

The Effectiveness of the Communication Strategy of the Padangsidempuan City General Election Commission (KPU) in Increasing Voter Participation in the Simultaneous Elections

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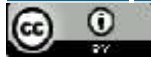
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ABSTRACT

Voter participation is a key indicator of the quality of electoral democracy, particularly in the implementation of simultaneous elections at the local level. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the communication strategies implemented by Komisi Pemilihan Umum Kota Padangsidempuan in increasing voter participation during the simultaneous elections. The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation. Research informants included election commissioners, technical staff responsible for voter education and socialization, democracy volunteers, and community members as voters. Data analysis was conducted using interactive analysis techniques involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, supported by source and technique triangulation to ensure data validity. The findings reveal that the Election Commission of Padangsidempuan City applied a combinative communication strategy by integrating face-to-face communication with the use of digital and conventional media. This strategy contributed positively to increasing voters' knowledge and awareness, particularly through structured socialization activities and social media dissemination. However, the effectiveness of the communication strategy remained partial due to challenges such as political distrust, voter fatigue, and limited two-way interaction in digital media practices.

INTRODUCTION

Voter participation is a key indicator of the quality of electoral democracy in Indonesia, particularly during the implementation of simultaneous elections. At the local level, voter turnout reflects not only citizens' political awareness but also the effectiveness of election organizers in building inclusive public communication (Norris, 2000; Amrizal et al., 2018). However, the reality in various regions shows that voter participation still faces significant fluctuations (Hayati et al., 2022). This phenomenon indicates structural and cultural challenges in the election socialization process, particularly in reaching first-time voters, marginalized groups, and communities with varying levels of political literacy (Saleh et al., 2021). Therefore, voter participation cannot be understood solely as a citizen's responsibility but also as a result of the political communication strategies implemented by election organizing bodies (Dinarto & Ng, 2021; Setiawan & Kartini, 2021).

In the local context, the Padangsidempuan City General Election Commission (KPU) plays a strategic role in ensuring public engagement in the Simultaneous Elections (Hayati et al., 2022; Yunita et al., 2023). Padangsidempuan City, as a region with heterogeneous social characteristics, both in terms of age, education level, and access to information, demands an adaptive and contextual communication approach. Although various forms of outreach have been implemented, such as voter education campaigns and the use of social media, voter participation has not fully reflected the existing demographic potential (Rambe et al., 2025). This situation indicates a gap between communication efforts undertaken and the response of the public as recipients of the messages. Therefore, a more in-depth study is needed to understand the effectiveness of the KPU's communication strategy in addressing this social challenge (Sikumbang et al., 2024; Dalimunthe, 2018).

Political communication literature confirms that the success of election administration is greatly influenced by the quality of the communication strategy implemented by the organizing body (Ufen, 2018; Sarino et al., 2021). Persuasive communication theory explains that political messages will be effective if tailored to the characteristics of the audience, the communication channel, and the socio-cultural context of the recipient (Setiawan et al., 2020; McNair, 2018). Several studies have shown that the use of appropriate media, accessible language, and consistent messaging can increase public understanding and trust in the election process (Habermas, 2006; Dennis & Owen, 2016). These findings reinforce the view that election communication is not simply the delivery of technical information, but also a process of constructing meaning and democratic legitimacy. Therefore, communication strategy is a key variable in increasing voter participation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Empirical studies on voter participation emphasize the importance of a dialogic and participatory communication approach. Two-way communication is considered more effective than one-way communication that is solely informative. Previous research has shown that when voters feel involved, heard,

and valued, turnout tends to increase (Dalton, 2017; Brians & Grofman, 2021). On the other hand, the failure of communication strategies is often associated with low public trust, political fatigue, and the perception that elections do not directly impact people's lives (Bimber, 2014). This literature emphasizes that the effectiveness of election communication needs to be analyzed contextually at the local level.

