

THE DYNAMICS OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

**Ahmad Sampurna Rambe¹, Hikmatul Fadilah², Putri Nadia Ritonga³, Siti Nabila Azzahra⁴,
Zakiah Mahrani Harahap⁵**

¹²³⁴⁵Fakultas Dakwah dan Komunikasi, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara Medan

Correspondence Email : ahmadsampurna@uinsu.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The development of digital technology has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of political communication, creating new spaces for interaction between political actors and the public through social media. This study aims to analyse the dynamics of political communication in the digital age by highlighting how media and algorithmic logic frame the construction of political discourse and public participation. Using a qualitative approach based on literature review, this study examines literature from accredited scientific journals discussing topics such as digital political communication, mediatisation, social media algorithms, and political literacy. The results of the study indicate that political communication in the digital space tends to be dominated by visual aesthetics and performance rather than political substance. Digital platforms, through non-neutral algorithms, reinforce opinion polarisation and create echo chambers that limit dialogue between groups. Meanwhile, public political participation has expanded in meaning but often gets stuck in shallow and reactive symbolic expressions. The discussion in this study emphasises that digital political communication is ambivalent: it opens up opportunities for the democratisation of information, but simultaneously increases the potential for manipulation and domination of discourse by certain powers. The conclusion of this study is that political communication in the digital age requires an increase in critical literacy so that the public can navigate the complexity of information and avoid the trap of symbolic proximity illusions and structured disinformation.

Keywords: Political Communication; digital era; algorithms; Public Participation; critical literacy.

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of digital technology has had a structural impact on the dynamics of contemporary political communication. The emergence of social media as a virtual public space has broken down the barriers between the political elite and the public, enabling direct, simultaneous, and massive political interaction. Amidst the increasingly dense and rapid flow of information, politics is no longer solely produced through formal institutions, but also through narratives, symbols, and discursive constructions circulating in the digital space. This change is not merely technological but also epistemological: the way society understands, evaluates, and participates in political processes has undergone a fundamental shift, (Walangarei & Sitorus, 2023).

The urgency of this study lies in the fact that social media, as the primary medium for digital political communication, has the power to shape public opinion, mediate conflicts, and directly influence political outcomes. However, at the same time, social media also serves as a breeding ground for disinformation, identity polarisation, and manipulative practices that are not immediately apparent, (Van Bavel et al., 2021). Algorithmic architecture of digital platforms plays a major role in reinforcing exclusive political preferences, creating an echo chamber phenomenon that reduces public deliberative space, (Alfifa et al., 2025). Therefore, a more critical understanding of how political communication is conducted, disseminated, and influenced in the digital context is needed.

The rationale for this research refers to the need to review classical approaches in political communication studies that have not fully explained the political reality in the digital space. Whereas previously the focus of political communication studies was on mass media, formal campaigns, and image strategies, now the algorithmic dimension, digital performativity, and citizen participation based on media have become important elements that cannot be ignored. Modern political communication is increasingly characterised by visual aesthetics, emotional rhetoric, and the logic of virality, which have replaced substantive argumentation, (Yulius et al., 2024).

This study aims to critically examine the dynamics of political communication in the digital age, particularly by highlighting the relationship between political actors, digital media, and society in shaping public discourse. The focus is on how political messages are constructed, disseminated, and received by digital audiences through algorithm-based platform mechanisms. This study also explores to what extent the public can become active participants in digital political communication, or whether they are trapped in symbolic passivity due to the flow of disinformation and narrative control by certain powers.

As a problem-solving approach, this research uses a qualitative method based on literature review, analysing scientific articles and relevant documents on digital political communication, mediatization theory, algorithms, and citizen political participation. This method allows for in-depth exploration of concepts and produces reflective analysis that enriches academic discourse while contributing to the development of digital political literacy.

From a number of previous findings, it can be assumed that political communication in the digital era is not neutral or uniform, but is influenced by technological structures, media logic, and dominant actors who have ideological and electoral interests, (Bossetta, 2018; Echeverria, 2023). Therefore, the hypothesis developed in this study is that digital political communication tends to exhibit an ambivalent character: it opens up space for the democratisation of participation while also becoming a new hegemonic tool for controlling public opinion.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive and reflective library research method, (Adlini et al., 2022). The activity design focuses on a critical review of journal articles, books, and academic documents discussing digital political communication, mediatization, media algorithms, and political participation. The scope of the research covers the phenomenon of political communication that takes place on social media such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. The object of study is conceptual, namely the discourse and practice of political communication in the digital space. Data were obtained from nationally and internationally accredited literature (2019–2025) managed using Mendeley and Zotero. Data collection techniques were conducted through documentation and content classification based on themes.

Operational definitions of variables include: (1) digital political communication as the process of exchanging political messages through digital media; (2) mediatization as the dominance of media logic in political processes; (3) algorithms as automated information filtering systems; and (4) digital political participation as citizens' engagement in political issues through online media.

