

## DISINFORMATION, POLARISATION AND DIGITAL CAMPAIGNS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN THE ONLINE SPHERE

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**ABSTRACT.** Digital political campaigns have become a key phenomenon in contemporary politics. They significantly transform the patterns of communication between political parties, candidates, and voters. This study aims to analyze the development, dynamics, and implications of digital political campaigns on voter behavior as well as political communication strategies in the era of information technology. Using a qualitative approach through literature review of scholarly articles, the results show that digital political campaigns offer high efficiency in reaching a broad audience and enable the personalization of messages based on big data and predictive analytics. However, this practice also brings new challenges, such as the spread of disinformation, political polarization, and manipulation of public opinion. This method employs a qualitative literature review of peer-reviewed studies (2020–2025) and, where relevant, clarifies the analytical lens used, such as thematic or categorical analysis. This approach enhances methodological transparency without adding excessive length. These findings affirm that digital transformation in political campaigns is not merely a change in medium, but also a paradigm shift in political communication. Therefore, transparent digital governance, adaptive regulation, and political digital literacy for society are essential to ensure that digital political campaigns are conducted ethically and strengthen democratic values.

**Keywords:** Digital Political Campaign; Political Communication; Big Data; Digital Democracy

### INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving digital era, information and communication technology has become a significant force across various sectors, including politics. Digital political campaigns have now become an integral part of political communication strategies, allowing politicians to interact directly with voters through digital platforms such as social media, websites, and mobile applications. This phenomenon offers major opportunities for politicians to reach a wider audience, particularly younger voters who are more active in the online world (Chadwick, 2013). This article examines previous research that discusses the role of digital political campaigns in shaping the communication strategies of leadership candidates, both in the context of Regional Head Elections (Pilkada) and General Elections (Pemilu) in Indonesia since 2014, when the use of social media and digital technology began to grow massively.

Several studies show that the emergence of social media such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), and Instagram has transformed traditional campaign patterns into more interactive, personal, and data-driven models of political communication (Gibson, 2020; Kreiss & McGregor, 2018; Tapsell, 2017). In Indonesia, studies by Nugroho (2018) and Suryani (2020) highlight how digital campaigns play an important role in building political image, expanding the reach of a candidate's message, and mobilizing online public support, especially during the 2014

and 2019 elections. However, these studies also emphasize that digital political campaigns not only bring opportunities, but also present new challenges such as the spread of hoaxes, disinformation, and algorithmic manipulation which can affect public perception (Friggeri, Galstyan, & Ridiz, 2014; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

An effective digital political campaign demands a deep understanding of social dynamics as well as the interplay between social capital and symbolic capital within the context of information dissemination in the digital sphere. This research arises from a gap in understanding about how the power of social capital (such as networks of relationships and public trust) and symbolic capital (such as image, reputation, and political legitimacy) operate and influence each other in political campaign strategies in the era of social media. Although various previous studies have highlighted the effectiveness of digital campaigns in building political image (Tapsell, 2017; Gibson, 2020), there remains a lack of clarity on how symbolic practices and digital social relations also influence the dissemination and reception of political messages amid information flows that are vulnerable to manipulation. The focus of this study is directed at how digital political communication strategies are used in the context of regional elections in Indonesia, compared with other countries where the use of technology in political contests is increasingly developing, as well as their effectiveness in building public participation and strengthening democratic

values. A deep understanding of the factors that influence the effectiveness of digital campaigns is crucial for formulating political communication models that are ethical, transparent, and sustainable in the digital era.

This research aims to explain how the practices of digital political campaigns are formed and operate within a complex communication ecosystem, as well as how political actors and voters face the challenges of information manipulation in the era of social media. Digital platforms have the power to shape the patterns of delivery, reception, and interpretation of political messages by audiences, which ultimately can influence their political orientation and attitudes toward both candidates and specific public issues (Nabillah & Anwari, 2022). Therefore, political actors need to develop strong digital literacy and communication ethics in utilizing social media so that the political messages conveyed do not lead to disinformation or distortion of meaning in the public sphere. Thus, this research not only contributes to enriching the study of digital political communication in Indonesia but also offers a new theoretical perspective through the integration of research findings to understand the relationship between social, symbolic, and power structures in the increasingly complex and dynamic practice of political campaigns in the digital sphere.