Based on empirical conditions and the findings of this literature, this study aims to examine in depth the effectiveness of the communication strategy implemented by the Padangsidempuan City Election Commission (KPU) in increasing voter participation in the Simultaneous Elections. The primary focus of the study is directed at how messages are formulated, media selected, and communication methods implemented to reach various voter segments. By analyzing the communication practices employed, this study is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the implemented strategy. Therefore, the purpose of this study is not only descriptive but also evaluative.

This research also aims to identify factors influencing the effectiveness of election communication strategies at the local level. These factors include internal aspects of the election organizing institution, the social characteristics of the community, and the dynamics of the communication media used. By understanding the interactions between these factors, this research is expected to provide strategic recommendations based on empirical evidence. This objective is crucial so that the research results are not limited to academic purposes but also have practical relevance for improving the quality of election administration in the future.

This research is based on the argument that low or fluctuating voter turnout is not solely caused by public political apathy but is also influenced by the effectiveness of the election organizers' communication strategies. Communication strategies that are not contextual, less participatory, or do not utilize media optimally have the potential to fail to reach a wide range of voters. Therefore, evaluating the General Elections Commission (KPU)'s communication strategy is crucial to understanding the root causes of voter participation. This argument positions communication as a determining variable in the electoral democracy process.

The argument further emphasizes that studies on the effectiveness of the KPU's communication strategy at the local level are still relatively limited, particularly in the context of a mid-sized city like Padangsidempuan. However, local social and cultural dynamics significantly influence the success of election communication. By examining the case of the Padangsidempuan City General Elections Commission (KPU), this research is expected to fill gaps in previous research and enrich the body of political communication and election studies. Therefore, this research has both theoretical and practical significance in strengthening participatory democracy in Indonesia.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach, aiming to deeply understand the effectiveness of the communication strategy implemented by the Padangsidempuan City General Election Commission (KPU) in increasing voter participation in the Simultaneous Elections (Creswell, 2018). The qualitative approach was chosen because this study does not focus on measuring numbers or statistical relationships, but rather on exploring the meaning, processes, strategies, and dynamics of communication that occur within a specific social context. With this approach, researchers can capture empirical reality holistically and contextually according to the social characteristics of the local community. This type of research is descriptive, because it is directed at systematically and factually describing how the election communication strategy was designed, implemented, and evaluated by the Padangsidempuan City KPU. The study is not intended to test hypotheses, but rather to map the communication practices carried out, the form of messages conveyed, the media used, and the public response to election socialization activities (Sugiyono, 2022). Thus, the results are expected to provide a complete picture of the effectiveness of election communication at the local level. The research subjects were determined using purposive sampling, namely informants who were considered to have knowledge and direct involvement in the implementation of election communication strategies. Key informants included the Padangsidempuan City KPU commissioners, technical staff handling voter socialization and education, as well as supporting parties such as democracy volunteers or election socialization partners.

This research also involved informants from the community as voters to obtain the perspectives of election communication message recipients. Data collection techniques were conducted through three main methods. First, in-depth interviews with key informants to explore communication strategies, considerations in media selection, and challenges faced in increasing voter participation. Second, non-participant observation of election socialization and communication activities, both conducted in person and through digital media. Third, documentation, in the form of a review of official KPU documents, socialization materials, social media content, activity reports, and regulations related to the implementation of the Simultaneous Elections. Data analysis techniques were carried out using an interactive analysis model that includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation were first reduced by sorting information relevant to the research focus. Next, the data were presented in a systematic thematic narrative to facilitate interpretation. The final stage was carried out by drawing conclusions based on patterns, themes, and meanings that emerged from the overall data. To maintain data validity, this study employed triangulation techniques, both source triangulation and technical triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from various informants, while technical triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, the researcher also cross-checked the data with

informants (member check) to ensure that the researcher's interpretation was in accordance with the informant's intent. Through this qualitative descriptive research method design, the study is expected to produce a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the Padangsidimpuan City Election Commission's communication strategy in increasing voter participation, while also providing theoretical and practical contributions to the development of political communication studies and election administration at the local level.

