

POLITICAL MARKETING-BASED POLITICAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN THE 2024 BANDUNG CITY ELECTION: A CASE STUDY OF MUHAMMAD FARHAN AND ERWIN'S WINNINGS

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Abstract

This study analyzes the political communication strategies implemented by the Muhammad Farhan and Erwin ticket in the 2024 Bandung City Regional Election using a political marketing perspective. In the context of modern electoral democracy, political communication is no longer understood solely as a campaign activity, but rather as a strategic process that is voter-centered and designed to respond to public needs and preferences. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method, with data collection techniques through document analysis, literature review, and secondary data collection sourced from mass media, social media, electability survey results, and official publications of related institutions. The results show that the success of the Farhan-Erwin ticket is influenced by the implementation of an integrated political marketing strategy, including the use of social media as the main arena for political communication, the use of political branding through the slogan "Bandung Utama", and the involvement of community leaders as opinion leaders in expanding communication reach. This strategy reflects a shift from a candidate-centric campaign approach to a voter-oriented approach, especially the millennial generation and Generation Z. In addition, the research findings show that success in the media arena contributes significantly to increasing electability in the electoral arena. This study concludes that an effective political communication strategy in regional elections (Pilkada) is determined not only by campaign intensity, but also by the candidate's ability to integrate communication, political branding, stakeholder management, and voter orientation within an adaptive political marketing framework. These findings provide theoretical and empirical contributions to the development of political communication and political marketing studies in the context of regional head elections in Indonesia.

Keywords: Pilkada, Political Branding, Political Communication, Political Marketing, Social Media.

A. INTRODUCTION

Local Head Elections (*Pemilihan Kepala Daerah / Pilkada*) constitute one manifestation of democratic values at the local level because they provide a mechanism for exercising popular sovereignty in provinces and regencies/municipalities to elect governors/regents/mayors and their deputies directly and democratically. Within this framework, Pilkada should not be understood merely as an electoral routine, but rather as an institutional instrument to ensure that leadership succession occurs legitimately, transparently, and in accordance with democratic electoral principles (direct, general, free, secret, honest, and fair). (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, 2024).

Furthermore, Pilkada functions as a channel of public accountability: citizens can grant political mandates, evaluate performance, and “correct” the direction of local governance through their electoral choices. Consequently, the quality of Pilkada helps determine the quality of local democracy from the perspectives of representation, participation, and policy responsiveness because elected local leaders acquire legitimacy to pursue development agendas. In contemporary practice, the design of simultaneous Pilkada is also projected to enhance the stability and efficiency of electoral governance; nevertheless, recent studies indicate that derivative policy challenges (such as leadership vacancies and administrative political implications) must be managed so that democratic objectives remain safeguarded (Ramadani et al., 2025).

In the context of the 2024 Pilkada, numerous variables stimulate citizens to choose candidates for regional head and deputy head who share aligned goals with particular individuals or groups. Beyond seemingly well-crafted visions and missions, candidates also require delivery strategies that can be effectively received by the broader public—namely, by maximizing political communication.

Within the 2024 Pilkada, various factors influence voters’ decisions in selecting leaders, including candidates’ track records, electability, popularity, and the communication strategies employed during campaigns. Pilkada thus becomes not only an arena for contesting ideas and programs, but also a contest of image in which candidates must be able to attract public sympathy effectively. Advances in information technology and social media further expand the reach of political communication, enabling candidates to engage voters more broadly and interactively. Therefore, effective political communication can shape public opinion, increase voter engagement, and build a positive candidate image.

According to Nasution and IP (1990), political communication refers to any transmission of messages whether in the form of symbols, written words, spoken expressions, or gestures that influences a person’s position within a particular power structure. From ancient Greece to the contemporary era, communication has remained fundamental for politicians to disseminate ideas to the public in order to cultivate image and secure support. This is evidenced by the victory of Bandung’s elected Mayor and Deputy Mayor, Muhammad Farhan and Erwin, who secured a total of 523,000 votes (Bagaskara, 2024).

