

POLITICAL CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF SOCIAL MEDIA PRACTICES

Bikah Kusti Noviani *

Komisi Pemilihan Umum Kabupaten Bantul

bikah.kustinoviani@gmail.com

Edy Sijaya

Universitas Pohuwato

edysijaya31@gmail.com

Hasman Umuri

Universitas Pohuwato

umurihasman@gmail.com

Abstract

Political campaigning in the digital age has undergone major changes. Social media is now an important tool in politicians' campaign strategies. This paper reviews the various ways politicians use social media to campaign. From Facebook to TikTok, politicians utilise online platforms to reach out to voters. They share their visions, programmes and activities directly to voters' smartphones. In addition, social media is also used to fundraise and organise supporters. However, the use of social media in politics also creates new problems. It has become easier to spread fake news and manipulate public opinion. Voter data privacy is also a serious concern. Nevertheless, social media remains an important part of modern campaigning. Politicians who are good at utilising it can benefit greatly. In the future, expertise in digital campaigning will be increasingly crucial for anyone who wants to succeed in politics.

Keywords: Strategy, Political Campaign, Digital Age, Social Media.

Introduction

The digital era has brought significant changes in various aspects of human life, including in the world of politics and electoral campaigns. Politics and electoral campaigns are two concepts that are closely interrelated in a modern democratic system. Politics can be defined as the activity or process of decision-making in a group, which involves the distribution of power and resources in society. (Ibrahim & Safieddine, 2020).. Meanwhile, electoral campaigns refer to a series of organised activities conducted by political candidates, parties or interest groups to influence public opinion and gain voter support in an election. Electoral campaigns usually involve various communication strategies, including public speeches, debates, advertisements, and direct interaction with voters, with the main goal of convincing the public to cast their votes for a particular candidate or party. In the context of the digital age, the definition of electoral campaigns has evolved to include the use of social media and

other digital platforms as the primary means of reaching and influencing voters. (Ahlquist, 2023).

The development of information and communication technology, particularly social media, has dramatically changed the landscape of political campaigns. This shift not only affects the way politicians communicate with their constituents, but also changes the way the public participates in the political process.

Social media, with its interactive, real-time and wide-reaching characteristics, has become a key platform in modern political campaign strategies. This phenomenon is evident in various elections around the world, such as the 2008 and 2016 US presidential elections, where the utilisation of social media became a key factor in the success of the campaign. (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2020).

The presence of social media in political campaigns has brought about a change in the way politicians and parties interact with voters. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok offer direct and real-time communication channels between candidates and their constituents. This allows for faster, wider and more personalised dissemination of political messages. (Nenadić et al., 2024).. Social media has also democratised political information, allowing candidates with limited resources to reach a larger audience without having to rely entirely on traditional media. In addition, the data analytics provided by social media platforms allow campaigns to target their messages with more precision, tailoring content based on voters' demographics, interests and online behaviour. (Ahlquist, 2023).

However, the presence of social media also brings new challenges to political campaigns. One of the main problems is the spread of disinformation and fake news that can quickly spread and influence public opinion. Political polarisation also tends to increase due to social media algorithms that often create "echo chambers" where users are primarily exposed to views that align with their own beliefs. (Fletcher, 2024). Data privacy is also a serious concern, especially after scandals such as Cambridge Analytica that revealed how user data can be misused for political manipulation. In addition, the speed and viral nature of social media can magnify small mistakes into major crises, demanding campaign teams to be alert and responsive at all times. These challenges require politicians and campaign teams to not only be proficient in digital communication, but also understand the ethics and implications of using social media in a political context. (Alotaibi, 2023).

Thus, given the crucial role of social media in contemporary political campaigns, it is important to conduct a comprehensive review of the existing literature on political campaign strategies and practices on social media. An in-depth understanding of this topic is not only relevant for political practitioners and policymakers, but also essential for the wider public in navigating the increasingly complex political information landscape in the digital age.

This research examines various political campaign strategies on social media, analyses their effectiveness, and identifies their challenges and ethical implications. As such, it is expected to provide valuable insights into the dynamics of political campaigning in the digital age and its contribution to the contemporary democratic process.

Research Methods

The study in this research uses the literature method, which is a systematic research approach to collect, analyse, and synthesise information from various written sources relevant to a particular research topic. (Firman, 2018).

The literature method involves the process of searching and selecting relevant sources, such as books, journal articles, research reports, theses, and other publications. Researchers usually start by defining the research question or purpose of the study, then identify relevant keywords and phrases for the literature search. This search can be conducted through electronic databases, libraries, or other online sources. After collecting potential sources, the researcher conducts a critical evaluation of the quality and relevance of each source, considering factors such as the credibility of the author, the methodology used, and suitability to the research topic. (Suyitno, 2021); (Jelahut, 2022).