RESEARCH RESULT

The Padangsidimpuan City General Election Commission's Communication Strategy in Election Socialization

Research results indicate that the Padangsidimpuan City General Election Commission implemented a combination communication strategy, combining direct (face-to-face) and media-based communication approaches. This strategy was designed to reach diverse voter segments, from first-time voters and the general public to specific community groups. In practice, the KPU utilized formal outreach activities such as voter education forums, public discussions, and community-based activities involving community leaders and democracy volunteers. This approach demonstrates the KPU's efforts to adapt its communication patterns to the social and cultural characteristics of the Padangsidimpuan community.

Substantially, the communication messages conveyed not only contained technical information regarding the stages and procedures of voting but also emphasized the importance of political participation as a form of civic responsibility. The emphasis on democratic values and voting rights was a key part of the message structure. These findings demonstrate that the KPU served not merely as a transmitter of administrative information but also as an agent of political education. From the perspective of political communication theory, this approach aligns with the view that election communication functions to shape public political awareness, attitudes, and behavior. The research results show that the Padangsidimpuan City General Elections Commission implemented a combination communication strategy, combining direct (face-to-face) and media-based communication approaches. This strategy was designed to reach diverse voter segments, from first-time voters and the general public to specific community groups. In practice, the KPU utilized formal outreach activities such as voter education forums, public discussions, and community-based activities involving community leaders and democracy volunteers. This was emphasized by an informant from the election organizing committee who stated:

"We can't rely on just one method. Some people are easier to reach through face-to-face meetings, while others are active on social media. Therefore, our strategy is layered, adapting to the conditions of the Padangsidimpuan community."

The interview excerpts show that the KPU's communication strategy is not uniform, but rather adapts to the social heterogeneity of the community. Analytically, this approach reflects the application of the principle of audience-centered communication, where audience characteristics are the primary basis for designing messages and selecting communication channels (Jungherr, 2015).

This strategy is relevant in the context of local communities with varying levels of political literacy and access to information. Substantially, the communication messages delivered by the General Elections Commission (KPU) not only contain technical information regarding the stages and procedures of voting but also emphasize the importance of political participation as a form of civic responsibility. Emphasis on democratic values and voting rights is a key part of the message construction. This is as expressed by another informant:

"In the socialization, we not only explain when and how to vote, but also why voting is important. We emphasize that one vote is meaningful for the future of the region."

The interview narrative indicates that the KPU positions election communication as a political education process, not simply the delivery of administrative information. From the perspective of political communication theory, this strategy aligns with the function of political socialization, namely shaping public awareness, attitudes, and political orientation (Amida et al., 2024; Cormack, 2019). Messages imbued with normative democratic values have the potential to enhance the subjective meaning of elections for voters, thereby encouraging more conscious and voluntary involvement (Aroziki, 2025). Furthermore, the involvement of community leaders and democracy volunteers in socialization activities is also viewed as strategic by the KPU. One informant stated:

"If a community leader or volunteer known to the community delivers the message, it's more easily accepted. People trust it more and are more willing to come to the polling stations."

This excerpt demonstrates that the General Elections Commission (KPU) consciously utilized opinion leaders in its election communication process. Analytically, this finding reinforces the two-step flow of communication theory, which argues that institutional messages are more effective when channeled through figures with social closeness and cultural legitimacy in the eyes of the public. In the Padangsidimpuan context, this approach is crucial because social ties and community trust still play a dominant role in shaping political behavior. Therefore, this study confirms that the effectiveness of the Padangsidimpuan City KPU's communication strategy is determined not only by the intensity of outreach but also by the quality of the message, media selection, and the communication actors involved. The combination of direct communication, media, and the role of local figures creates an election communication ecosystem that is relatively adaptive to the local socio-cultural context (Green & Gerber, 2019; John, 2024). However, this effectiveness still requires strengthening, particularly in developing more dialogic and participatory communication so that it does not stop at increasing knowledge but actually leads to a sustainable increase in voter participation.