Given this outcome, the campaign strategy of the elected Mayor and Deputy Mayor can be regarded as successful, as reflected in the concrete result of obtaining the highest vote total. Accordingly, this article aims to analyze the political communication strategies used in the winning campaign for Bandung’s Mayor and Deputy Mayor, encompassing the utilization of mass media and social media, voter-oriented communication strategies, and the image-building efforts undertaken by Muhammad Farhan and Erwin.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Marketing

Political Marketing is understood as the application of marketing principles to design, communicate, and strategically “exchange” political products (candidates, programs, images, symbols) for voters’ support. In essence, a campaign does not end at promoting a figure; rather, it begins by mapping voters’ needs, values, and preferences through market intelligence so that the political offer feels relevant. Within the market-oriented party framework, parties/candidates use public feedback to adjust their political product (policy substance, leadership style, and narratives), not merely to refine its presentation. This approach requires segmentation–targeting–positioning practices and the integration of communication channels, including digital media, so that messages remain consistent across arenas. Accordingly, campaign success is viewed as the ability to integrate voter research,

political brand differentiation, and adaptive communication execution (Newman, 1999; Lees-Marshment, 2001; Strömbäck, 2007). Indicators:

- Voter research and needs mapping (market intelligence).
- Voter segmentation and selection of key target groups.
- Positioning and differentiation of the candidate/program “product.”
- Consistency of brand identity (slogans, symbols, narratives) across channels.
- Integration of media strategy (online–offline) and message orchestration.
- Evaluation of public responses and feedback-based strategic adjustment.

Agenda-Setting

Agenda-setting emphasizes that the media do not always determine what the public thinks, but they are powerful in shaping which issues the public considers important. When a particular issue receives more frequent, more prominent, and more consistent coverage, perceptions of that issue’s importance tend to rise in people’s minds. In the campaign context, candidates may try to “attach” themselves to issues with high salience or push new issues onto the public agenda through measured media exposure. The key mechanism is salience cues such as placement, repetition, and intensity of coverage that direct voters’ attention. Therefore, this theory is relevant for examining the relationship between content strategy (including social media) and shifts in public attention that may resonate with electability. (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) Indicators:

- Frequency of issue appearances in campaign content/news.
- Level of issue prominence (headlines, prime placement, main posts).
- Issue consistency over time (narrative continuity).
- Issue resonance in public conversation (comments, hashtags, shares).
- Shifts in voters’ top-of-mind issue perceptions.

Two-Step Flow of Communication

The two-step flow model explains that media influence often does not flow directly to everyone, but is mediated by opinion leaders within social networks. Opinion leaders are typically more exposed to information, more active in interpreting messages, and then disseminate them through interpersonal communication to wider groups. In political campaigns, community figures, local elites, influencers, or organizational leaders can function as opinion leaders who extend reach and enhance the credibility of candidates’ messages. The persuasive effect arises because messages carried by opinion leaders have been “translated” into the community’s language, norms, and experiences, thereby reducing voters’ resistance. Hence, this model helps explain why engaging community leaders can become a critical leverage point for penetrating specific voter segments (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Katz, 1940). Indicators:

- Identification of key actors as opinion leaders (figures/communities/influencers).
- Intensity of endorsements and leaders’ involvement in campaigning.
- Network strength and social closeness between leaders and voter bases.
- Message diffusion pattern: media → leaders → community (offline/online).
- Triggered interpersonal discussions (citizen/community/volunteer talks).
- Network-based mobilization of support (volunteers, communities, local nodes).

C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach using a case study method to explore in depth the political communication strategies employed by the Muhammad Farhan–Erwin ticket in the 2024 Bandung mayoral election (Pilkada Kota Bandung). Data were drawn from multiple secondary sources, including mass media reports, academic publications, campaign documentation, and election-related data made available by the KPU and polling institutions.

Data were collected through document analysis of publicly released campaign materials, covering the candidates' vision and mission, policy programs, and the communication strategies they employed. A literature review was also conducted by referring to political communication theories and relevant prior studies. In addition, indirect observation of campaign activities in mass media and on social media enabled the mapping of communication patterns applied throughout the campaign period.