After the collection and evaluation process, the researcher then analyses and synthesises the information obtained. This involves organising key findings, identifying emerging themes, and recognising gaps in existing knowledge. The results of the literature method are usually presented in the form of a narrative summary that provides a comprehensive overview of the state of the art in the field under study. This method is important because it helps researchers understand the context of their research, avoid duplication of existing work, and identify areas that require further research. In addition, literature methods can also be used to support arguments, develop conceptual frameworks, or as a basis for further empirical research. (JUNAIDI, 2021); (Abdussamad, 2022).

Results and Discussion

Social Media Practices in Political Campaigns

The digital age is characterised by several key characteristics that shape the contemporary technological and social landscape. Firstly, there is a significant increase in global connectivity through the internet and mobile devices, enabling instant communication and seamless access to information. Second, digitisation of data and

content is becoming the norm, with information increasingly being stored and accessed in digital formats. Third, automation and artificial intelligence are starting to take over routine tasks and even some complex jobs. (JAUPI & BUDINI, 2024). Fourth, there is a shift towards a knowledge- and information-based economy, where data becomes a highly valuable asset. Fifth, there is an emerging online participatory culture through social media and collaborative platforms. Sixth, there is a change in the way we work, learn and interact socially, with more and more activities being conducted online. Finally, the digital era is also characterised by new challenges such as data privacy issues, cybersecurity, and the digital divide between those with access to technology and those without (Hadisah et al., 2015). (Hadisah et al., 2022)..

Social media has become a highly influential instrument in modern political communication, dramatically changing the way politicians, governments, and citizens interact and disseminate information. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok provide virtual public spaces where political ideas can be spread quickly and widely, allowing politicians to communicate directly with their constituents without the intermediary of traditional media. (Wang, 2023). Social media also facilitates grassroots mobilisation, campaign organisation and more efficient political fundraising. However, the role of social media in political communication also brings challenges, such as the spread of disinformation and fake news, increased political polarisation, and the formation of echo chambers that can reinforce existing biases. In addition, the algorithms of social media platforms can influence the political information that users receive, potentially shaping public opinion. (Whelan, 2021). Despite its complexity, social media has become an integral component of contemporary political communication strategies, changing power dynamics in public discourse and influencing election outcomes and public policy.

Social media practices in political campaigns have become a crucial element in modern political communication strategies. Candidates and political parties utilise various social media platforms to reach and engage voters in a more personalised and effective manner. They use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok to share campaign messages, upload speech videos and interact directly with constituents. Through social media, campaign teams can tailor their messages for different voter segments, utilising data analytics to target specific audiences with relevant content. (Tarabasz, 2020).

One increasingly popular practice is the use of social media influencers in political campaigns. Candidates work with influencers who have large and relevant followings to promote their platforms and increase the engagement of young voters. Live streaming and live Q&A sessions on platforms such as Instagram or YouTube are also often used to create a sense of openness and accessibility. In addition, political campaigns often utilise internet trends and memes to create viral content and increase candidate visibility. (Hong, 2020).

However, the use of social media in political campaigns also brings challenges and risks. There are concerns about the spread of disinformation and manipulation of public opinion through bots and fake accounts. Some countries have begun implementing regulations to govern political advertising on social media and increase transparency. Candidates must also be mindful of the potential controversy that can arise from inappropriate posts or poorly thought-out comments. (Johnson, 2020). Nonetheless, social media's ability to reach voters directly and mobilise support at a relatively low cost means it remains an indispensable tool in modern political campaigns.

Political Campaign Strategy on Social Media

Political campaign strategies on social media have evolved into a vital aspect of winning modern elections. Candidates and their campaign teams now realise the importance of having a strong presence on various digital platforms to reach and influence voters. One key strategy is content personalisation, where campaign messages are tailored to the preferences and demographic characteristics of the target audience. By utilising advanced data analytics, campaign teams can create content that is more relevant and appealing to different voter segments, increasing the likelihood of engagement and support. (Kennis, 2022).

The use of engaging multimedia content is also a key strategy in political campaigns on social media. Short videos, infographics and easy-to-share memes are often used to deliver campaign messages effectively and memorably. Live streaming of campaign events or live Q&A sessions with candidates has become a popular way to create real-time engagement with voters and build an image of openness. In addition, strong storytelling through serialised posts or hashtag campaigns can help build a coherent and compelling narrative about the candidate's vision and values. (Widyatmoko, 2022).