## METHOD

In collecting data, this article employs a literature review approach aimed at providing a general overview as well as a synthesis of previous research findings. Specifically, this study adopts a *narrative literature review* to conceptually synthesize prior studies on digital politics and digital campaigning. Through the literature review, research data are collected from various sources relevant to the research topic (Habsy, 2017). This method draws on a number of peer-reviewed journal articles obtained from diverse written sources published between 2020 and 2025, and compiles data from analyses of social media within studies of digital political campaigns across different countries. More specifically, this research analyzes scholarly articles that discuss digital content published during election campaign periods in Indonesia and several other countries. Such digital content is generally disseminated through social media platforms such as X (Twitter), TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram, which reflect various perspectives on the use of digital capital in political campaigns.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we will elaborate on 20 journal articles regarding digital political campaigns that have been conducted by previous researchers. From the relevant research, we found that most of these studies were carried out within the context of general elections in various Southeast Asian countries. Researchers found that this literature review explains how digital political campaigns have fundamentally impacted the way politicians communicate with the public. This method draws on a number of peer-reviewed journal articles obtained from diverse written sources published between 2020 and 2025, and compiles data from analyses of social media within studies of digital political campaigns across various countries. Of the 20 articles reviewed, eight studies explicitly address political hoaxes and disinformation, while twelve studies do not position hoaxes as a primary focus, instead emphasizing digital mobilization, candidate fandom on social media, and online volunteer networks.

Social media has encouraged the emergence of exclusive thought groups that are isolated from others, or what are then referred to as enclave groups. The political discourse occurring within these enclaves is characterized by the appearance of inconsistent information and inaccuracies. This research concludes that social media serves as an “echo chamber” which does not allow for the exchange of ideas and critical reflection, because participants are not in the process of seeking information that contradicts their views but rather seek out all information that supports their opinions (Hasfi, 2019).

Echo chambers can emerge on social media or when we browse for news on online media platforms. Facebook draws users into an echo chamber because this social media platform applies content selection algorithms to the Facebook homepage in such a way that what appears first in the newsfeed are posts tailored to the user’s interests. These interests are based on the user’s history of clicks, likes, shares, and comments on their Facebook homepage. With such algorithms, for instance, a Facebook user will only receive information about a particular issue from a single perspective. Ultimately, in the context of political communication, for example, a Facebook user who leaves a digital footprint in the form of consuming information that is opposed to a particular political candidate will tend to receive more negative information about that candidate, and vice versa. The same happens when netizens consume online media; the algorithm will link all relevant information to what they are currently searching for, rather than

providing information with a variety of perspectives (Hasfi, 2019). Digital political campaigns have also grown rapidly in recent decades, along with the swift advancement of technology. Previously, the political world relied more on traditional mass media such as television, radio, and newspapers to deliver their messages.

However, with the advent of the internet and social media, these old methods are increasingly being replaced by more efficient and interactive digital channels. In this increasingly connected world, digital political campaigns have transformed the face of democracy and the electoral process in many countries. The role of technology in political campaigns cannot be underestimated. The internet and social media enable political candidates to reach a wider audience at a more affordable cost. A digital political campaign that once depended solely on television advertisements or poster distribution can now be executed with a single click, sending messages directly to millions of people around the world. Candidates can interact directly with voters, delivering more segmented messages tailored to specific audiences. Campaign messages become more personal, more targeted, and more efficient. Voters not only see the messages delivered by candidates, but can also respond in real time, through likes, comments, or even sharing information. However, the success of digital political campaigns also brings major challenges. Social media, although it allows for direct interaction, has also become a breeding ground for a new phenomenon: the spread of false information and hoaxes. With the ease of disseminating information quickly, unverified news can spread widely, influencing public opinion without any clear control. Hoaxes, Disinformation and propaganda can be easily produced and distributed on a large scale, altering voters' perceptions in dangerous ways.

