactions provide voters with a feeling of being heard, included, and valued, which ultimately influences their political perceptions and loyalty.

Social Media and the Reconstruction of Political Communication in Indonesia

In the context of a developing democracy such as Indonesia, social media has reconstructed the landscape of political campaigning. Digital platforms enable wider, faster, and more flexible dissemination of political messages compared to conventional methods such as billboards or television advertisements. In the 2020 Manado mayoral election, more than 80% of regional head candidates used social media as their primary channel to communicate with voters. Campaign practices included not only the dissemination of videos and visual content but also interactive strategies such as live streaming, political memes, polls, and the use of local influencers. This phenomenon aligns with findings from various studies showing how candidates in Indonesia build political images through visual and symbolic narratives on digital platforms, including in major contests such as the 2019 presidential election.

The Arena of Discourse Contestation and the Role of Algorithms in Campaigns

Previous research shows that social media often functions as an arena for discourse contestation among candidates. Political competition occurs not only through programs or platforms but also through battles of digital narratives utilizing visual representations, memes, and political symbols. In this context, platform algorithms play a significant role in directing political communication because they regulate content visibility based on user interactions. Campaign approaches that utilize data analysis and algorithms allow candidates to target specific voter groups with greater precision. Research by Nugroho and Syarif in the *Jurnal Komunikasi Indonesia* shows that measured and personalized digital strategies can increase voter engagement rates by up to 37% compared to conventional campaign methods such as billboards or radio advertisements. These findings affirm that digital campaigns are not merely a trend but a strategic instrument that determines the effectiveness of political communication in the social media era.

C. METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

This study employs a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design to examine in depth the forms, characteristics, and dynamics of digital political strategies implemented in the 2024 Manado mayoral election. This approach was selected because it is suitable for exploring complex socio-political phenomena, particularly when the research focuses on a single case with a high degree of uniqueness and strong contextual relevance. An intrinsic case study enables the researcher to understand the phenomenon not merely as an object of analysis, but as an important social entity in itself, allowing for a deeper exploration of the local context, political culture, social structure, and power relations that shape digital political communication practices. In the context of the 2024 Manado mayoral election, this approach provides space to understand how candidates' digital strategies are constructed, executed, and received by the public within a social media environment filled with interaction, symbolism, and political representation.

The research process was carried out through three interrelated stages. The first stage was data collection, conducted through systematic observation of the candidates' official social media accounts

including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube throughout the campaign period. The observations aimed to assess content scheduling consistency, the types of political messages disseminated, the use of visuals and narratives, and patterns of interaction between candidates and the public. In addition, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with members of the AARS campaign team, content creators involved in producing digital materials, and active voters who followed the campaign content on social media. These interviews aimed to explore internal perspectives on digital strategy, the rationale behind platform selection, audience segmentation, and message-production mechanisms, while also uncovering public perceptions of the effectiveness and reception of digital content. The researcher also collected digital campaign documentation such as campaign videos, infographics, political memes, jingles, and other interactive content used to build emotional proximity with voters.

The second stage was data analysis, conducted thematically using open and axial coding techniques. Open coding was used to identify initial categories from raw data, such as patterns of social media usage, communication styles, image construction, or forms of digital interaction. Axial coding was then used to connect these categories and identify the main themes that explain the structure of AARS's digital political strategy. This thematic analysis was strengthened by several theoretical frameworks, including the mediatization of politics which explains how media logic shapes political action political branding theory, which views candidates as "political products" with strategically constructed identities and values, and the concept of digital engagement, which emphasizes the importance of public participation through two-way interaction in digital spaces. Through these theoretical lenses, the analysis does not merely describe campaign content, but also interprets the strategic functions, purposes, and meanings embedded within it.

The third stage was the preparation of the research report, conducted through the integration of empirical findings with relevant conceptual frameworks and theories. The results of the analysis were organized into a comprehensive academic narrative that illustrates the interconnections between digital political strategies, local socio-political dynamics, and public responses. This stage ensures that the findings are not only descriptive but also analytical, offering deep insights into how digital campaigning has become an integral part of electoral competition in the City of Manado. The report writing also adhered to qualitative validity principles such as data triangulation through the combination of observation, interviews, and documentation and researcher reflexivity regarding the social context and power dynamics that may influence the interpretive process.