Data analysis in this research was carried out using content analysis and discourse analysis. The collected data were classified according to their relevance to the political communication strategies under study and then organized into a systematic descriptive narrative. This approach was intended to illustrate how political communication was deployed by the Muhammad Farhan–Erwin ticket to build an image and secure public support.

The interpretation of the data aimed to assess the effectiveness of the political communication strategies in building relationships with the public, disseminating campaign messages, and responding to emerging issues during the election process. Through this approach, the study is expected to offer a comprehensive understanding of political communication strategies in the 2024 Bandung mayoral election and their contribution to the success of the elected ticket.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Political Communication Strategy as a Political Marketing Process

From a political marketing perspective, political communication is not merely a campaign activity but a strategic process that is voter-centered. Newman (1999) defines political marketing as the application of marketing principles to analyze, design, execute, and manage political campaigns in order to win public support by addressing voters' needs and aspirations.

The communication strategy of the Muhammad Farhan–Erwin ticket reflects a marketing concept orientation rather than a purely candidate-oriented approach. The campaign did not simply “sell” a finished candidate persona; instead, it adapted its messages, communication style, and campaign issues to the preferences of key voter groups, particularly Millennials and Generation Z. This aligns with Strömbäck (2007), who argues that political marketing requires tailoring the political product including image, messages, and symbols to the needs of the voter market, whether those needs are explicit or latent.

Farhan–Erwin's campaign segmentation targeting young voters demonstrates the implementation of product development, segmentation, and positioning, as discussed by Newman (1994). Social media was used as a primary channel because younger voters tend to be more responsive to communication that is visual, interactive, and grounded in personal narratives than to conventional political communication.

Political communication is also understood as one of many variables that can influence an actor's electoral success in political contests. Political communication can also be referred to as political campaigning. Political campaigning is a form of applied political communication carried out by an individual, a group, or a political organization to shape and cultivate a positive image and public opinion in order to be elected in elections such as general elections, local elections, and presidential elections (Anwar, 2003).

The strategy employed by Muhammad Farhan and Erwin in the Bandung mayoral election contest can be considered successful, as it culminated in an electoral victory. Their campaign was segmented toward Millennials and Generation Z, based on the consideration that these age groups represent a significant proportion of Bandung's voter demographics. They optimized social media platforms to deliver narratives of their vision and mission in

ways that were broadly acceptable to the public. Within the media arena framework, Strömbäck (2007) notes that the primary goal of political actors is to maximize positive publicity through the media, especially in candidate-centric campaigns. The Farhan–Erwin ticket’s reliance on Instagram, TikTok, and other digital platforms indicates that their campaign strongly depended on success in the media arena to strengthen their position in the electoral arena.

Campaign content highlighting closeness to citizens, the use of local symbols, and a relaxed communication style reflects a pull political marketing strategy, in which voters are “attracted” through emotional resonance and social identification rather than being pushed through normative messages or political directives. This approach is consistent with Newman’s (1994) model, which positions media and voters as key sub-markets within the political exchange process.



Figure 1. Erwin's Mayoral Debate Reels Post
Source: Instagram reels @kangerwin_bdg (2024)

As a concrete example, one of the campaign posts on Instagram @kangerwin_bdg illustrates how the Muhammad Farhan–Erwin ticket employs a more visual and interactive political communication approach. Their content constructs an image of leaders who are close to the community, incorporates local symbols, and delivers campaign messages in a relaxed yet still substantive tone. This strategy appears to strengthen their appeal among younger voters, who tend to be more responsive to digital content.

According to data from the Bandung City General Election Commission (KPU Kota Bandung), voters aged 17–35 account for 65% of the total permanent voter list (DPT) of 1,887,881 individuals. A survey by the Indonesian Political Research Institute (2024) indicates that 72% of young voters are more likely to choose candidates who are active on social media and who interact directly with the public through digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter.