Apart from the issue of disinformation, the presence of the "filter bubble" is also a serious challenge in digital political campaigns. Social media tends to display content that aligns with users' preferences or beliefs. This causes many voters to be exposed only to information that reinforces their own views and rarely gain access to differing viewpoints or facts. As a result, political polarization becomes sharper, with certain groups feeling separated from others, creating tensions that are difficult to resolve.

Digital media has the capability to limit the types of content shown according to each user's interests. This phenomenon is known as the Filter Bubble, which is a situation where users are trapped within information they already believe (McIntosh,

2020). One of the elections taking place in Indonesia in 2024 is the context of the 2024 Presidential Campaign, where Filter Bubbles can strengthen someone's conviction in the chosen candidate pair because information about other candidates is restricted. On the other hand, the Filter Bubble causes users to continually consume content that caters to their interests and to ignore other issues that may be equally important (Pariser, 2011). In addition, the use of technology in political campaigns has transformed more traditional political strategies. There are several key findings in the literature review, which the researcher categorizes into three main aspects: (1) mechanisms and conditions, whereby network structures and algorithmic processes are embedded within social media systems and campaign environments; (2) contextual moderators, analyzed through levels of political polarization and digital literacy; and finally, (3) cross-study variation, which is examined based on differences in research methods, types of elections, and platform affordances.

Campaigns that once relied on mass approaches have now become more segmented and personalized. For instance, a candidate can now send different campaign messages to different segments of voters, taking into account their behavioral tendencies and interests that have been mapped using digital data. As a result, political campaigns become more concentrated and focused, with messages that are relevant to specific audiences. However, although digital political campaigns offer various advantages, their impact on democracy must also be considered. These cheaper and more accessible campaigns are not always conducted transparently.

The misuse of personal data, algorithm manipulation, and concerns over the spread of inaccurate information can undermine the integrity of the democratic process. Therefore, stricter regulations are needed to ensure that digital political campaigns remain ethical and democratic. Considering all of its challenges and benefits, digital political campaigning certainly requires greater attention. Going forward, it is crucial to ensure that technology is used in ways that support transparency, fairness, and voters' rights. Governments and digital platforms must collaborate to create a safer, fairer, and more responsible environment for using technology in political campaigns. Only then can we ensure that digital political campaigns remain tools that strengthen democracy rather than undermine it. For example, through social media, candidates can easily manage their own narratives. With a large number of followers and high levels of interaction, a candidate's positive image can be reinforced. They

can use Instagram to share inspiring content, whether in the form of videos, photos, or infographics illustrating their vision. This content not only serves to introduce policies but also to build an emotional connection with voters, who feel increasingly close to and engaged in the political process.

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Although social media offers significant advantages in building an image, there are several challenges that must be faced. One of the biggest challenges is the inequality of access to information. Not all voters in Indonesia have the same access to technology and the internet. This creates a gap in how voters obtain information about prospective leaders. Voters living in remote areas or those less familiar with digital technology may be left behind in terms of obtaining accurate and relevant information about the political candidates running in Indonesia. In addition, there is also the potential for discursive manipulation in cyberspace. Negative campaigns, the spread of hoaxes, and misleading information can easily spread through digital platforms. While social media offers great opportunities to build a positive image, the risk of information manipulation must be watched out for. Therefore, prospective leaders should be cautious in using social media, so as not to get trapped in a damaging information war.

However, it's not just about the number of followers or interactions that matters. A successful digital political campaign must be able to manage messages well and maintain integrity. Social media can be an extremely powerful tool, but if used in a non-

transparent manner or filled with disinformation, it can actually damage a candidate's image and worsen public perception. Digital political campaigns have become a main strategy for winning voter support in Indonesia, with social media being one of the most important platforms in efforts to build an image and deliver political messages. In line with the rapid development of information and communication technology, politicians in Indonesia are increasingly relying on digital media to reach a wider audience, as well as to gather support and influence public opinion. However, phenomena arising from the use of social media, such as filter bubbles, provide a new dimension that needs to be analyzed in the context of digital political campaigns.

### **Digital Political Campaign Strategies**

One of the key elements of a digital political campaign is the narrative constructed by the candidates. In the digital space, this narrative serves to influence voters' perceptions of the candidate and to shape the desired image. Politicians and political parties utilize various platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok to deliver their political messages and use narratives to create a political identity that appeals to specific audiences. Framing and narratives in digital campaigns are often polarizing and tend to package certain issues in a simpler and more emotional way. This sometimes carries the risk of overlooking the complexities inherent in social and political problems. In this sense, emotional manipulation becomes a tactic frequently used to strengthen political messaging.

