

Digital Campaign Dysfunction in Indonesian Regional Election During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The 2020 Simultaneous Regional Elections in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic caused digital campaigns to become the most viable alternative amidst health protocol restrictions. Preliminary data shows that the use of digital for political campaigns was not optimal. The readiness of candidates and voters to enter the digital campaign era is interesting for further analysis. This article aims to understand the campaign practices of candidates in the digital space during the pandemic, as well as analyze the readiness of candidates and voters in the digital campaign. Qualitative case study research was conducted using a holistic multi-case design in three regions in Central Java, Indonesia. Data collection was carried out by observing candidates' social media, as well as interviews with campaigners. The research results show that the digital campaign was a "forced" situation, not a creative idea of the candidates. The digital space has yet to become an effective public sphere for discussing candidate ideas and programs with voters. The lack of public engagement with campaigns in the digital space shows that a digital political habitus has yet to be formed in society. As a result, digital campaign dysfunction occurs when candidates and voters are not well connected

in effective political communication, even though both are in the digital space.

Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic, Digital campaign, Dysfunction, Regional Election.

INTRODUCTION

The simultaneous regional elections in 270 districts and provinces of Indonesia in 2020 are an important historical record of electoral politics. It provided a great experience not only in the political aspect but also in socio-cultural because it took place amid an unpredictable situation, the COVID-19 pandemic. Political campaigns, which are very important for candidates to attract public sympathy and collect electoral votes, have been hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which limits human interaction. Physical and social distancing policies are the biggest challenges in campaigns during the pandemic. In fact, in an election, campaigns are an important instrument for candidates to gain public sympathy and collect votes (Lewis-Back & Tien, 2018). Therefore, campaigning via digital media has become one of the alternatives chosen by candidates in conducting political campaigns from September to December 2020.

In elections, political campaigns have at least four important roles (Lilliker, 2006, p. 53). First, to raise and emphasize the importance of an issue or problem chosen as

a party or candidate program, or vice versa, to counter issues raised by opponents. Second, the persuasive role is to convince voters that an issue is good or bad for the public interest. Third, to increase public recognition and popularity of a candidate, especially new challenger candidates who have yet to be well known to the public. Fourth, as a reminder for supporters because even though their preferences are apparent in the voting, they need motivation to strengthen and maintain support for the candidate.

The use of the Internet and digital media in election campaigns is nothing new. Before the Covid-19 pandemic occurred, the digital space, both on social media and online media, had become a strategic space for candidates to compete for voters' sympathy, both in Indonesia (Hayat & Hasrullah, 2016; Wihayati, 2016; Wirga, 2016; Rusda, 2017; Harisah, 2019) as well as in various other countries around the world (Ballard et al, 2016; Chadwick, 2016; Stier, 2018; Schwartz, 2015). Studies on the role of the Internet in political campaigns began to emerge after the spectacular phenomenon occurred in the 2008 and 2012 United States presidential elections, which led to Barack Obama winning the presidential election with the support of a massive Internet campaign (Bimber, 2014; Jungherr, 2015; Jungherr, 2016). Barack Obama's Internet campaign is widely cited as one of the important studies that show the Internet's transformative power in the contemporary political arena, especially in electoral politics.

The Internet currently dominates people's lives in Indonesia, where 73.7% of Indonesians are Internet users (We Are Social, 2023). Therefore, political campaigns in the digital space are not something new to the public. The importance of the digital space in political campaigns is increasingly strengthened by the increasing population of the digital native generation, or the generation born in the digital era as a large base of novice voters. The large population of the digital

native generation in general elections in many countries is considered a determinant of a candidate's victory (Ohme, 2019). Therefore, the digital native generation has become essential in today's electoral democracy because their large numbers are a potential vote market for political parties contesting elections.