The results of a Charta Politika Indonesia (“Charta Politika”) survey were obtained through face-to-face interviews with 600 respondents in Bandung City. The study used a multistage random sampling method, with a margin of error of 4% and a 95% confidence level. The findings placed the M. Farhan–Erwin ticket as the top choice, followed by Haru Suandharu–Ridwan Dhani Wirianata, with Arfi Rafnialdi–Yena Iskandar Ma’soem and Dandan Riza Wardana–Arif Wijaya ranked in subsequent positions.

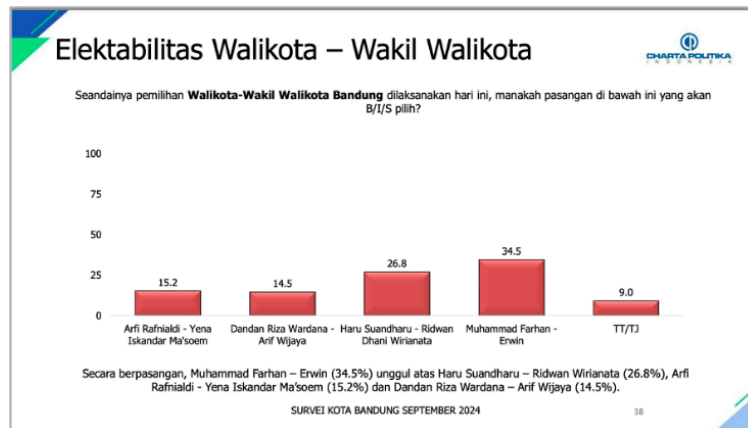


Figure 2. Electability of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Bandung
Source: Charta Politika Indonesia, accessed September 2024

Meanwhile, a survey conducted by Indikator Politik Indonesia (“Indikator”), involving 800 respondents using the same method with a margin of error of $\pm 3.5\%$. In a simulation of four candidate pairs, the results again placed M. Farhan-Erwin as the top choice, with Haru Suandharu-Ridwan Dhani Wirianata in second place, followed by Arfi Rafnialdi-Yena Iskandar Ma’soem and Dandan Riza Wardana-Arif Wijaya in third and fourth place, respectively.

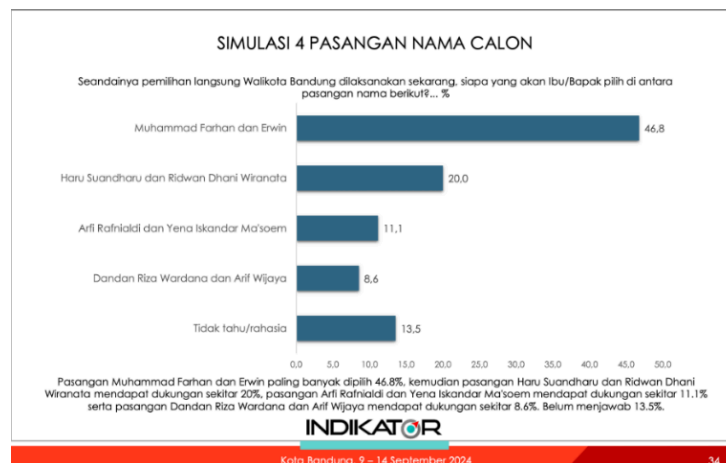


Figure 3. Simulation of 4 Pairs of Candidate Names
Source: Charta Politika Indonesia, accessed September 2024

Demographically, a Charta Politika survey showed that M. Farhan-Erwin was superior among first-time and young voters, while Haru Suandharu-Ridwan Dhani Wirianata was preferred by older voters. Meanwhile, the Indikator survey revealed the M. Farhan-Erwin pair's superiority across nearly all age groups and education levels.