For example, a candidate might construct a narrative that depicts themselves as the only solution to a particular problem, while portraying their opponents as obstacles or threats. This strategy is highly effective in capturing voters' attention. However, simplified and overly dramatic narratives have the potential to be misleading and can exacerbate social polarization within society. Such content is important because it gives the public an opportunity to better understand presidential candidates and their views on various important social, political, and economic issues. In an increasingly complex political landscape, the public often finds it difficult to access objective information about the candidates competing in regional and national elections in Indonesia. Therefore, politicians and political parties should be prudent in using social media, understanding the risks and consequences that may arise, and ensuring that the messages communicated do not mislead the public.

## Digital Political Campaigns

On the other hand, digital political campaigns are also inseparable from the phenomenon of filter bubbles, which arise from the manipulation of social media algorithms. Filter bubbles occur when social media algorithms filter and display content based on users' search history, preferences, and interactions. This creates a closed information space where users are only exposed to content aligned with their views, while differing or opposing perspectives tend to be excluded. This happens because of algorithmic manipulation on social media platforms. This phenomenon is highly relevant in the analysis of digital political campaigns in Indonesia, given the high level of social media use among voters. In this context, effective digital political campaigns may not only rely on disseminating political messages, but also on algorithms that manipulate the types of information users receive. A study conducted by Seargeant & Tagg examined how Facebook social media users also contribute to information distortion and the polarization of social and political opinions (Seargeant & Tagg, 2019). In addition to filter bubbles, user activity within the media also plays a significant role in making the media a platform for discussion. The study found that users tend to avoid problems with other users who have different preferences. As a result, Facebook users also engage in managing their online audience and selecting content to suit their beliefs. Social media can thus be a key tool for influencing its users' thoughts, dialogues, beliefs, and actions on social issues (Juliswara & Muryanto, 2022)

The existence of Filter Bubbles in a given medium appears to reinforce confirmation bias. Based on this, researchers pay significant attention to the phenomenon of Filter Bubbles, which are assumed to shape political participation as well as the digital campaign process. Forms of political participation are grouped into five categories, namely: voting, campaigning, communal activities, lobbying, and demonstrations or protests (Dalton et al., 2015). These five forms of political participation identified by Dalton serve as a reference point for conducting digital campaigns on social media.

## Literature Review: Digital Political Campaigns

Literature Review Digital political campaigns have become a hot topic of discussion, especially because of the perceived negative risks associated with them (Jaursch, 2020). In the framework of politics, philosophy, and economics, risk is primarily seen as "the probability of a negative outcome" (Ferretti 2016, 3) or more specifically, "risk equals

hazard times exposure" (Chicken and Posner 1998, 7), with hazard referring to something or a situation that can cause harm. In the context of digital election governance, we understand risk as the consequence of specific activities carried out during a digital political campaign. Various digital campaign activities—such as micro-targeting, the use of personal data, personality-tailored messaging, AI-generated messages, and videos—contribute to an increased likelihood of risk for individuals, political actors, and organizations involved in the process of making decisions, producing, distributing, or consuming digital political messaging. Both legal and illegal activities occur in this process. Among the latter are foreign influences in national elections, which have already triggered widespread alarms (Ringhand 2021) and resulted in systemic risks in the form of manipulated election results (Tenove et al. 2018), undermining democratic principles and causing political instability.

The type of risk depends on which actor we consider as the main reference: political parties, consultants, online platforms, citizens, or democratic institutions. We recognize the probability of both positive and negative risks (Klinke and Renn 2021, 544) arising from digital political campaign activities. Among the negative risks generated by digital campaigns and most relevant to citizens in a representative democracy, we can list distorted debates, unequal participation in political discussions, polarization, lack of public oversight, privacy violations, lack of transparency, manipulation, disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation. Disinformation, in particular, is considered the number one global risk in 2024 according to the World Economic Forum's risk perception survey (World Economic Forum 2024). Disinformation in the context of digital campaigns is harmful not only for consumers as potential voters but also for individuals delivering the digital messages. Digital work involved in its implementation can be unstable, carried out by disinformation groups operating in the gray/illegal digital economy worldwide (Grohmann and Ong 2024). Agencies targeting opposition parties may be paid by the ruling party and could also be shielded from prosecution by the same (George 2019; Ong 2020).