Through these stages, this research method provides a deep, holistic, and contextual understanding of the digital political strategies employed by the AARS candidate pair in the 2024 Manado mayoral election, while also demonstrating how digital campaign practices interact with the social structure and political culture of the local community.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Regional and Voter Profile

Manado City, as the capital of North Sulawesi Province, is an urban area with diverse social, cultural, and demographic characteristics. Administratively, Manado consists of 11 districts and 87 sub-districts spread across coastal regions, lowland areas, and densely populated residential zones. These geographical conditions shape the city's social dynamics, including the distribution patterns of voters and local political segmentation. In the 2024 local election (Pilkada), the Final Voter List (DPT) recorded a total of 353,325 voters, comprising 173,742 male voters and 179,583 female voters. This composition indicates that the participation of female voters carries strategic potential in determining electoral outcomes, given their larger proportion compared to male voters. Additionally, Manado has 1,371 polling stations (TPS) distributed across all sub-districts, reflecting the scale of the election and the intensive coordination required among electoral organizers, political candidates, and the public. The diversity of administrative areas, population density, and social characteristics of voters in Manado City are important factors influencing candidate campaign strategies, particularly in the use of digital technology to reach various community segments evenly.

AARS Digital Political Strategy

The digital political strategy implemented by the candidate pair Andrei Angouw and Richard Sualang (AARS) in the 2024 Manado City Election was designed in a structured and systematic manner, based on the media consumption patterns of urban communities. One of the pillars of this strategy was daily content scheduling across all social media platforms, aimed at maintaining a consistent rhythm of political communication and ensuring the coherence of messages received by the public. This daily content included the presentation of work programs, candidate activities, community testimonials, and narratives about prior development achievements. AARS also collaborated with local and regional content creators who have a sizable audience base, particularly among young people. This collaboration not only expanded message reach but also enhanced the appeal of campaign materials through modern, creative, and shareable visual styles. In addition, the use of campaign jingles served as an emotional strategy to strengthen campaign identity, build collective recall, and foster symbolic closeness with voters.

The use of multiple platforms was a fundamental component of AARS's strategy, with Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube utilized complementarily to target different voter segments. Facebook targeted adult audiences and local communities; Instagram provided aesthetic and informative campaign visuals; TikTok served to engage younger voters with dynamic short-form content; and YouTube was used for broadcasting long-form campaign videos, activity documentation, and in-depth explanations of visions and missions. This multi-platform strategy proved effective in maintaining candidate-public connectivity while also increasing the frequency of political message exposure throughout the campaign period.

Voter Participation

Voter participation in the 2024 Manado City Election reached a relatively high level of 77.43% of the total DPT, surpassing the participation target of 77.5% set by the General Election Commission (KPU). This achievement demonstrates the success of election organizers in expanding voter education outreach and raising public political awareness. The Manado City KPU conducted various targeted voter education programs, including socialization activities in schools, universities, and community groups. These activities aimed to instill understanding of the importance of democratic participation, introduce transparent electoral mechanisms, and encourage first-time and young voters to participate actively. Moreover, the increase in voter turnout was also influenced by the intensity of candidates' digital campaigns, including those of AARS, which effectively and personally reached voters through social media. Continuous exposure to information on digital platforms helped build voter awareness and motivation to visit polling stations, contributing to the high turnout rate during the voting process.

Compliance and Legal Disputes

The 2024 Manado City Election was conducted in an orderly manner, on schedule, and in accordance with all regulations established by the General Election Commission. Compliance with electoral regulations was reflected in the minimal administrative violations recorded throughout the campaign period, voting process, and tabulation stages. This indicates strong coordination among election-related institutions KPU, Bawaslu, and security forces. Furthermore, all legal disputes arising during the election stages were handled professionally, with a settlement success rate of 100%, surpassing the initial target of 90%. This accomplishment signifies robust oversight mechanisms and effective law enforcement in local elections, as well as the success of electoral institutions in ensuring that every complaint or dispute was resolved transparently and accountably.