However, the 2020 Indonesian Simultaneous Regional Election brings a new situation in digital campaigns. Digital campaigns are considered an emergency solution and an alternative campaign method during the pandemic. The outbreak of the pandemic and the threat of transmission of the COVID-19 virus means that physical interactions between people must be avoided, including during campaign activities. As regulated by the Indonesian General Election Commission, candidates are prohibited from carrying out physical campaign activities such as general meetings, art performances, harvest activities, music concerts, mass sports activities, competition events, social activities, or political party anniversary celebrations. Therefore, campaigns in the digital space are the most recommended alternative during the 2020 Simultaneous Regional Elections.

Changing people's paradigms and behavior for digital campaigning has many dynamics, especially since these changes are made due to the pressure and coercion of the social situation because of the COVID-19 pandemic. An ideal electoral political campaign is only possible with preparation and planning because the planning stage in a preliminary campaign is the starting point which plays a significant role in determining the candidate's victory (Burton & Shea, 2010). Therefore, the readiness of candidates and voters in the digital campaign process is an important thing to study, both from the aspects of infrastructure readiness, digital literacy, and habitus in consuming digital media.

The dynamics of the campaign behavior of candidates and voters in the digital space in the 2020 simultaneous regional elections

amid the pandemic is an interesting phenomenon to study. Digital campaigns in three research areas in Central Java: Semarang Municipality, Semarang Regency, and Kendal Regency, took place with various dynamics. This article further analyzes the readiness of candidates and voters in the digital campaign process and the effectiveness of regional election candidates' digital campaigns.

METHODS

This research uses qualitative methods, which are concerned with the point of view and life experiences of the research subjects (Silverman, 2004, p. 343). Referring to Yin's concept (2015:46), this research uses a holistic multi-case design with three regional election cases studied and focuses on one unit of analysis, the digital campaign. Case studies were conducted on three regional elections in Central Java Province: Semarang Municipality, Semarang Regency, and Kendal Regency. The three study areas have different characteristics, and it is fascinating to study the digital campaign process in each region. Differences in characteristics include geocultural conditions where Semarang Municipality has an urban population, Semarang Regency is an area dominated by rural areas, and Kendal Regency combines these two characteristics. Another characteristic difference is the number of candidates competing, where there is a single candidate in Semarang Municipality, two candidates in Semarang Regency, and three candidates in Kendal Regency.

Research informants consist of several categories: candidates for the 2020 regional elections, success teams and supporting volunteers, voters, regional general election commissions, and regional election supervisory agencies. Data was collected through digital observation on candidates' social media campaign platforms and interviews with candidates, success teams, voters, election commissions, and supervisory agencies. Case study data analysis was carried out on the three cases

studied in an integrated manner, referred to as holistic case analysis (Yin, 2015).

RESULT & DISCUSSION

The Use of Social Media in Indonesian Regional Election Campaigns

In the 2020 simultaneous regional election campaign, candidates in the three research areas utilized various social media platforms as campaign tools in digital spaces, such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter. The social media platforms used by candidates can be divided into two categories. First is official campaign social media, registered with the Regional General Election Commission, and second is unofficial social media not registered with the Regional General Election Commission. The campaign team usually manages official social media accounts, while unofficial accounts are usually managed by volunteers or individuals with relationships with the candidate.

In Semarang Municipality, the sole candidate, Hendi-Ita (Hendita), uses Instagram as the most popular social media, with the accounts @hendrarprihadi and @mbakitasmg. Apart from that, there are several Instagram accounts created by the campaign team and volunteers, including @gardahebat2020, @rehita.hebat @smg.hit, @srikandisetiahendi, and @hendita_2020. On Facebook, there are the accounts "Hendrar Prihadi", "Hevearita Gunaryanti Rahayu", the Facebook page "RehitaHebat", and the Facebook group "Hendi-Ita untuk Semarang Semakin Hebat". Hendi-Ita also uses the Twitter accounts @hendrarprihadi and @hendita2020. On YouTube, there is a channel called @hendrarprihadihendita to support the digital campaign.