Data analysis uses thematic content analysis to identify patterns of meaning, dominant narratives, and discourse structures in the literature under review, with an interpretive and reflective approach.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study are presented in the form of a thematic synthesis of scientific literature related to the dynamics of digital political communication, which has been classified into three main themes: political mediatisation, algorithms and polarisation, and digital participation. These findings are summarised in the following table:

Table 1. Dynamics of Digital Communication

Theme	Key Findings
Political Mediatisation	The political process is increasingly subject to the logic of digital media. Political actors tend to build visual and performative images rather than convey substantive ideas.
Algorithms and Polarisation	Digital platforms are designed to strengthen emotional engagement through algorithms. This creates filter bubbles and echo chambers that reinforce political polarisation.
Digital Political Participation	The public, especially the younger generation, is active in digital political expression (hashtags, memes, comments), but this is not always accompanied by deep reflection.

The table above shows three crucial dimensions that define current political communication practices. All three are interconnected in a digital ecosystem that shifts the structure of interactions between the state and citizens, elites and the masses, and information and perception.

Political mediatisation (Media-Based Political Mediation) causes politics to be treated as visual content that competes with other entertainment genres on social media. Politics is packaged like an 'image show,' where the visualisation of emotions, rhetorical language style, and popular narratives determine public perception more than the credibility of programmes or track records, (Alim et al., 2024). In this context, media is not merely a distribution tool but an agency that determines how politics is understood by the public. This brings politics closer to the logic of the market and media capital, rather than its representative social mission.

The interpretation of these findings leads to the conclusion that in the digital space, the existence of politics is more determined by the ability to appear and go viral, rather than the substance of policy. This risks creating performative populism that sacrifices the deliberative process for the sake of superficial engagement.

Meanwhile, the role of algorithms in directing information exposure shows that digital political communication does not take place in a neutral space. Algorithms operate based on computational logic that amplifies content that is emotional, extreme, and provocative. Note that this triggers the formation of echo chambers, where users are exposed only to views aligned with their own, thereby narrowing intergroup dialogue and reinforcing political identity segmentation, (Al-Fatih et al., 2024).

Interpretation of this fact shows that algorithms not only determine what is seen but also how political perceptions are formed, (Huszár et al., 2022; Pamungkas et al., 2024). Society no longer accesses information in a balanced manner but through filters designed to stimulate engagement, not truth. In the long term, this weakens public rationality and opens the door to systemic disinformation, (Callie Rizma Riendani et al., 2024; Maya Enjelia Lusi, 2024).

Digital political participation, which on the one hand shows broad public engagement in political discourse, also reveals reflective weaknesses. Younger generation appears active in the digital space, their expressions are often reactive and emotional, without being accompanied by a critical understanding of the political issues raised, (Dewi et al., 2024). This reflects the contradiction between political expression and political effectiveness; many voices, but little structural change.

The interpretation of these findings shows that digital participation needs to be complemented by critical political literacy and the ability to sort information, (Al-Fatih et al., 2024). Otherwise, the digital space becomes a new place of symbolic repression that multiplies voices but removes substance, (Siti Maisaroh et al., 2024).