Utilizing Communication Media to Increase Information Reach

The research also revealed that utilizing communication media is a key pillar of the Padangsidimpuan City General Election Commission's strategy to increase voter participation. Social media such as Facebook and Instagram are

used as a means of disseminating information quickly and widely, particularly to reach young voters who are highly digital media users. Meanwhile, conventional media such as banners, billboards, and local radio broadcasts are retained to reach communities with limited internet access or unequal digital literacy. This combination of media usage reflects the KPU's awareness of the digital divide that persists in Padangsidempuan. This strategy was expressed by one election organizer informant:

"If we rely solely on social media, we won't reach everyone. Many people still get information from radio or street billboards. That's why we continue to use all available media."

This interview excerpt demonstrates that the KPU's choice of communication media was pragmatic and contextual, rather than simply following digital trends. Analytically, this approach aligns with the concept of a media mix strategy, where the effectiveness of public communication is determined by the institution's ability to adapt communication channels to the characteristics of the audience. In the context of a society with varying levels of digital literacy, the use of multiple media is a rational strategy to minimize information exclusion (Purba et al., 2025; Kurniawati et al., 2025). However, the research also shows that the effectiveness of digital media still faces several challenges, particularly related to limited two-way interaction. The General Elections Commission (KPU)'s social media content tends to be informative and one-way, focusing on conveying schedules, stages, and normative appeals. This situation was directly acknowledged by an informant, as in the following statement:

"Indeed, most of our content is still informational. There is interaction with the public, but it hasn't been intense due to limited time and resources."

This statement indicates that the KPU's use of social media has not been fully directed as a space for public dialogue. From the perspective of symmetrical two-way communication theory, this situation indicates that digital media has not been maximized to foster active voter engagement through dialogue, feedback, and open discussion. In fact, the characteristics of social media inherently allow for more participatory interactions between the institution and the public. Nevertheless, this study also found that the presence of digital media continues to contribute significantly to increasing the visibility of election information. A community informant stated:

"I mostly get election information from the KPU's Instagram. Even if it's just through posts, at least I know the voting schedule and rules."

This quote demonstrates that, despite suboptimal interaction, digital media still plays a significant role in increasing voter information awareness. Analytically, this confirms that the media's informative function remains effective as an initial stage in the political communication process, particularly within the voter's cognitive domain. However, to encourage more active and sustained participation, this informative function needs to be developed into a dialogic and persuasive function. Therefore, the results of this study indicate that the Padangsidempuan City KPU's use of communication media has been adaptive and contextual, but still requires strengthening in terms of interactivity.

Optimizing digital media as a two-way communication space presents both a challenge and a strategic opportunity to increase voter engagement, particularly among the younger generation (Ritonga et al., 2024; Dalimunthe et al., 2023). These findings emphasize that the effectiveness of election communication is determined not only by media reach but also by the quality of interactions established between election organizers and the public.

The results also reveal that the use of communication media is a key pillar of the Padangsidempuan City KPU's strategy. Social media such as Facebook and Instagram are used as a means of disseminating information quickly and widely, particularly to reach young voters. In addition, conventional media such as banners, billboards, and local radio broadcasts are still used to reach communities with limited digital access. This combination of media reflects the KPU's awareness of the digital literacy gap in society. The effectiveness of digital media still faces challenges, particularly related to limited two-way interaction (Kenski & Jamieson, 2017; Ritonga et al., 2024). The General Elections Commission (KPU)'s social media content tends to be informative and one-way, thus not fully encouraging intense public dialogue. From the perspective of two-way communication theory, this situation indicates that media utilization is not optimal in building active voter engagement. Nevertheless, the presence of digital media continues to contribute to increasing the visibility of election information and expanding the reach of the KPU's communication messages (Humaizi et al., 2024).