In Semarang Regency, the first candidate, Bintang-Soni (Bison), used his personal Instagram @bintangnarsasi, @soniwibisono77, as well as the campaign team accounts @bintangnarsasi_official8, @bisonbintangku, and @bisonbupati. Other social media used in the Bintang-Soni digital campaign are Facebook "Bintang Narsasi", "Gunawan Wibisono", "Srikandi

Bison", as well as the Facebook Fan Page "bintangnarsasi". On YouTube social media, there is a channel called @relawanbison8653.

The campaign team for the second candidate pair in Semarang Regency, Ngesti-Basari (Ngebas), managed personal Instagram accounts @ngesti.nugraha, @h.basari.s.t., as well as campaign Instagram accounts via the accounts @ngebas_02, @timkampanyengebas, @relawanngembaskidulkali, and the millennial volunteer account @rekom02. On Facebook, Ngesti-Basari has several accounts, including "Ngesti Nugraha", "Basari Basari", "Ngebas Kosongdua", "Ngesti Basari", "Relawan Ngebas Kidulkali", "Tim Kampanye Ngebas ", and "Tim Pemenangan Ngebas ". Apart from that, there are also Facebook Fan Pages "Ngesti Nugraha Official", "Basari", "Relawan Ngebas", "Tim Kampanye Ngebas ", and "Relawan Ngebas Kidul Kali". On YouTube, there is the channel "Ngesti Nugraha"; on Twitter, there is the account @NugrahaNgesti, which is used as digital campaign media.

In Kendal Regency, the first candidate pair, Dico-Basuki (Dibas), operated their digital campaign on Facebook and Instagram. On Facebook, there are accounts "Dico Ganinduto" and "Windu Suko Basuki", as well as Facebook Fan Pages "dicoganinduto", "Bolone DIBAS", "Dico-Basuki-Dibas" and "Kendal Handal". On Instagram, there are accounts @dicoganinduto and @windubasuki, as well as several campaign team and volunteer accounts at @bolonedibas, @dibas.kendal, @dibaskendal_, and @kendalhandal_.

The second candidate pair in Kendal Regency, Ali Nurudin-Yekti Handayani (Nurani), uses personal Instagram accounts @ustadz.ali, @yekti.handayani.125 as well as the official campaign team accounts @nuranikendal, @seputar_ustadzali, @nurani_joss, and @kendalsijigantiustadzali. On Facebook, there are the accounts "Ali Nurudin" and

"Rekan", as well as the Facebook Group "Sahabat Ustadz Ali Nurudin", the Fan Page "Nurani Kendal", "Yekti Handayani", "Seputar Ustadz Ali", and the Fan Page "Kendal Siji Ganti Ustadz Ali." Other social media used are the YouTube channel "Nurani Kendal" (@nuranikendal3903) and the Twitter account @nuranikendal.

The third candidate pair in Kendal Regency, Tino-Mustamsikin (TIM), in the digital campaign, utilized the personal Instagram accounts @tinoindraw and @mukh.mustamsikin, as well as the campaign team accounts @timkendal_id and @millenial_tim. Meanwhile, the Facebook accounts used include the "Tino Indra" account, the "Mukh Mustamsikin" account, and the "Sedulur Tino-Mustamsikin" account. The Tino-Mustamsikin candidate pair also has a Facebook group, "TIM M3NANG", and a Facebook Fan Page, "TINO INDRA WARDONO", "Kita Adalah TIM", and "Kendal Bersama TIM". On YouTube, there is also campaign media via the channel @tinoindrawardono3664.

Among the various social media platforms used in the campaign, Instagram and Facebook are the candidates' favorite platforms. Candidates prefer Instagram and Facebook over other social media because these two platforms are very popular and have the most users in Indonesia, at 86.6% and 85.5%. (We Are Social, 2023). Teenagers and the younger generation dominate Instagram platform users, while Facebook reaches senior citizens or the older generation.

