

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF POLITICAL PARTIES' DIGITAL CAMPAIGNS IN THE 2024 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF THE GERINDRA PARTY IN KUPANG CITY

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the effectiveness of the Gerindra Party's digital campaign during Indonesia's 2024 Legislative Election in Kupang City and identifies the factors supporting and constraining its implementation, amid the growing strategic role of digital campaigning and rising social media use among young voters. Using a qualitative case-study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, social media observation, and documentation, then analyzed with the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model. Informants included Gerindra officials, the digital campaign team, millennial and Gen Z voters, a political observer, and a Bawaslu Kupang City representative. Applying the AIDA model, the campaign was highly effective at the attention and interest stages, reflected in sustained engagement and visual recall; moderately effective at the desire stage, where positive party image coexisted with reliance on candidates' records; and limited at the action stage, as votes were shaped by family discussion and face-to-face interaction rather than online exposure. This uneven distribution across AIDA stages is the study's central finding, revealing a conversion gap between digital engagement and electoral behavior rarely noted in prior studies. Building on this gap, the study proposes an "interrupted AIDA" model, in which digital media generate attention and shape agenda, while final decisions are mediated through interpersonal, two-step-flow-like communication rooted in local context. Supporting factors included widespread youth social media use, a structured digital team, and cost flexibility, while inhibiting factors included digital literacy gaps, persistent face-to-face culture, limited resources, and weak content oversight. The study concludes that digital campaigning complements rather than replaces conventional campaigning, extending the AIDA model for future research.

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INTRODUCTION

The transformation of information and communication technology over the past two decades has fundamentally changed the landscape of political communication, including how political parties reach and influence voters. Whereas in the past political campaigns relied heavily on conventional media such as television, radio, and outdoor signage, digital media particularly social media has now become the primary channel for building a party's image, disseminating its platform, and engaging with constituents. Digital campaigns offer a number of comparative advantages over conventional methods, including wider reach, relatively affordable costs, and the capacity for two-way interaction which allows parties to foster voter engagement and loyalty through creatively designed and segmented content. It is no surprise, then, that in the 2024 General Election, nearly all political parties in Indonesia have made digital strategies one of the main pillars of their campaigns.

This shift is not merely about moving campaigns to the online space but also transforms the very nature of political practice itself. (Postill, 2020) asserts that digital politics must be understood as a series of social practices occurring within the digital media ecosystem, where political actors, technology, and culture intertwine in a non-linear manner and are heavily influenced by algorithmic logic and user participation. Contemporary society, according to him, lives within a hybrid media system that connects traditional and new media; thus, the effectiveness of digital campaigns cannot be separated from political actors' ability to manage these digital practices to foster public engagement and mobilization. In line with this view, (Coleman, 2015) emphasizes the importance of conceptualizing how digital technology shapes political behavior and the relationship between citizens and political actors, where the effectiveness of digital political communication depends heavily on the ability of political actors to create spaces for deliberation, trust, and two-way interaction with voters rather than merely disseminating campaign messages on online platforms.

Various recent studies underscore the urgency of this topic in the context of Indonesia's 2024 general election. A study (Jayus et al., 2024) published in the Journal of Simbolika found that legislative candidates are intensively utilizing a combination of Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok to boost their campaign visibility ahead of the 2024 general election. Another study in the Journal of Nusantara Communication highlights that TikTok users tend to perceive campaigns on that platform as effective in building rapport with young voters, while research by (Afrita, 2024)) underscores the role of social media in fostering open political discourse and public participation in the 2024 General Election. On the other hand, studies on the political literacy of the younger generation including those published in EduTech: Journal of Education and Social Sciences and SELAMI IPS remind us that the younger generation's digital participation remains fraught with challenges such as misinformation, polarization, and digital literacy gaps that can limit the effectiveness of online political messages. These findings indicate that although digital campaigns have become a common practice, their effectiveness in changing attitudes and voting behavior still requires contextual empirical research (Putricia, 2024).

Nevertheless, these studies reveal three trends that leave gaps in the research. First, the majority of previous studies, including (Jayus et al., 2024) and the study in the Journal of Nusantara Communication, focus on the digital campaigns of individual legislative candidates, rather than on the digital strategies of political parties as institutions that collectively coordinate messages and public images. Second, most of these studies were conducted in major urban areas with relatively high levels of digital literacy and well-developed technological infrastructure; consequently, their findings may not necessarily apply to regions with different characteristics, particularly in eastern Indonesia. Third, existing studies generally measure the effectiveness of digital campaigns in terms of platform users' perceptions or the intensity of social media use, but rarely link these digital practices contextually to a party's actual electoral performance at the local level, nor do they qualitatively explore the supporting and hindering factors involved.