Public Response to Election Communication Strategies

Research findings indicate that public responses to the communication strategies implemented by the Padangsidempuan City General Elections Commission (KPU) varied. Some stated that the election information provided was relatively easy to understand and helped raise awareness about exercising their right to vote. This positive response was particularly felt by voters who actively participated in direct outreach activities or regularly accessed information through the KPU's social media channels. This was expressed by one voter informant:

"If you participate in direct outreach activities or see KPU posts on social media, the information is quite clear. So you know when to vote, how to vote, and you feel like it's a shame not to vote."

This interview excerpt demonstrates that repeated and consistent exposure to information can improve voters' cognitive understanding and shape positive attitudes toward election participation. Analytically, these findings confirm that contextual and sustainable communication strategies play a crucial role in strengthening public political awareness. From a political communication perspective, this reflects successful communication at the awareness and understanding levels, which are prerequisites for developing participatory behavior (Ghibran et al., 2025; Yüksel, R., & Bayrak, 2024). However, this study also found that some community groups felt under-reached by the General Elections Commission (KPU)'s outreach activities. This group generally showed low levels of interest in election information, even though messages had been

disseminated through various communication channels. One informant expressed their views as follows:

"I rarely participate in outreach activities, sometimes I just look at the billboards. But honestly, the current election feels ordinary, it doesn't have much impact on daily life."

This narrative indicates political fatigue and a low perception of the election's significance among some voters. Analytically, this finding strengthens the argument that the effectiveness of election communication is determined not only by the intensity of messaging, but also by the psychological state and social experiences of voters. Factors such as skepticism about change, political fatigue, and low trust in political actors are important variables influencing the reception of communication messages. Furthermore, busy schedules and time constraints also emerged as barriers to participation, as expressed by another informant:

"Sometimes it's not that I don't want to vote, but the timing isn't right. The information is available, but not everyone has the time to participate in outreach activities."

This finding suggests that barriers to participation are not always ideological but also structural. From the perspective of persuasive communication theory, this situation emphasizes the importance of a communication strategy that is not only informative but also empathetic and relevant to the realities of people's lives. Election communication messages need to be designed with voters' daily context in mind to overcome these psychological and social barriers. The results of this study indicate that the diversity of public responses reflects the complexity of voter behavior. The General Elections Commission (KPU)'s existing communication strategy has been able to raise awareness among some, but has not fully reached apathetic or skeptical voters. Therefore, election communication needs to be directed toward a more persuasive and dialogical approach, with an approach that emphasizes the election's direct relevance to public interests. This approach is expected to broaden communication reach while sustainably improving voter participation (Indainanto et al., 2023).

The research findings also indicate that public responses to the Padangsidempuan City KPU's communication strategy were varied. Some stated that the election information provided was relatively easy to understand and helped raise awareness about exercising their right to vote. This was particularly felt by voters who actively participated in direct outreach activities or accessed information through social media. This positive response indicates that a contextual and repeated communication strategy can strengthen public understanding of the importance of electoral participation.

On the other hand, there are also groups of people who feel less accessible to outreach activities. Busy schedules, political fatigue, and the perception that elections do not bring significant change are the main reasons for the low interest of some voters (Rusli, 2025; Okour & Alhammad, 2025). This finding strengthens the argument that the effectiveness of election communication is determined not only by the intensity of message delivery, but also by the psychological and social context of the message recipient. Therefore, election communication needs to be

designed to be more persuasive and dialogical to reach voter groups that tend to be apathetic.