Collaboration with influencers and influential public figures on social media is also becoming an increasingly common strategy. By utilising influencers' networks and credibility, candidates can expand the reach of their message and gain support from segments of the electorate that may be difficult to reach through traditional methods. This strategy is especially effective in reaching younger voters who tend to be more active on social media and trust recommendations from figures they follow more. (Stoychev, 2020).

Engagement and active interaction with followers are also important components of a social media campaign strategy. Responding to comments, conducting polls, and encouraging discussions can increase the sense of voter engagement and build a solid community of supporters. In addition, the use of targeted advertising on social media platforms allows campaigns to reach specific audiences with

customised messages, increasing the efficiency of campaign spending and the potential conversion of support. (Wulandari & Ibad, 2021).

As such, political campaign strategies on social media have become multifaceted and increasingly sophisticated, utilising a variety of tactics to maximise reach and impact. Personalisation of content, the use of engaging multimedia, collaboration with influencers, and active engagement with voters have become key pillars in digital strategies. Success in modern political campaigns increasingly depends on the ability to integrate effective social media strategies with traditional campaign methods. As technology and social media user behaviour continue to evolve, political campaign strategies on digital platforms will continue to evolve, demanding adaptability and innovation from candidates and their campaign teams.

The Effectiveness of Political Campaign Strategies on Social Media

The effectiveness of political campaign strategies on social media has proven significant in recent years. The ability of social media to reach a wide audience at a relatively low cost makes this platform an invaluable tool for political candidates (Palmer & Seethaler, 2024).. Campaigns on social media enable the viral spread of messages, allowing ideas and information to spread quickly amongst a network of users. This can create strong momentum for candidates, especially if they manage to create content that resonates with public sentiment.

One of the most effective aspects of political campaigning on social media is its ability to microtarget. By leveraging available user data, campaign teams can tailor their messages to very specific groups of voters based on their demographics, interests and online behaviour. This allows for more efficient and effective use of campaign resources, with more relevant and persuasive messages for each audience segment. (Casero-Ripollés, 2021). For example, Barack Obama's campaigns in 2008 and 2012 are considered pioneers in the use of data and social media for microtargeting, which contributed significantly to his electoral success (Farnsworth et al., 2024)..

Social media has also proven effective in building and mobilising a supporter base. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram allow candidates to interact directly with voters, creating a sense of immediacy and engagement that is difficult to achieve through traditional media. Successful crowdfunding campaigns, such as that of Bernie Sanders in 2016, demonstrate how social media can be used to garner financial support from many small donors. In addition, the ability to organise events and rallies quickly through social media has increased the effectiveness of grassroots mobilisation. (Cruz & Tarabasz, 2024)..

However, the effectiveness of political campaigns on social media also brings its own challenges and risks. The spread of disinformation and fake news can happen quickly, potentially damaging a candidate's reputation or misleading voters. The Cambridge Analytica case in the 2016 US presidential election showed how social media

user data can be misused for political manipulation. In addition, social media platforms' algorithms that tend to create "echo chambers" can reinforce political polarisation, where users are only exposed to information that matches their own views (Park & Suiter, 2021).

As such, political campaign strategies on social media have proven to be highly effective in reaching and influencing voters. Its capabilities in microtargeting, building a base of supporters, and grassroots mobilisation have changed the landscape of modern political campaigns. However, this effectiveness also comes with responsibilities and risks that need to be carefully managed. To maximise effectiveness while minimising negative impacts, candidates and campaign teams need to adopt an ethical and transparent approach to the use of social media. In the future, the ability to harness the power of social media effectively and responsibly will increasingly become a determining factor in the success of political campaigns.

Challenges and Ethics of Political Campaigning on Social Media

Political campaigns on social media face significant challenges. One of the main challenges is the spread of false or misleading information (disinformation and misinformation). The speed of information dissemination on social media platforms allows fake news or propaganda to spread quickly before it can be verified or debunked. This can unfairly influence public opinion and destabilise the democratic process. Candidates and campaign teams should always be aware of the information circulating about them and be ready to respond quickly and accurately. (Brogi et al., 2024)..

User data privacy is also an important issue in political campaigns on social media. The use of personal data for political microtargeting has raised ethical and legal concerns. The Cambridge Analytica scandal shows how user data can be misused for political manipulation. The challenge for political campaigns is to find a balance between effective targeting and respect for user privacy. Regulations such as GDPR in Europe have begun to restrict the use of personal data, requiring political campaigns to be more careful and transparent in their data collection and use practices. (Carlini et al., 2024).