The city of Kupang is a relevant location to address this gap for several reasons. The Gerindra Party, as one of the nation's major political forces, has demonstrated a relatively progressive adaptation to these shifting patterns of political communication. In the 2024 Legislative Elections, Gerindra actively utilized various social media platforms to disseminate its vision and mission, introduce its candidates, and build an emotional connection with voters particularly the digitally savvy younger generation. In Kupang City, this phenomenon has strong empirical relevance: in the 2024 elections, Gerindra succeeded in increasing its number of seats in the City Council to five, with approximately 25,400 votes, and secured a position for one of its cadres as Chair of the Kupang City Council a significant improvement compared to the 2019 elections,

when the party only held the position of Vice of the City Council with approximately 15,467 votes (General Elections Commission (KPU), 2019). The party even succeeded in securing a position for one of its members as Deputy Mayor of Kupang (General Elections Commission (KPU), 2024), an achievement not attained in previous local elections. This sharp electoral surge which occurred at the party level rather than merely through individual candidates makes Gerindra in Kupang City a rare case in the literature and warrants in-depth research: does this surge truly correlate with the digital campaign strategies implemented, or do other factors play a more dominant role? Furthermore, the uneven level of digital literacy, disparities in access to information technology infrastructure, and the distinctive characteristics of political information consumption among the people of NTT mean that findings from the context of large cities cannot be directly generalized to the context of Kupang City; thus, a contextual study in this region also enriches the perspective of research on digital political communication, which has so far been dominated by studies based on major cities in western Indonesia.

Although digital campaigns promise wide reach and high interactivity, their effectiveness in influencing the preferences and voting behavior of the public at the local level such as in Kupang City remains an area that has not been extensively studied. Uneven levels of digital literacy, disparities in access to information technology infrastructure, and the distinctive characteristics of political information consumption among the people of NTT mean that findings generalized from the context of major cities cannot be directly applied to the context of Kupang City. This research gap forms the backdrop for the importance of this study: to conduct a qualitative and contextual analysis of how the Gerindra Party's digital campaign is implemented, to what extent the campaign is able to reach and influence voters, and what factors support or hinder its effectiveness at the local level.

Based on this gap, this study makes an academic contribution by presenting a qualitative-contextual analysis of a political party's digital campaign (rather than that of an individual candidate) in a region with digital literacy and infrastructure characteristics that differ from those of major urban centers, while linking these digital practices to actual electoral outcomes as well as their supporting and hindering factors at the local level.

Based on this description, this study is designed to answer two main questions: (1) how effective was the Gerindra Party's digital political campaign in the 2024 Legislative Elections in Kupang City, and (2) what enabling and hindering factors influenced the implementation of this digital political campaign. This study is expected to make an academic contribution to the development of research on digital political communication at the local level, while also providing practical benefits for political parties in designing more effective digital campaign strategies, as well as for election organizers and supervisors in formulating digital campaign oversight policies that are adaptive to technological developments.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design to gain an in-depth and contextual understanding of the Gerindra Party's digital campaign practices during the 2024 Legislative Elections in Kupang City, East Nusa Tenggara Province, as emphasized by (Moleong, 2021), who states that qualitative research aims to understand phenomena holistically within their natural context. The research took place over approximately two months. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews and direct observation of campaign activities on social media, while secondary data were sourced from General Elections Commission (KPU) documents, media archives, and statistics from the party's official accounts.

Informants were selected purposefully and numbered 10, consisting of members of the Gerindra Party's Kupang City Branch Executive Committee (DPC), the party's social media/IT team, millennial and Generation Z voters, local academics/political observers, and representatives from the Kupang City Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), totaling 10 individuals; this number was determined based on the principle of data saturation, meaning that interviews were terminated when information from additional informants no longer revealed new themes. Interviews were conducted in person using a semi-structured guide, lasted an average of 30–60 minutes per session, were recorded with the informants' permission, and were transcribed verbatim; observations were made of the content and interactions on the party's official accounts on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp throughout the 2024 legislative election until its conclusion.

Data analysis utilized an interactive model (Miles, 2014) through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions and verification. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation by comparing the party's

digital team's statements with voters' perceptions and academic assessments as well as methodological triangulation, which involved cross-checking interview results against social media account observations and official KPU/Bawaslu documents, ensuring the research findings possess adequate credibility and reliability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Kupang City, as the capital of East Nusa Tenggara Province, has a heterogeneous population and a relatively high level of internet penetration, particularly among first-time voters and those of working age, making digital media a locally relevant campaign tool. In the 2024 Legislative Election, the Gerindra Party demonstrated a strong position in the city's political contest, securing approximately 25,385 votes, placing it at the top of the party vote tally and successfully securing seats for several of its members in the Kupang City Regional People's Representative Council (General Election Commission (KPU), 2024). The party's digital team utilized various platforms in distinct ways: Facebook and WhatsApp were used to reach the general public and the Tim digital supporters, while Instagram and TikTok were optimized to attract young voters through visual content and short videos. This segmented, multi-platform approach aligns with findings (Jayus, 2024), which indicate that tailoring platforms to audience characteristics was key to the effectiveness of digital campaigns in the 2024 elections across various regions.