## The Role of Digital Capital in Political Campaigns

This analysis is based on the theory of capital used by researchers in reviewing the literature. Bourdieu's theory of capital offers an important perspective in analyzing the use of digital political campaigns. Digital capital, which includes access

to technology, social media, and the skills to utilize digital platforms, plays a crucial role in controlling and manipulating the digital space. Politicians who possess strong digital capital—such as campaign teams proficient in data analysis and social media—can optimize algorithms to effectively reach voters and steer narratives in favor of their candidates. However, disparities in access to technology in Indonesia present significant challenges to effectively utilizing digital capital. Voters in certain regions with limited internet access or lacking social media skills may not be fully reached by digital political campaigns. This exacerbates the information gap between voter groups with broad access to digital technology and those without, creating unfairness in the democratic process. Meanwhile, candidates must campaign their visions and missions through the digital sphere as one way to broaden the reach of their campaigns. This remains a homework assignment for Indonesian politics—particularly in the digital realm—in developing a democratic, fair, and honest system for future general and regional elections. There are also challenges from cyberattacks by political opponents and the issue of hoaxes, which have become significant factors in fostering sportsmanship and honesty for healthy competition.

### **Digital Political Campaigns in Various Countries**

Digital political campaigns have rapidly developed in recent years, thanks to the swift advancement of information and communication technology (ICT). Not only in Indonesia, but also abroad, they have evolved to present both opportunities and challenges. In various countries, digital political campaigns offer a range of opportunities and challenges depending on each country's social, political, and cultural context. To understand the dynamics of digital political campaigns, here is a comparative analysis between Indonesia and several other countries, such as the United States, India, and Brazil. Indonesia, with more than 200 million internet users in 2023 (Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association, 2023), stands out as a nation with a massive online population. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok are extremely popular in Indonesia, making them the main platforms for digital political campaigns. In Indonesia, digital political campaigns often use a more personal and community-based approach, leveraging influencers and celebrities who have a substantial impact on public opinion. However, Indonesia also faces serious challenges related to the spread of hoaxes and disinformation. In recent elections, social media hoaxes have

triggered polarization and influenced electoral results. In response, the Indonesian government has begun introducing stricter regulations to tackle the spread of false information online, although the effectiveness of these measures is still questioned. Additionally, Bourdieu's theory of capital can be applied in Indonesia, where social capital (political networks and influencers) and symbolic capital (the image of politicians) play significant roles in winning digital campaigns. Politicians with close ties to public figures or influential community leaders can gain significant support. Looking at Bourdieu's capital theory in the Indonesian context, social capital—building extensive political networks and having connections with influencers—becomes an advantage, since influencers possess large numbers of subscribers, followers, and fans. Aside from social capital, symbolic capital (political image) is vital in Indonesian politics, where documenting community outreach, impromptu visits, relationship-building, and personal branding are key sources of political strength. In the United States, digital political campaigns have long been more advanced and professional than in Indonesia. The 2008 and 2012 elections—particularly Barack Obama's campaigns—are early examples of using social media and sophisticated data analysis to reach voters and boost participation.

Digital campaigns in the U.S. tend to be highly structured, utilizing advanced technologies like big data analysis and microtargeting to identify and mobilize specific voters (Tufekci, 2014). However, the U.S. also faces issues concerning the spread of hoaxes and the influence of social media on political polarization. Issues such as the dissemination of fake news by foreign actors, for example, through Russian intervention in the 2016 Election, show the dark potential of digital political campaigns. In this context, the theory of hoaxes is highly relevant for understanding the negative impact of social media on electoral integrity. In America, digital capital and digital campaigning are very structured and sophisticated. The digital role in Barack Obama's election was a novelty that has served as a reference for other countries and future U.S. political candidates. Social media is used to publicly display content such as profiles, activities, or even users' opinions, as well as to provide spaces for communication and interaction within online networks (Nasrullah, 2014, p. 26). In Indonesia, social media excitement is believed to continue rising. The Indonesian public has great potential as social media users. In fact, Barack Obama's success in winning two consecutive terms in U.S. elections was partly due to making

social media the main tool for campaigning and shaping his public image (Harisah, 2019).