Political polarisation reinforced by social media algorithms is also a major challenge. "Echo chambers" and "filter bubbles" created by platform algorithms tend to isolate users in a circle of information that conforms to their own views. This can deepen political divisions and make constructive dialogue between groups with different views difficult. Political campaigns face the challenge of penetrating this "bubble" and communicating with voters beyond their existing base of supporters. (Dunaway & Settle, 2022).

Ethics in political campaigning on social media is becoming increasingly important. The use of bots and fake accounts to manipulate public opinion, the practice of astroturfing (creating the illusion of grassroots support), and "dark advertising" tactics (adverts that are only visible to certain target groups) all raise ethical questions.

Candidates and campaign teams are required to uphold integrity and transparency in their social media activities. This includes disclosing the source of campaign funds, clearly marking sponsored content, and avoiding the use of manipulative tactics. (Arif et al., 2022).

As such, the ethical challenges and considerations in political campaigning on social media demand a careful and responsible approach. The success of a campaign is not only measured by its effectiveness in influencing voters, but also by its integrity in maintaining democratic principles. Candidates and campaign teams need to develop strategies that are not only effective, but also ethical and transparent. This includes combating disinformation, respecting data privacy, working to reduce polarisation, and upholding strict ethical standards. With a balanced approach, political campaigning on social media can be a powerful tool to increase democratic participation and healthy public discussion, while still maintaining the integrity of the political process.

Conclusion

Political campaign strategies in the digital age have undergone a significant transformation with the advent of social media. A review of the literature shows that this digital platform has become a very important tool in reaching and influencing voters. Social media allows candidates and political parties to conduct more personalised two-way communication with constituents, disseminate campaign messages more efficiently and widely, and analyse public sentiment in real-time. The use of big data and algorithms for microtargeting has also increased precision in reaching specific groups of voters. However, the effectiveness of this strategy also brings new challenges related to data privacy, the spread of disinformation, and the potential manipulation of public opinion.

While social media offers great opportunities for innovation in political campaigns, the literature also emphasises the importance of an ethical and responsible approach. Candidates and campaign teams need to balance the use of advanced technologies with sound democratic principles. This includes transparency in the use of data and political advertising, active efforts to combat fake news, and a commitment to maintaining the integrity of the democratic process. In conclusion, political campaign strategy in the digital age requires a deep understanding of the potential and risks of social media, as well as the ability to utilise it effectively while upholding democratic values and political ethics.

References

Abdussamad, Z. (2022). *Qualitative Research Methods Book*. Query date: 2024-05-25 20:59:55. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/juwxn>

- Ahlquist, J. (2023). A Values-Based Strategy for Social Media. *Digital Leadership in Higher Education*, Query date: 2024-11-20 10:57:17, 132-161. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003444244-9>
- Alotaibi, N. (2023). Analysing digital discourses of the #Endmaleguardianshipsystem campaign in Saudi Arabia. *Discourse in the Digital Age*, Query date: 2024-11-20 10:57:17, 196-227. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003300786-13>
- Arif, M. F., Suhendi, H., & Sholeh, N. S. M. (2022). Optimisation strategy of mosque infaq funds. *Islam, Media and Education in the Digital Era*, Query date: 2024-11-20 10:57:17, 34-36. <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781003219149-4>
- Brogi, E., Klimkiewicz, B., & Parcu, P. L. (2024). Monitoring media pluralism in a comparative manner. *Media Pluralism in the Digital Era*, Query date: 2024-11-20 10:57:17, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003437024-1>
- Carlini, R., Cádima, F. R., Flynn, R., & Kalbhenn, J. C. (2024). Media viability vs Market plurality: A comparative perspective. *Media Pluralism in the Digital Era*, Query date: 2024-11-20 10:57:17, 96-115. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003437024-7>
- Casero-Ripollés, A. (2021). Influencing the public agenda in the social media era: Questioning the role of mainstream political journalism from the digital landscape. *The Routledge Companion to Political Journalism*, Query date: 2024-11-20 10:57:17, 322-329. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429284571-30>
- Cruz, A., & Tarabasz, A. (2024). Marketing to organisations in the digital era. *Digital and Social Media Marketing*, Query date: 2024-11-20 10:57:17, 327-345. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003372189-18>
- Dunaway, J., & Settle, J. (2022). Opinion Formation and Polarisation in the News Feed Era. *The Cambridge Handbook of Political Psychology*, Query date: 2024-11-20 10:57:17, 508-525. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108779104.035>
- Eshbaugh-Soha, M. (2020). 7. Traditional Media, Social Media, and Different Presidential Campaign Messages. *Controlling the Message*, Query date: 2024 11-20 10:57:17, 136-152. <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479886357.003.0007>
- Farnsworth, S. J., Lichter, S. R., Latif, F., & Burkley, S. (2024). Late-Night Political Humour and the 2020 Presidential Campaign. *Social Media Politics*, Query date: 2024-11-20 10:57:17, 253-270. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003409427-13>
- Firman, F.-. (2018). QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH. Query date: 2024-05-25 20:59:55. <https://doi.org/10.31227/osf.io/4nq5e>
- Fletcher, G. (2024). A visual introduction to marketing in a digital age. *Digital and Social Media Marketing*, Query date: 2024-11-20 10:57:17, 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003372189-1>
- Hadisah, R., Faaroek, S. A., Tambunan, R. M., & Heriyanti. (2022). Analysis of Satria Vocational High School Digital Campaign Strategy with Instagram Social Media. *Formosa Journal of Applied Sciences*, 1(7), 1411-1430. <https://doi.org/10.55927/vas.vii7.2099>
- Hong, J. (2020). Chapter 2 Social Media and the Changing Political Culture in China. *China in the Era of Social Media*, Query date: 2024-11-20 10:57:17, 39-62. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9781793608758-39>