When analyzed through the AIDA model framework (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action), the effectiveness of the Gerindra Party's digital campaign in Kupang City showed uneven patterns across each stage. During the attention and interest stages, the digital campaign proved quite strong: visual content, videos of party members' activities, and narratives on local issues successfully captured voters' attention and sparked their interest, as acknowledged by an informant from the party's IT/digital team, who noted that the volume of comments, incoming messages, and shared content indicated a high level of engagement. During the "desire" stage, the digital campaign helped shape a positive perception of the party's image viewed as active, modern, and responsive though this trust was balanced by voters' consideration of candidates' track records and their own direct experiences. However, at the "action" or voting decision stage, the influence of digital campaigns is relatively limited and indirect; the millennial and Generation Z voters interviewed consistently stated that social media helped them get to know the party and its candidates, but their final voting decisions were still influenced by family discussions, their social circles, and face-to-face interactions.

This pattern of diminishing influence of digital media at the action stage aligns with the two-step flow of communication theory proposed by (Katz, 1955). Katz and Lazarsfeld explained that media messages do not directly influence the audience but are filtered and renegotiated through opinion leaders and immediate social networks before affecting individual attitudes and behaviors. In the context of Kupang, family and the social environment appear to function as "filters" in this second stage, so that high levels of digital engagement during the attention-interest stage do not automatically translate into voting decisions during the action stage. This finding also offers a critical perspective on the linear application of the AIDA model in the context of local politics: rather than four sequential and mutually reinforcing stages, field data reveal a "conversion gap" between desire and action that is filled by non-digital social mechanisms. This interpretation differs from the common assumption in the literature on digital political marketing, which tends to treat the intensity of online engagement as a direct proxy for vote gain.

Several support factors were identified that strengthened the implementation of Gerindra's digital campaign in Kupang City. First, the increasing penetration and intensity of social media use among young voters created a strategic digital public space for the party to interact directly with constituents without the intermediary of conventional media. Second, the presence of a structured digital team, albeit with limited resources, enables more consistent and targeted content management, reflecting political marketing practices that tailor messages to audience characteristics. Third, the flexibility and cost-efficiency of digital media expand a campaign's reach across regions without being limited by time or space. The academics and political observers interviewed also assessed that the main strength of Gerindra's digital campaign lies in its ability to

link national issues to local contexts through content showcasing the actual activities of party cadres on the ground, ensuring that the digital campaign does not appear disconnected from grassroots political work.

On the other hand, this study also identified several constraints that limit the optimization of digital campaigns. Digital literacy gaps across regions and among voter groups result in campaign messages not being distributed evenly, while limitations in human resources and the digital team's budget impact the consistency and quality of the content produced. The proliferation of inaccurate information in the digital space has also prompted some voters to adopt a critical and selective stance toward online political messages, consistent with findings from studies on political literacy among the younger generation, which indicate that the challenges of misinformation and polarization can erode the depth of voters' political understanding (Akmal S et al., 2024). Interestingly, findings in Kupang reveal a slightly different nuance from the general concerns in the literature: rather than completely losing trust or becoming apathetic toward online political information as is commonly depicted in studies on the impact of hoaxes some voters in Kupang have instead developed a more active, selective, and critical approach to verifying information an adaptive response that has not been widely emphasized in the referenced studies. Another equally significant barrier is the strong conventional political culture at the local level, where face-to-face interactions and personal connections between candidates and voters are still viewed as more persuasive determining factors than digital interactions alone.

Findings regarding voter engagement reveal an interesting dynamic: the intensity of digital interactions such as likes, comments, and content shares does not always correlate directly with changes in voting behavior. This pattern aligns with the concept of "slacktivism" or low-intensity digital activism widely discussed in the literature on online political communication, which refers to the tendency of social media users to express symbolic support through casual interactions without accompanying substantive political commitment or action. Most voters in Kupang view digital interactions as a form of symbolic support that fosters emotional closeness and a positive image, without directly making it the sole basis for political decision-making. This pattern reinforces the argument that digital engagement should be understood as part of an ongoing political communication process that complements conventional campaigns, rather than as a sole indicator of electoral effectiveness; it also serves as a methodological caution that engagement metrics (vanity metrics) cannot be used as a sole proxy for campaign success without being confirmed by actual voting behavior data (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). These findings are also relevant to studies on the rhetoric of digital campaigns targeting millennials, which indicate that increased digital visibility and engagement by political parties do not automatically correlate with a significant increase in electoral support; thus, this study reinforces, rather than refutes, trends that have been documented in the context of young voters in other regions.