Candidate Pessimism on Digital Campaigns

During the 2020 Pilkada campaign, all the contesting candidates used digital media, especially social media, in their campaigns. Digital media use was encouraged by the General Election Commission's regulations to use online campaigns to anticipate the spread of COVID-19. This research found various dynamics in using digital space as a campaign arena that was visible during the

regional election campaign. These various dynamics show that using digital media as a campaign tool was running ineffectively. Candidates as central actors in regional election contestations were not ready for campaign practices in the digital space. Older candidates admit that their introduction and familiarity with digital technology still need to be improved. Several candidates admitted that they started creating social media accounts after entering the regional election contestation due to regulatory obligations and recommendations from the campaign team. A candidate in Semarang Regency, Soni, said he does not care about digital media and the internet because he feels he is too old. However, he inevitably had to learn to use digital media because he had to participate in the regional election contestation. The opposing candidate, Ngesti Nugraha, also expressed the same view. He said that as an older generation, he must force himself to learn and become familiar with digital media to survive in the 2020 regional election battle during the pandemic, which has many physical limitations. These data findings show the phenomenon of a "generation gap feeling" among candidates, which puts their views on digital campaigns in a pessimistic perspective.

Statements by candidates who feel they are from the older generation and, therefore, are not familiar with the digital world are a common perception that is often found. Digital information technology had often been perceived as the world of young people, so the older generation feels confused when they come into contact with the digital world. They feel that the digital world is not their home world. This view is related to the development of digital technology, which cannot be separated from the linear development of generations between digital immigrants and digital natives (Kesharwani, 2020). The older generation is assumed to be a generation of digital immigrants who migrated from the analog or conventional era to digital civilization. Meanwhile, the younger

generation, especially Generation Z, is often called the digital native generation because they were born amidst the rise of digital civilization. According to the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences and Social Behavior (Wright, 2015), the digital native generation is defined as individuals who have been intensively socialized from the start of their lives by using socio-digital and digital technology in their social lives.

The variation in candidate ages, which is dominated by the older generation, can be seen from the age range of candidates. Among the six candidate pairs or 12 candidates who contested in the 2020 Simultaneous Regional Elections in the three research areas, there were eight candidates aged over 50 years, two aged between 40-49 years, and two under 40 years. The data shows that 75% of candidates are from the generation over 50 years old. If analyzed using a generational approach, the data shows that most candidates are the older generation exposed to digital culture when they were adults or digital immigrants. Older candidates' lack of literacy with internet technology because it was not internalized from an early age gives rise to their perception of the digital world as the world of young people, not their world. Therefore, most candidates leave it to youth or millennial teams to manage digital campaigns. A millennial team recruited from young people strengthens the candidates' perception that the digital world is not their world. The existence of the millennial team, apart from representing the candidate's attention to young people, is also a substitute for the candidate's lag in digital technology. By handing over digital campaigns to millennial teams, candidates have plenty of time to campaign massively through conventional door-to-door methods, which they consider more effective than social media campaigns.

Not all candidates consider digital media an essential part of their political campaigns. Several candidates had a pessimistic view of the existence of digital media, which is considered to have the potential to spread

slander, hoaxes, and black campaigns. A candidate from Kendal Regency, Yekti Handayani, even deactivated her Instagram and Facebook accounts in the middle of the campaign because she felt that the existence of social media often disadvantaged her. Yekti feels that the existence of digital campaign media is less effective and has even become an instrument for opponents to undermine the honor of Yekti and her family. She considered the decision to close social media accounts as the best solution, and it made her more comfortable because she was protected from attacks by slander, hoaxes, and attempts to degrade themselves. Candidates were not convinced that digital campaigns could guarantee victory in the election. They positioned digital campaigns as complementary, not as a substitute or replacing the role of conventional campaigns. Candidates believed that conventional face-to-face campaigns are still more effective in demonstrating the candidate's presence to voters and confirming their choice at the polls. Surprisingly, some candidates said that no matter how good the digital campaign was, money politics or transactional politics were believed to be more decisive in determining voters' decisions at the polls.