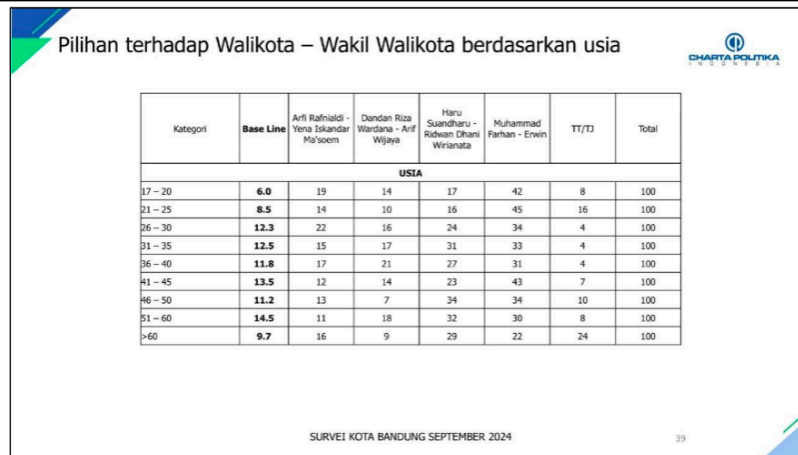


Figure 4. Choice of Mayor and Deputy Mayor by Age
Source: Charta Politica Indonesia, accessed September 2025



Figure 5. Simulation of Candidate Pairs by Demographics and Region
Source: Indikator, accessed September 2025

Furthermore, the negotiation and creation of the Referendum Movement, involving figures from diverse backgrounds, demonstrated that this pair could form a strong and solid coalition to jointly achieve their stated goals. The creation of the Referendum Movement also aimed to increase the electability of Muhammad Farhan and Erwin among the public, who already trusted certain figures. This aligns with the Two-Step Flow Model of Political Communication (Katz, 1940), a political communication pattern that delegates vision and mission narratives to figures to increase the electability of political actors within the public.

The formation of support networks through community leaders and local elites can be explained through this two-step flow of communication, where public opinion is shaped through opinion leaders before reaching the broader electorate. However, within the framework of modern political marketing, this strategy also functions as a market penetration strategy, expanding the reach of the voter market through actors with social legitimacy.

In Stromback's (2010) terminology, these figures serve as stakeholders who contribute to shaping the image and credibility of political products (leadership image

and party image). Thus, this strategy is not only communicative but also structural in building political exchange between candidates and voters.

To further foster inclusivity, the Muhammad Farhan and Erwin ticket also raised issues circulating in the community, such as environmental management, government transparency, and community participation in development. The Muhammad Farhan and Erwin ticket successfully integrated existing problems in Bandung City and packaged them with logical and credible solutions. This aligns with Political Marketing Theory (Lees-Marshment, 2009), which involves offering solutions to existing problems in a region for political gain.

Political Narrative and Social Media in Political Marketing



Figure 6. Bandung Utama Website Appearance
Source: bandungutama.id Website (2024)

The website bandungutama.id is the official platform of the mayoral and deputy mayoral candidate pair for Bandung City Muhammad Farhan and Erwin in the 2024 regional election (Pilkada). The site serves as a channel for presenting their vision, mission, and policy programs to the public, while simultaneously strengthening a political image that is both credible and persuasive. Through this website, citizens can get to know Farhan and Erwin more closely, including their educational background, professional experience, and their track record in political and social spheres. In addition, the site outlines their flagship programs in detail, ranging from the development of Bandung Technopolis to improving the welfare of Qur'an teachers (guru ngaji), reflecting their commitment to building a more advanced and inclusive Bandung.

The site also features the latest campaign news, electability survey results, and documentation of candidate activities. With a modern and informative design, bandungutama.id functions not only as an information hub, but also as a space for public interaction enabling citizens to express support through volunteering, donations, and the dissemination of campaign information.