- Ibrahim, Y., & Safieddine, F. (2020). 3. Political and Social Impact of Digital Fake News in an Era of Social Media. *Fake News in an Era of Social Media*, Query date: 2024-11-20 10:57:17, 43-58. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9781786614223-43>
- JAUPI, E., & BUDINI, B. (2024). Analysis of political communication and strategy used in online media during the 2021 Albanian election campaign: A case study. *Polis*, 23(1), 72-97. <https://doi.org/10.58944/euhb9782>
- Jelahut, F. E. (2022). *Various Theories and Types of Qualitative Research*. Query date: 2024-05-25 20:59:55. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/ymzqp>
- Johnson, J. (2020). Chapter 5 2016 Presidential Campaign Narrative. *Political Rhetoric, Social Media, and American Presidential Campaigns*, Query date: 2024-11-20 10:57:17, 97-126. <https://doi.org/10.5771/9781498540841-97>
- JUNAIDI, J. (2021). ANNOTATED QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY JOHN W. CRESWELL. Query date: 2024-05-25 20:59:55. <https://doi.org/10.31237/osf.io/6kt5q>
- Kennis, A. (2022). Comparing Today's Era of Social Media with the Early Beginnings of the Digital Age. *Digital-Age Resistance*, Query date: 2024-11-20 10:57:17, 330-354. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003003854-11>
- Nenadić, I., Carlini, R., & Spassov, O. (2024). A decade of digital transformation. *Media Pluralism in the Digital Era*, Query date: 2024-11-20 10:57:17, 17-32. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003437024-2>
- Palmer, M., & Seethaler, J. (2024). Evolution of space and geography in media pluralism. *Media Pluralism in the Digital Era*, Query date: 2024-11-20 10:57:17, 133-148. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003437024-9>
- Park, K., & Suiter, J. (2021). Media and the Election: Social and Traditional Media Narratives in the Campaign. *How Ireland Voted 2020*, Query date: 2024-11-20 10:57:17, 113-134. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66405-3_6
- Stoychev, I. (2020). Digital and social media marketing strategy. *Digital and Social Media Marketing*, Query date: 2024-11-20 10:57:17, 98-120. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429280689-7>
- Suyitno. (2021). QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS CONCEPTS, PRINCIPLES AND OPERATIONS. Query date: 2024-05-25 20:59:55. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/auqfr>
- Tarabasz, A. (2020). Campaign planning and project management. *Digital and Social Media Marketing*, Query date: 2024-11-20 10:57:17, 123-148. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429280689-9>
- Wang, Q. (2023). Analysis of the Key Opinion Leader Marketing Strategy in the Era of Social Media. *Advances in Economics, Management and Political Sciences*, 38(1), 115-120. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2754-1169/38/20231895>
- Whelan, B. (2021). Brand iconisation in the social media era. *Journal of Brand Strategy*, 10(2), 171-171. <https://doi.org/10.69554/aieh5834>
- Widyatmoko, W. (2022). DEVELOPMENT OF MARKETING STRATEGY THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACT ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN THE DIGITAL ERA. *Proceeding of The International Conference on Economics and Business*, 1(1), 112-120. <https://doi.org/10.55606/iceb.vii1.196>
- Wulandari, E. R., & Ibad, M. N. (2021). DIGITAL STRATEGY OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION MEDIA ON SOCIAL MEDIA. *Wasilatuna: Journal of Islamic*

Communication and Broadcasting, 4(1), 28-42.
<https://doi.org/10.38073/wasilatuna.v4i1.555>