The high level of legal compliance strengthened the legitimacy of the election results, reduced the potential for horizontal conflict, and reinforced public trust in the local democratic process. Moreover, the successful resolution of disputes supported the smooth post-election stages, including the certification of the elected candidate pair and the governmental transition process. Thus, the overall conduct of the 2024 Manado City Election not only reflected local political stability but also highlighted the crucial role of electoral institutions in safeguarding democratic integrity.

Election Results

Based on Manado City KPU Decree Number 887 of 2024, the pair Andrei Angouw and Richard Sualang (AARS) secured 107,285 votes, achieving a significant lead over other candidates. This vote count reflects a high level of public acceptance toward the AARS pair, both in terms of electability and the effectiveness of their campaign strategies. The victory not only represents the political preferences of the people of Manado but also demonstrates the candidates' success in combining face-to-face communication approaches with structured digital strategies. In addition, this achievement shows that

the campaign messages promoted by AARS including urban development, social inclusivity, and public service innovation were widely accepted across various voter segments, including first-time voters who have high levels of digital information consumption.

Digital Content Oversight

In terms of digital campaign monitoring, the 2024 Manado City Regional Election proceeded relatively orderly, although several minor violations were found related to the dissemination of content on social media. These violations were not considered serious and were resolved through clarification mechanisms and content revisions in accordance with Bawaslu's directives. Based on Bawaslu Regulation No. 12 of 2024, each candidate pair is allowed a maximum of 20 social media accounts per platform and 10 advertising slots in print or electronic media. This provision aims to maintain balance within the digital campaign space, prevent excessive dominance by any single candidate, and ensure healthy political competition. In practice, AARS complied with these regulations by maintaining strict internal coordination to manage official accounts and published content. This disciplined management contributed to the minimal disputes related to digital campaign content and demonstrated the candidates' awareness of the importance of ethical political conduct in the digital sphere.

Table 1. Summary of the 2024 Manado Local Election Data

Aspect	Data
Districts	11 (Bunaken, Tuminting, Singkil, Wenang, Tikala, Sario, Wanea, Mapanget, Malalayang, Bunaken Islands, Paal Dua)
Urban Villages	87
Total Registered Voters	353,325 (Male: 173,742; Female: 179,583)
Number of Polling Stations (TPS)	1,371
Voter Turnout	77.43% (Target: 77.5%)
Winning Candidate Pair	Andrei Angouw & Richard Sualang: 107,285 votes
Second Candidate Pair	Benny Parasan & Bobby Daud: 12,501 votes
Third Candidate Pair	Jimmy Rimba Rogi & Ivan Lumentut: 97,564 votes
Fourth Candidate Pair	Audy Karamoy & Lucky Datau: 1,839 votes
Digital Content Violations	Minor, warnings issued
Maximum Allowed Social Media Accounts	20 accounts per platform
Media Advertisement Slots	Maximum 10 slots per television/radio station

Discussion

The digital political strategy implemented by the candidate pair Andrei Angouw and Richard Sualang (AARS) in the 2024 Manado City Regional Head Election demonstrates a high level of planning and structure, reflecting a deep understanding of social media dynamics and voter behavior in the digital era. This strategy is systematic, well-planned, and data-driven, ensuring that every step of the digital campaign is designed to achieve specific objectives, ranging from building the candidates' image, conveying political messages, to mobilizing voter participation. Daily content scheduling is a core component of this strategy, allowing the candidates to maintain a consistent communication rhythm with the public while ensuring message consistency. The scheduled content is not only informative but also designed to stimulate audience interaction, such as through open questions, online polls, and other interactive content. This aligns with the concept of digital engagement, which emphasizes the importance of interactivity in building emotional closeness and public trust in candidates (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

In addition to daily content scheduling, AARS's strategy also employs an intensive multi-platform approach. By using Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube simultaneously, the digital campaign can reach different voter segments. Facebook targets adult voters and communities active in traditional social networks; Instagram and TikTok target young voters through creative, concise, and easily shareable visual content; while YouTube is used to present in-depth long-form videos, such as candidate interviews, documentation of social activities, and comprehensive presentations of vision and mission. The multi-platform approach not only increases message exposure but also ensures that political messages remain consistent across different media. Such an approach aligns with digital political

communication literature, which emphasizes the importance of adapting content according to platform characteristics and audience to achieve maximum impact (Chadwick, 2017; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012).