Carrying the slogan "*Bandung Utama: Unggul, Terbuka, Amanah, Maju, Agamis*" (Bandung Utama: Excellent, Open, Trustworthy, Progressive, Religious), the site reinforces the political image of Farhan and Erwin as leaders with integrity, inclusiveness, and a sustainability-oriented development agenda. By leveraging digital technology, they demonstrate a commitment to transparent communication and to actively involving citizens

throughout their political journey. The use of the term “Bandung Utama” can be analyzed as a form of political branding, namely an effort to simplify the complexity of political vision and programs into an easily remembered symbol. From a political marketing perspective, branding functions as a tool to strengthen reification, meaning the candidates’ perceived presence and solidity in the public imagination (Randall & Svåsand, 2002). This jargon also reflects a voter-centered mindset, because it does not foreground the candidates’ personal identities, but instead emphasizes the collective aspirations of Bandung residents. This is consistent with Strömbäck (2010), who argues that the political product comprises policies, leadership image, and voter orientation as an inseparable whole.

Selecting a slogan is a core reference point that enables the public to remember and recognize the identity of a political actor. The slogan “BANDUNG UTAMA” adopted by Farhan and Erwin makes their communication pattern with citizens clearer and more assertive. This was conveyed directly by the candidates during a socialization event for their vision and mission. As they stated: *“Why Bandung UTAMA? It is not an abbreviation of our names and so on. We both set aside campaign IDs in the 2024 Bandung mayoral race that use our names, because this campaign is not about us, but about Bandung residents. We want to prioritize Bandung,”* said the Farhan–Erwin pair in Bandung, Thursday evening, 19 September 2024 (Ramdhani, 2024).

The slogan “BANDUNG UTAMA” was chosen as a strategy to reach voters across all segments by delivering the message through broad-based public channels. The theoretical lens used to interpret this campaign aligns with the Agenda-Setting Model of Political Communication (Shaw et al., 1999). The agenda-setting model emphasizes sustained media visibility when an issue or narrative appears with higher intensity across media channels, it becomes more likely to be recognized and discussed by the public. In this case, Muhammad Farhan and Erwin mobilized multiple social media platforms Instagram, TikTok, X, and Facebook to enhance their electability among Bandung residents.

In addition to social media, the Farhan–Erwin pair also actively conducted open campaigns, one of which was a mass rally at Tegalega Field, Bandung City, on 16 November 2024. Their warm use of “Sundanese jokes,” such as the phrase UHA (Unggal Hajat Aya), can be interpreted as signaling that the pair is ready to serve citizens in any situation. This communicative style creates a shared-background impression both candidates are portrayed as authentically “from Bandung” which helps build an emotional connection with the public. Moreover, Farhan and Erwin promoted a narrative of change toward a better future, positioning it as a collective aspiration for Bandung residents.

A further advantage in their political campaign is their attempt to construct the image of leaders who are close to ordinary citizens. This is reinforced through campaign attributes such as wearing *hansip* (community security/auxiliary force) uniforms, symbolizing an entity that is always present and responsive in helping residents. Overall, the strategies and framing employed by Farhan and Erwin appear to be well received by the public. In electoral competition, the central goal of political marketing is to maximize vote support (*vote-seeking*). The advantage of Farhan–Erwin in various electability surveys suggests that their political communication and marketing strategies successfully converted media exposure and a positive image into electoral preference. This success illustrates a balance between vote-seeking orientation and office-seeking orientation, as described by Strøm (1990), where candidates not only focus on winning votes but also build legitimacy to govern after the election.

Challenges in Political Communication Strategy

Political communication is a crucial element in democratic processes, aiming to shape public opinion, increase political participation, and influence government policy. However,

political communication strategies face multiple challenges that can hinder the effectiveness of message delivery to the public (McNair, 2018).

- **Political Polarization and Negative Campaigning**

In elections, political polarization often arises from ideological differences and competing interests among groups. Polarization is further intensified by negative campaigning intended to undermine political opponents. According to Anwar (2003), political campaigning is part of political communication that aims to shape and cultivate a positive image and public opinion to win elections or regional elections. Yet, in practice, it is often misused to spread narratives that deepen social divisions (Iyengar & Krupenkin, 2018).

- **Disinformation and Hoaxes on Social Media**

The proliferation of false information (hoaxes) on social media has become a major challenge in modern political communication. Hoaxes can generate misleading public opinion and damage the credibility of candidates or parties. Effective political communication strategies therefore must include efforts to counter disinformation through digital literacy education and the delivery of data-based information.