Overall, the results of this study show that political communication in the digital age is not a neutral or organic process, but takes place in an ecosystem determined by three major forces: media aesthetics, platform algorithms, and instant participation culture. These three forces shape a new political landscape that is fluid, ambivalent, and full of paradoxes. Politics is becoming closer symbolically, but further away substantively.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the dynamics of political communication in the digital age have undergone a fundamental shift characterised by the dominance of media logic, algorithmic intervention, and symbolic participation by the public. Politics is no longer merely conveyed through formal power structures, but is constructed in visual, emotional, and instant formats through social media. The process of mediatisation transforms political communication into a spectacle of images that prioritises aesthetics over substance, while the algorithmic logic of platforms reinforces the polarisation of opinions and creates digital echo chambers that narrow the diversity of views. Although the digital space opens up opportunities for broader and more inclusive political participation, this study finds that the digital political expression of society, especially the younger generation, is still predominantly reactive and emotional. This reflects weak political and digital literacy in responding to strategic discourses circulating on a massive scale. Digital political communication, therefore, is ambivalent: it offers opportunities for democratisation but also harbours the risk of hegemonic and manipulative discourse dominance. These findings emphasise the need for a critical approach in understanding the structure and practices of political communication in the digital age, as well as the importance of strengthening digital literacy so that the public can navigate information reflectively and not get caught up in the illusion of symbolic closeness alone. Political communication today is not merely an exchange of messages, but an arena of contestation over meaning and power that takes place simultaneously within complex and non-neutral digital structures.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adlini, M. N., Dinda, A. H., Yulinda, S., Chotimah, O., & Merliyana, S. J. (2022). Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Studi Pustaka. *Edumaspul: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 6(1), 974–980. <https://doi.org/10.33487/edumaspul.v6i1.3394>
- Al-Fatih, I. Z., Putera, R. A., & Umar, Z. H. (2024). Peran Algoritma Media Sosial dalam Penyebaran Propaganda Politik Digital Menjelang Pemilu. *Jurnal Kajian Stratejik Ketahanan Nasional*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.7454/jkskn.v7i1.10090>
- Alfifa, A. N., Fahira, V., Batubara, R., Sakinah, K., Manik, J., & Yoes, R. A. (2025). Media Sosial dan Pembentukan Opini Publik (Analisis Studi Kasus Echo Chamber Pada Interaksi Komentar di Akun Instagram @Turnbackhoaxid Dalam Konteks Post-Truth). *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial*, 2(6). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14709277>
- Alim, I. N., Herdian Farisi, & Yuliana, A. (2024). PENGARUH PEMASARAN POLITIK MEDIA SOSIAL DAN KUALITAS INFORMASI TERHADAP NIAT MEMILIH DENGAN KEPERCAYAAN DAN LOYALITAS PEMILIH SEBAGAI MEDIASI. *Jurnal Manajemen & Bisnis Jayakarta*, 6(01), 106–117. <https://doi.org/10.53825/jmbjayakarta.v6i01.277>
- Bossetta, M. (2018). The Digital Architectures of Social Media: Comparing Political Campaigning on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat in the 2016 U.S. Election. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 95(2), 471–496. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699018763307>
- Callie Rizma Riendani, Indiarta Raghda Atshila S, Afif Abhinaya, Ahmad Ridlo Abdillah, & Bahy Dzaky Mufadhol. (2024). Pengaruh Algoritma Media Sosial Terhadap Selektivitas Konsumsi Berita Politik Pada Generasi Z Di Indonesia. *Jurnal Pustaka Cendekia Hukum Dan Ilmu Sosial*, 2(3), 224–228. <https://doi.org/10.70292/pchukumsosial.v2i3.68>
- Dewi, T. R., Ramadhani, N. A., Misbah, R., Pramesella, M. A., Khalif, S. R., & Aji, M. P. (2024). STRATEGI KOMUNIKASI POLITIK: PROGRAM DESAK ANIES UNTUK MENINGKATKAN PARTISIPASI GENERASI MUDA DALAM PEMILIHAN PRESIDEN 2024. *Responsive: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Penelitian Bidang Administrasi, Sosial, Humaniora Dan Kebijakan Publik*, 7(3). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24198/responsive.v7i3.58348>
- Echeverría, M. (2023). Experiencing Political Advertising Through Social Media Logic: A Qualitative Inquiry. *Media and Communication*, 11(2), 127–136. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v11i2.6412>
- Huszár, F., Ktena, S. I., O'Brien, C., Belli, L., Schlaikjer, A., & Hardt, M. (2022). Algorithmic amplification of politics on Twitter. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 119(1). <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2025334119>
- Maya Enjelia Lusi, R. (2024). Komunikasi Digital dan Keterlibatan Politik: Menilai Pengaruh Platform Online Terhadap Opini Publik. *Jurnal Cendekia Ilmiah*, 3(3). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.56799/jceki.v3i3.3386>
- Pamungkas, Y. C., Moefad, A. Moh., & Purnomo, R. (2024). Konstruksi Realitas Sosial di Indonesia dalam Peran Media dan Identitas Budaya di Era Globalisasi. *Metta: Jurnal Ilmu Multidisiplin*, 4(4), 28–36. <https://doi.org/10.37329/metta.v4i4.3737>
- Siti Maisaroh, Silvy Novianty, & Shalsabyla Finta Azalea. (2024). Pengaruh Algoritma Facebook terhadap Polarisasi Politik di Kota Medan Selama Pemilu 2024. *Eksekusi: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum Dan Administrasi Negara*, 2(3), 198–206. <https://doi.org/10.55606/eksekusi.v2i3.1235>
- Van Bavel, J. J., Rathje, S., Harris, E., Robertson, C., & Sternisko, A. (2021). How social media shapes polarization. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 25(11), 913–916. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2021.07.013>

- Walangarei, A. S., & Sitorus, F. K. (2023). Post-Truth, Democracy, and the Need for Critical Media Literacy. *JKOMDIS: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi Dan Media Sosial*, 3(3), 802–805. <https://doi.org/10.47233/jkomdis.v3i3.1362>
- Yulius, Y., Patriansah, M., Viatra, A. W., Hakim, M. R., & Febrianti, N. F. (2024). *Jurnal Desain Komunikasi Kreatif Intepretasi Simbolisme Visual Nuansa Black Pink dan pada Kampanye Fitrianti-Nandriani*. 6(2), 199–204. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.35134/judikatif.v6i2.224>