Meanwhile, in India—the country with the second-largest population in the world—significant developments have also been seen in digital political campaigns. The country has experienced a surge in the number of internet and social media users in recent years. Digital political campaigns in India are heavily influenced by identity politics, with many politicians using social media to build a certain identity that resonates with their voter base, whether it is based on religion, caste, or language. Digital campaigns in India are often highly polarized, with social media being used to disseminate messages that are strongly focused on ethnic and religious identities and to amplify certain controversial narratives. Hoaxes and false information have become a significant problem in India, especially during national elections. Regulators in India have started trying to introduce measures to control disinformation, but challenges remain substantial given the broad reach of social media and the ever-increasing rate of internet penetration. In India, the role of social media focuses on spreading hoax issues and building identity.

This shows that the cultural capital in India's digital political campaigns is dominated by identity politics. Chadwick (2013) in Taberez (2016) provides an interesting analysis regarding the complexity of the hybrid media system in which political life is mediated through networks of action involving both offline and online communication as well as grassroots activism. The arrival of new media did not replace old media, but instead facilitated the emergence of a hybrid media system. Mobile phones are a good example of this phenomenon; what used to serve only as a communication device between two people has now become a multimedia device used for various activities including social communication. However, research also shows that the Internet is far from being revolutionary and democratic, considering that the medium has largely benefited elite political actors who were already active in the era of mass media (Margolis and Resnick 2000).

The new hybrid media ecology, where traditional journalism processes compete with citizen-driven digital media, also makes it difficult to identify the creators and sponsors of media frames around events or news (Hermida 2010 in Taberez 2016). The context in which similar developments in the shift toward a hybrid media system occur in India is even more complex because the country doesn't have just one, but several media systems and party systems, all grounded in specific regional configurations of competition. India's complexity

is driven by, and to some extent reinforced by, the evolving news market, which is populated by the various regional Indian languages as well as English (Neyazi 2010, 2014). Ordinary mobile phones (which support Short Message Service (SMS)) are crucial to our understanding of information flow and the symbiotic relationship among all actors in the 2014 election campaign. Around 70 percent of all Internet users in India accessed the Web via smartphones in 2014 (Kemp 2014).

The percentage of voters using ordinary mobile phones in 2014 was much higher. The importance of mobile phones and access to social media applications did not escape the attention of political parties during the campaign. The use of Twitter on smartphones and the sending of text messages via SMS on ordinary and smart mobile phones to broadly influence and shape information flow in campaigns was widely observed and reported, especially in urban constituencies (Goyal 2014). Studies found that the BJP and its leader Narendra Modi took advantage of this hybrid emergence and managed to bypass the traditional news media, which they regarded as hostile toward the party, to reach their supporters directly (Baishya 2015).

Likewise, Brazil is also one of the countries that heavily relies on social media in political campaigns. The 2018 elections in Brazil demonstrated how digital politics can be used to influence election outcomes, especially through the use of WhatsApp to spread political messages and, in some cases, disinformation. In Brazil, social media has become the main battlefield between different political groups, with the phenomenon of hoaxes occurring very frequently, particularly through messages disseminated via instant messaging apps. A distinctive feature of digital political campaigns in Brazil is the use of social media as a tool for direct mobilization, with many politicians taking advantage of these platforms to communicate directly with voters and strengthen their support base. As in Indonesia, Bourdieu's capital theory can be used to observe how social and symbolic capital play a role in building networks of support in the virtual world. In India, the role of digital campaigns is used as an arena for political contestation, where building social capital and strengthening the voter base are key characteristics of digital campaigns in India.