Effectiveness of Communication Strategy on Voter Participation

Based on observations and interviews, this study found that the Padangsidempuan City General Elections Commission (KPU)'s communication strategy contributed positively to increased voter participation, although not yet fully optimal. Structured and ongoing outreach activities were able to increase public knowledge about the election, which in turn encouraged some voters to participate. This aligns with the theory of communication effects, which states that increased knowledge is the initial stage in developing participatory behavior. The effectiveness of the communication strategy remains partial because it has not fully addressed non-communicative factors such as distrust of political actors and low confidence in democratic institutions. These findings suggest that the KPU's communication strategy needs to be supported by a collaborative approach with various stakeholders, including community leaders and educational institutions, to build public trust sustainably. Therefore, election communication cannot stand alone but must be part of a broader democratic ecosystem (Harianto et al., 2023; Ohorella et al., 2024).

Based on observations and interviews, this study found that the communication strategy implemented by the Padangsidempuan City General Elections Commission (KPU) contributed positively to increased voter participation, although its impact was not yet fully optimal. Structured and ongoing outreach activities have been shown to increase public knowledge about the stages, mechanisms, and importance of elections. This increased knowledge was the initial factor that encouraged some people to exercise their right to vote. This was conveyed by one election organizer informant:

"After several outreach sessions, we saw that people began to understand better. Their questions became more specific, and this was usually followed by their attendance at the polling stations."

This interview excerpt demonstrates that the increase in public cognitive understanding was a tangible result of the implemented communication strategy. Analytically, this finding aligns with the theory of communication effects, which positions changes in knowledge (cognitive effects) as the initial stage before forming participatory attitudes and behaviors. In other words, effective election communication does not immediately result in participation, but rather works gradually through a process of political learning. However, this study also found that the effectiveness of the General Elections Commission (KPU)'s communication strategy was still partial because it failed to fully address non-communicative factors that influence voter behavior. Factors such as distrust of political actors, disappointment with political promises, and low confidence in democratic institutions presented obstacles that could not be resolved through information dissemination alone. One informant from the community expressed the following critical view:

"Election information is available, but that's not the problem. Many people feel that regardless of who is elected, their lives remain the same."

This narrative indicates that the issue of voter participation lies not solely in the technical aspects of communication, but also in the psychological dimensions and political experiences of the public. Analytically, this finding reinforces the concept of political distrust and low political efficacy, where voters feel their votes have no significant impact on social change and public policy. In this context, informative election communications are insufficient to overcome this skepticism (Thelma et al., 2024). Furthermore, this study emphasizes that the General Elections Commission (KPU) communication strategy needs to be supported by a collaborative approach with various stakeholders to build sustainable public trust. The involvement of community leaders, educational institutions, and local communities is considered crucial to broadening the legitimacy of election messages. This was conveyed by the following KPU informant:

"We realize that building trust cannot be done alone. We need to collaborate with schools, religious leaders, and the community to increase the credibility of election messages."

This interview excerpt demonstrates institutional awareness that election communication is part of a broader social process. Analytically, this finding confirms that election communication cannot stand alone but must be integrated within a democratic ecosystem involving various social actors (Hardiyanto et al., 2023). Therefore, the effectiveness of the KPU's communication is measured not only by short-term increases in participation but also by its ability to build public trust and democratic awareness in the long term.

CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

This study confirms the relevance of political communication and persuasive communication theories in the context of local elections. Adaptive, contextual, and audience-oriented communication strategies have proven more effective in increasing voter awareness and participation. These findings also reinforce the view that election communication functions not only as a means of conveying information but also as a means of constructing meaning and legitimizing democracy. From a practical perspective, this study implies that the Padangsidempuan City Election Commission (KPU) needs to develop a more dialogic and participatory communication strategy, particularly through optimizing interactive digital media and strengthening community-based communication. Furthermore, ongoing evaluation of communication strategies is necessary to ensure that election messages truly reach all levels of society. Thus, the results of this study not only contribute to the development of political communication studies but also provide strategic recommendations for improving the quality of local election administration.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future research should focus on how adaptive, participatory election communication across digital and community channels influences voter trust and democratic legitimacy in the long term.

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