Half-baked Digital Political Campaign

The lack of enthusiasm and pessimism of candidates regarding digital campaigns causes most candidates to hand over digital campaign management to the digital campaign team completely without involvement. In local language terms, they call it an act of "pasrah bongkokan" which means completely handing over a problem to be worked on by another person or party. The candidates' attention is mostly focused on face-to-face campaigns from village to village or community to another. Candidates in the three research areas acknowledged the minimal role of candidates in digital campaign management. The role of the digital campaign team is becoming more dominant than the candidate in managing digital campaigns. In fact, the candidates'

personal accounts are also operated by the campaign team without the candidate's interference, as happened with candidates Yekti Handayani in Kendal and Soni Wibisono in Semarang Regency. Yekti feels uncomfortable using social media because since he declared herself a candidate, her social media account has received a lot of negative comments. Finally, Yekti decided to close his social media accounts in the middle of the campaign period and entirely handed over the campaign management on social media to the team. Meanwhile, Soni admits that being an older generation, over 60, makes him feel that he is not digitally competent and operates social media accounts directly. Therefore, campaign social media accounts, especially Instagram and Facebook, are handled by the social media team provided by the supporting party.

In the candidates' campaign teams, a digital campaign division is included in the official organizational structure. Most digital campaign team members come from political party administrators supporting the candidates. In reality, the digital campaign team that is registered structurally does not function optimally. Digital campaign team members registered in the official structure are a formality, only to fulfill the requirements when registering the campaign team at the regional general election commission. Social media management is handled mainly by individuals and unofficial volunteer groups, especially young-generation volunteers who help candidates' campaigns outside the organizational structure. Therefore, campaign management on social media tends to be informal and non-professional. Even though all candidates have social media accounts as official campaign media registered with the regional general election commission, these accounts are not managed optimally and have minimal activity. Content uploads and interactions with the voters are very minimal. In fact, the campaign team often creates candidate campaign accounts that are never used until

the end of the campaign period. Some campaign accounts only contain a small amount of content uploaded at the beginning of the account creation, and after that, there are no new uploads in it. Some accounts even look empty without any content uploaded.



Figure 1. Candidate's Twitter account without any posts

Candidates also campaign by conveying the programs offered to the public when elected. According to Kuo's concept (2018), a political campaign oriented toward program offers and issues related to the public will implement the program offer if elected, called a programmatic political campaign. In the 2020 Simultaneous Regional Election digital campaign, the candidates offered visions, missions, and programs as an effort to implement modern political democracy that prioritizes programmatic politics. However, in digital campaign practice, the programmatic campaign offered is nothing more than a parade of pamphlet visualizations on social media containing the formulation of the candidate's vision, mission, and program. Social media accounts become a showcase for displaying vision, mission, and programs without being followed by discussions about the various programs being offered. This phenomenon can be found in campaign accounts such as @bisonstarku, which has posted 42 pamphlets, all containing the Bintang-Soni program, which was uploaded massively in one day on September 22, 2020. However, after the massive upload,

the account was left without any other posting activity. until the end of the regional election period. In other cases, the candidate's ability to use social media effectively has yet to be well demonstrated, one of which is related to the inconsistency of the vision and mission conveyed in many versions of sentences and substance. This inconsistency creates information bias so that the audience can understand the essence of the candidate's vision and mission. This case was seen in candidate Tino's campaign account in Kendal Regency, who published a vision formulation with 16 different vision formulations, causing a bias in focusing on the offered programs.

The candidate's programmatic campaign on social media has received little response from the public. The number of "likes" and comments on each candidate's program upload looks minimal. Social media that informs candidates' programs and ideas has not become a dynamic discussion space between candidates and voters. The candidates' campaign accounts are only used to display program pamphlets without caring about the response from the public. In this way, social media is seen as one-way billboards and virtual banners and only as information boards. Ultimately, the candidate's programmatic campaign practices have yet to produce a dynamic political dialectic that the public can adequately consume.