One strategy often used in Brazil is recruiting influencers (artists, television hosts, radio commentators) not only to support a candidate but also for them to run as candidates themselves. Known as "vote pullers," they have the ability not only to garner votes and get elected but also to help

other candidates in the same party win. In Brazil, all votes for a candidate are counted towards the party's total. Thus, a popular candidate can secure enough votes to get elected as well as help other candidates from the same party/coalition/federation get elected. For example, suppose a party needs 1,000 votes to allow one delegate to be elected. If the party has five candidates, and one individual candidate receives 5,000 votes, then all five candidates can be elected. In this case, four candidates are elected thanks to the "vote puller" (Carlomagno 2016). To address this issue, Brazilian legislators adopted a barrier clause to reduce the influence of vote pullers. Influencers continue to affect audience behavior (in this case, voter behavior), through their accessible, emotional, and/or humorous public image. For instance, a survey conducted in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico in 2022 found that youth aged 16 to 24 obtained political information from channels and profiles that were not supposed to be politicized, as they began to move away from traditional politics and party intermediaries (Luminate 2022) in Grassi (2024).

Meanwhile, broadcasters in traditional media (such as television or radio) are not allowed to promote electoral candidates, but legislation (Law 13.488/2017; see Brazil 2017) allows digital influencers to campaign for their preferred candidates, as long as they are not paid to do so. Paid electoral campaigns on the Internet are permitted only for candidates and parties/coalitions/federations participating in the elections. In addition, TSE Resolution 23.671/2021 prohibits the recruitment of individuals or legal entities to disseminate paid advertisements of a political-electoral nature on profiles, pages, channels—or more broadly, in the digital environment—of political candidates in electoral competition.

In terms of the massive use of social media, digital political campaigns in the United States, Indonesia, India, and Brazil rely heavily on social media, although in different ways. In the United States, the use of technology and big data is more dominant, while in Indonesia, India, and Brazil, campaigns tend to focus more on direct interaction with voters through platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter. In Indonesia, there are also "buzzers," who are part of a cyber army working for a specific candidate to promote their chosen candidate in the digital world. As a result, issues of hoaxes and the battleground of social media are very tangible in Indonesia, sometimes leading to polarization—as happened during the 2017 Jakarta

gubernatorial election, when polarization arose between supporters of Ahok and Anies in Jakarta's society.

The challenge of fake news draws shared attention in many countries, as these countries face significant challenges regarding hoaxes and disinformation. In Indonesia and Brazil, hoaxes are often used to further social polarization, especially before major national political events. In the United States, despite similar challenges, the scale of foreign intervention in elections (as in the 2016 Election) adds an international dimension to this problem. India, with its vast social and political diversity, also faces major issues regarding the use of social media to spread messages that can worsen tensions between ethnic and religious groups. Some countries need to have regulations and government interventions; in practice, different countries have various approaches to regulating digital political campaigns. In the United States, regulation is more oriented toward transparency in political advertising and control over foreign influence. In Indonesia and Brazil, regulation often focuses on controlling hoaxes and the spread of false information. India has also started introducing stricter policies to address misinformation. Specifically in Indonesia, there is the ITE Law, which is one of the laws related to defamation in cyberspace.

## CONCLUSION

Digital political campaigns have become a vital instrument in shaping the dynamics of contemporary political communication. The digital transformation of elections in various countries has enabled faster, more open, and measurable interactions between candidates, political parties, and voters through the use of big data and social media. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of digital campaigns greatly depends on the level of digital literacy among the public, which is a key prerequisite for the success of healthy and democratic political communication. In Indonesia, there is still a gap in digital literacy among voters, especially in the ability to distinguish valid political information from disinformation or content manipulation. This situation makes the digital space not only an arena for competition of ideas but also a battlefield of discourse that is vulnerable to polarization and the spread of hoaxes.

Therefore, modern political communication cannot rely solely on technology and digital marketing strategies, but must be accompanied by systematic, inclusive, and sustainable political digital literacy education. Political digital literacy plays a crucial role in shaping a public that is critical and rational,

not merely consumers of political content. Digitally literate voters will be better able to evaluate political messages, understand context, and make decisions based on ethical and rational considerations. Thus, digital political campaigns can serve as a means to strengthen the quality of democracy—not merely a tool for electoral mobilization—as long as they are accompanied by the ethical responsibility of political actors and the critical awareness of the digital public.

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