- **The Influence of Social Media Algorithms**

Social media platforms use algorithms that prioritize content aligned with user preferences. This can reinforce informational bias and reduce exposure to alternative perspectives. In the context of the 2024 Bandung Pilkada, Farhan and Erwin effectively leveraged social media algorithms by targeting millennials and Generation Z through platforms such as Instagram and TikTok.

- **Declining Trust in Political Institutions**

Public trust in political institutions has weakened due to corruption scandals and unfulfilled political promises. To rebuild trust, political communication strategies must emphasize transparency and accountability (Pew Research Center, 2021). In the 2024 Bandung campaign, Farhan–Erwin used the slogan “BANDUNG UTAMA” as political branding that highlights citizen involvement in regional development.

- **Complexity of Public Issues and Message Delivery Difficulties**

Many political issues are complex and difficult for the general public to understand, such as economic policy, climate change, and government transparency. Consequently, candidates and parties must be able to simplify their narratives so they remain accessible without losing substantive meaning. In the 2024 campaign, Farhan and Erwin packaged issues of the environment and governance transparency into concrete solutions that were more readily accepted by citizens.

- **Rapid Dynamics and Shifts in Public Opinion**

Public opinion can change quickly, especially in the fast-paced digital era. Even minor communication mistakes may produce significant impacts on candidate or party image (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Therefore, communication strategies must be responsive and adaptive to shifts in public sentiment.

- **Pressure from Multiple Stakeholders**

Politicians face pressure from multiple stakeholders, including parties, donors, and civil society groups. In political communication strategy, negotiation across interests becomes essential so that diverse demands can be accommodated without compromising transparency and accountability.

In sum, challenges in political communication strategy require a holistic and adaptive approach. Success depends not only on how effectively messages are transmitted, but also on how they are received, understood, and internalized by the public. By using social media responsibly, countering hoaxes, and rebuilding trust through transparency, political

communication can serve as an effective tool for strengthening a healthy and inclusive democracy.

E. CONCLUSION

This article shows that the success of the Muhammad Farhan–Erwin ticket in the 2024 Bandung mayoral election cannot be separated from the application of a political communication strategy oriented toward a political marketing approach. Political communication in this context functions not merely as a vehicle for delivering campaign messages, but as a strategic process designed systematically to respond to voters' needs, preferences, and characteristics. The strategy reflects a shift from a candidate-centric campaign approach toward voter-centered political marketing, in which voters are positioned as the primary subject in shaping messages, images, and communication media.

The use of social media as the main campaign channel placed the Farhan–Erwin pair in a strong position within the media arena, as described in modern political marketing frameworks. Campaign content that was visual, interactive, and locally nuanced not only increased candidate visibility, but also built emotional closeness with voters, particularly millennials and Generation Z. This strategy demonstrates the effectiveness of a pull political marketing approach, where voter support is cultivated through social identification and value resonance rather than through one-way persuasion.

In addition, the involvement of community figures and local elites strengthened the political communication process through a two-step flow of communication mechanism, while also functioning as a voter-market penetration strategy via actors who possess social legitimacy. From a political marketing perspective, these figures act as important stakeholders who help build credibility, leadership image, and public trust in the political “product” being offered.

The use of the slogan “Bandung Utama” as a campaign identity illustrates the effective application of political branding. The slogan succeeds in simplifying the political vision and programs into a collective symbol that is easily recognized and accepted across different segments of society. This branding does not foreground the candidates' personal figures; instead, it reinforces an orientation toward citizens' interests, thereby strengthening perceptions of the candidates as inclusive leaders committed to public service.

The Farhan–Erwin pair's advantage in various electability surveys indicates that the communication and political marketing strategies employed were effectively converted into tangible support in the electoral arena. This reflects a balance between vote-seeking orientation and efforts to build governing legitimacy (office-seeking). Thus, the article affirms that effective political communication in modern electoral contests requires integration of media strategy, political branding, stakeholder management, and voter orientation as the core foundation for winning public trust and democratic competition.

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