The chairman of the Kendal Regency General Election Commission, Hevy, also acknowledged the ineffectiveness of digital campaigns. According to Hevy, campaigns on social media to socialize candidate programs and ideas have yet to be carried out effectively and attractively. Hevy saw that the public response in Kendal to political campaign information on social media was feeble. Various information uploaded by the Kendal General Election Commission and candidate campaign information via social media accounts had minimal responses and comments. In fact, according to Hevy's observations, candidates uploaded only a little campaign

content on their social media during the campaign period. The general election commissioners in Semarang Municipality and Semarang Regency also saw that digital campaigns felt quiet and had not been utilized optimally by candidates and the public as an effective medium for dialogical and democratic election campaigns.

The lack of public response to digital campaigns has given rise to various strategies for candidate campaign teams. One of the unique facts found in the research is the phenomenon of "masturbation posting," where campaign content is posted by a member of the candidate's campaign team, then he comments on it himself but with a different account. Idham, a campaign team member in Kendal Regency, explained that each team member operates at least five accounts with different names. Each account is targeted to post and comment activities at least ten times daily. This is a deceptive strategy carried out by the candidate's team to build a digital campaign image of the candidate that looks dynamic and attracts public attention. Talkis, the election supervisory commissioner in Semarang Regency, also provided similar information. He said most candidate campaigns on social media were only done by uploading content. Comments on campaign content are only made by their supporters, even by the person who posted it themselves.

Research data shows that digital campaigns in the 2020 simultaneous regional elections have yet to be effective as a medium for political communication between candidates and the public. There are several indications of the campaign's ineffectiveness. First, the digital interactions on the candidates' accounts are dominated mainly by volunteers and supporters or are "supporter-centered". In various posts uploaded by candidates, most likes and comments came from their sympathizers. This situation differs from the campaign objective of persuading the public and undecided voters to choose a candidate. The second indication is the phenomenon of the "silent

majority" of netizens regarding information and campaign content distributed by candidates in regional public group forums, especially in Facebook Groups. People who join the Facebook group know that candidates and supporters send campaign information to the group, but they are reluctant to respond and leave the campaign information alone. The most dynamic public group forums during the regional elections were the Facebook groups "Kabupaten Kendal Diskusi Politik (KKDP)" and "Bangun Kab Semarang". Based on observations, most candidate campaign information posts in this group are dominated by several accounts affiliated with the candidates. Meanwhile, accounts from the general public are not seen providing comments or responses, even just by giving likes. The public's reluctance to get involved in the frenzied debate in the group forum because they feel that the discussion is not of much use for daily life, as well as the public's laziness to see the debates of candidate supporters in the group forum, which contain more insults than debating the ideas and programs offered by the candidate.

Supporter-centered digital campaigns and the lack of public participation in the digital campaign process have resulted in one-way communication from candidates to passive audiences. In the end, the public, who were the campaign's primary target, turned into "the silent majority" and did not provide an adequate response. The response to the digital campaign was given more by supporters and campaign team members who were a minority in the group. The lack of public response shows that digital campaigns have not been able to attract public interest in participating in the electoral democratic process. This situation shows the dysfunction of digital campaigns as an effective political communication medium for reaching the public.

Digital campaigns have yet to become an effective communication bridge connecting candidate ideas with the public. According to McNair's theory (2011:4-6), there are

three important elements in the political communication process: political organizations, media, and citizens. Ideally, these three elements are reciprocally related to create an excellent political communication process. Furthermore, according to Lilleker (2006), three important actors are involved in the political communication process: the political sphere, namely political actors (including the state, parties, and candidates); non-state actors, namely the public or civil society (including voters), and the media whose role is to communicate political issues, as well as influence the public and political actors. Effective political communication in electoral politics must at least be able to perform several functions, such as making candidates always appear connected to the majority of voters, healing divisions between social groups or classes, showing that the group is inclusive, as well as making candidates identified as part of a community group (Lilleker, 2006, p. 11).

However, in the 2020 Pilkada digital campaign, there is a gap in the relationship between the three elements above. Digital campaigns have yet to be able to connect candidates with citizens or voters ideally; on the contrary, digital media has become a dome of communication traps that limits candidate relationships to only their supporters. This results in the circulation of candidate program information only circulating among internal supporters of each candidate without reaching the wider public. Digital campaigns ultimately become “supporter-centric” campaigns where the consumption of campaign information is only received by volunteers and supporters.