Theoretically, the findings of this study reinforce the relevance of the elements of political communication (Lasswell, 1948). "who says what, through which channel, to whom, with what effect" in the digital context, where social media serves as the primary channel enabling parties to directly control political messages to voters without gatekeeping by conventional mass media. This study also confirms the validity of agenda-setting theory in the local digital sphere, particularly regarding the ability of the party's digital team to highlight specific issues through content repetition and visibility. However, the theoretical contribution of this study goes beyond merely confirming these three theories separately. By simultaneously integrating the AIDA model, agenda-setting theory, and the two-step flow of communication theory, this study proposes a new interpretation that is better suited to the local context of Kupang: Gerindra's digital media and campaign teams effectively perform Lasswellian and agenda-setting functions during the attention-interest stage, but decision-making authority in the final decision stage (action) shifts from digital channels to interpersonal networks in accordance with the two-step flow mechanism. In other words, the digital campaign in Kupang does not function as a single, linear channel of persuasion as assumed by the classical AIDA model, but rather as a "pre-persuasion" stage that prepares the agenda and image, while the final decision is still reprocessed through local sociocultural structures that prioritize face-to-face interaction. This hybrid model, which can be termed the "interrupted AIDA" pattern, differs from the application of the AIDA model in

the context of commercial marketing or digital campaigns in urban areas with higher digital literacy, and thus constitutes an original contribution of this study to the literature on digital political communication at the local level.

In practical terms, these findings suggest that the Gerindra Party's digital campaign in Kupang City would be more effective if implemented in an integrated manner by combining the power of digital media with face-to-face campaigning, improving voters' digital literacy, and managing content in an ethical manner that complies with election regulations, in line with the view that digital technology should be positioned as a supporting tool during the pre-persuasion stage, rather than the sole determinant at the final decision stage, in the electoral democratic process at the local level.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Gerindra Party's digital campaign in Kupang City functions effectively as a pre-persuasion stage in voters' political decision-making process, but does not serve as the sole determinant of voting decisions. Digital media successfully fulfilled the functions of attracting attention, building interest, and shaping the party's image (attention-interest-desire), but the authority over the final decision (action) remained within the realm of social-interpersonal interactions and face-to-face political culture characteristic of the local context in Kupang. In other words, the strength of Gerindra's digital campaign lies in its ability to build awareness and set the issue agenda, not in its ability to directly convert that awareness into votes.

Theoretically, this finding contributes the "interrupted AIDA" model as a modification of the classic AIDA model's application in the context of local political campaigns where face-to-face political culture remains strong. This model demonstrates that the AIDA stages do not always proceed linearly and continuously, as they do in the context of commercial marketing or digital campaigns in regions with high digital literacy; rather, they are interrupted at the transition point from desire to action, which is then filled by the two-step flow mechanism through family and immediate social networks as the determinants of the final decision. This finding simultaneously enriches the relevance of Lasswell's theory and agenda-setting theory in the local digital sphere, affirming that the effectiveness of both theories is contextual and limited to the awareness-building stage, not the stage of voter behavior conversion.

This study also confirms that voter engagement in the digital space in the form of likes, comments, and content shares should be understood as a form of symbolic support, not a direct proxy for electoral success. High levels of engagement among young voters do not automatically correlate with tangible changes in voting behavior; therefore, digital metrics alone are insufficient as the sole indicator for evaluating the effectiveness of political campaigns.

In practical terms, these findings have implications for three groups. For the Gerindra Party and other political parties, digital campaigns should be positioned as tools for raising awareness and advancing an issue-based agenda integrated synergistically with grassroots campaigns and face-to-face interactions rather than treated as standalone channels of persuasion. For election organizers and supervisors, regional and voter-group disparities in digital literacy must be taken into account when formulating more adaptive policies for monitoring digital campaign content. For academic development, the "disconnected AIDA" model proposed in this study opens opportunities for further testing in other regions with different sociocultural characteristics, to determine whether similar patterns apply more broadly or are specific to the context of Kupang City.

Further research is recommended using a mixed-methods approach that combines digital data-based social media analytics such as measuring reach, sentiment, and content dissemination patterns using platform application programming interface (API) data with larger-scale surveys of voting behavior, to more precisely measure the strength of the relationship between exposure to digital campaigns and voting decisions. Expanding the scope of the research to other political parties or regions with different levels of digital literacy and socio-cultural structures is also necessary to test the extent to which this "disconnected AIDA" model is specific to the Kupang context or applies more broadly to local elections in Eastern Indonesia.

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