Collaboration with local content creators is another significant strategy in the AARS campaign. Content creators have loyal audiences and the ability to produce creative material aligned with digital trends, thereby enhancing the credibility and appeal of campaign content. Additionally, this collaboration expands the campaign's reach to digital communities that are otherwise difficult to reach through conventional channels. By involving third parties perceived as independent and professional, the AARS digital campaign gains additional legitimacy, resulting in a more positive and authentic public perception of the candidates. This strategy emphasizes that in the digital era, campaign success depends not only on message quality but also on the ability to leverage social networks and influencers as mediators of political communication (Koc-Michalska & Lilleker, 2017).

Emotional elements also play a crucial role in AARS's digital strategy, particularly through the creation of campaign jingles or slogan songs. These songs serve as political branding tools, creating collective memory and an emotional bond between the candidates and the public. The messages conveyed through these songs are simple, memorable, and have rhythms that facilitate public association with the candidates' identities. Psychologically, the use of music in political campaigns can increase emotional engagement, strengthen voter loyalty, and facilitate more effective internalization of political messages compared to verbal content alone (Papacharissi, 2015). Thus, AARS's digital strategy emphasizes not only informative aspects but also affective dimensions in shaping public perception.

The effectiveness of AARS's digital political strategy is also reflected in increased voter participation and electoral outcomes. A participation rate of 77.43% indicates that the digital campaign successfully encouraged voters to turn out at polling stations, while the significant vote gain achieved by the AARS pair demonstrates that the strategy effectively mobilized real support. This proves that digital campaigning is not merely a passive communication tool but also a strategic instrument capable of shaping public perception, influencing political opinions, and driving voter behavior. A well-planned, consistent, and data-driven strategy allows candidates to identify critical voter segments, design appropriate messages, and assess campaign effectiveness in real-time through digital engagement indicators such as likes, shares, comments, and views (Chadwick, 2017; Lim, 2017).

Beyond technical aspects, the AARS digital strategy demonstrates a deep understanding of the local socio-political context. Campaign content not only emphasizes development programs but also highlights issues relevant to the daily lives of Manado residents, such as public services, the local economy, and cultural identity. This reflects the candidates' ability to combine digital strategy with a contextual approach sensitive to the needs and aspirations of the community. This approach aligns with the concept of the mediatization of politics, which emphasizes that modern politics must adapt to media logic and audience characteristics to be effective in building image and garnering support (Couldry & Hepp, 2017).

Overall, the AARS digital political strategy demonstrates that a structured, multi-platform, collaborative, and emotionally engaging campaign can build a positive image, mobilize support, and increase voter participation. The strategy proves that careful digital campaign management is not merely supplementary but has become a determining factor in the success of local political contests in the digital era. Moreover, AARS's success can serve as a model for other candidates in designing effective, inclusive digital campaigns aligned with the socio-political dynamics of local communities.

E. CONCLUSIONS

The digital political strategy implemented by the AARS candidate pair in the 2024 Manado City Regional Election has proven effective in building political image, increasing voter participation, and mobilizing support. The use of daily content scheduling, multi-platform engagement, collaboration with content creators, and emotional elements such as campaign songs enabled campaign messages to be delivered widely, consistently, and appealingly to various voter segments. This success demonstrates that digital campaigning is not merely a complement to conventional strategies, but has become a strategic instrument capable of influencing local political perceptions and behaviors.

This study provides theoretical contributions by affirming the relevance of the concepts of mediatization of politics, political branding, and digital engagement in the context of local contests, as well as practical contributions as a reference for candidates and campaign teams in designing effective,

adaptive, and ethical digital strategies. The findings also emphasize the importance of understanding the local socio-political context in digital campaigns, ensuring that strategies are not only persuasive but also widely accepted by the public, with the potential to enhance sustainable electoral support in the future.

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