The formation of the communication trap dome can be seen based on digital observation data. The candidates' social media campaign accounts are followed only by the accounts of supporters and sympathizers. On average, campaign Instagram and Facebook accounts are followed by tens to hundreds of followers, so their reach is limited for an area with

hundreds of thousands of voters. Several reasons explain the low level of connectedness between candidates and voters on social media, especially through digital friendship networks. Rahma, a resident of Kendal Regency, said she did not know the social media accounts used by the candidates in campaigning. Among the three candidates in Kendal, Rahma only knows Dico's Instagram account because his wife's popularity as a national artist made Rahma curious to know Dico's figure. The same thing happened in Semarang Regency, where a resident named Joko admitted that he did not know the accounts used by the candidates. Joko also has no connection to the candidates' campaign social media accounts.

The contesting candidates acknowledged the lack of public response to the digital campaign. One of the candidates in Kendal, Dico, felt that the public's response, whether through comments, private messages, or likes and shares, was mainly done by the supporters. Hence, it had little effect on expanding support and electability. With or without campaigning, supporters will almost certainly support him. Bondan, head of the Ngesti-Basari candidate campaign team in Semarang Regency, said a similar thing and admitted that most of the responses in social media campaign posts were dominated by supporters rather than the public. The Nurudin-Yekti candidate campaign team also had difficulty finding the suitable campaign model in digital media, so it was felt that the campaign they had carried out had not achieved maximum results. Internal conversations between supporters only always dominate the response obtained from digital campaign uploads.

This phenomenon shows the separation in the digital world between candidates and voters. Basically, people's connectivity with the digital world is getting stronger because internet access is becoming more evenly distributed, especially via smartphones. However, the candidates' digital campaign arena is separate from the digital world of the majority of voters. The candidate's

success team has used various methods to increase public engagement with the candidate's digital campaign, such as providing giveaways through quizzes uploaded on social media to provoke public responses. However, the public's response to the giveaway seemed minimal. Until the competition deadline ended, only one account responded to the quiz, so in the end, there was no further follow-up from the quiz.

The candidates and campaign teams realized that the connection between their campaign social media accounts and the public was not optimal. Campaign accounts that have just been created and the public's lack of interest in politics cause difficulties in popularizing candidate campaign social media accounts. This became an evaluation for the campaign team, so several candidates ultimately decided to campaign face-to-face even though the COVID-19 health protocol limited their space for mass gatherings. In the end, most candidates used the pick-up method by visiting people from one village to another.

The head of the campaign team for one of the candidates in Semarang Regency, Nurul Huda, admitted that the digital campaign during the regional election was ineffective in gaining electoral support. Nurul sees that digital political culture has yet to be internalized in the lives of people in his region. Physical campaigns, by meeting the community directly, even on a limited scale, are believed to play a much more important role in gathering community support. The power of social networks, such as the approach of community leaders, religious leaders, and rural elites, is still considered more effective than digital campaigning. The ineffectiveness of the digital campaign process was recognized by the regional election monitoring agencies, which observed that during the 2020 regional election campaign, the power of "land warfare" was more decisive than "air battle" or cyber war.

Dysfunction of the Digital Public Sphere in the Indonesian Regional Election Campaign

The concept of the Public Sphere is a theoretical idea promoted by Jurgen Habermas (1991) and is closely related to explanations about the growth of democracy and community participation in civic life (Goode, 2005: 3). The Public Sphere in the context of the political area is a place where citizens meet regarding the needs of society and as a meeting space for citizens' thoughts and discourses which are discussed freely and egalitarianly.

The context of the public sphere in Habermas's idea as a place for people to gather in a spatial space has now been transformed into a virtual public sphere, where people no longer need to gather physically to establish communication (Papacharissi, 2002). Papacharissi further explained that the Internet creates democratic spaces where "A virtual space enhances discussion, a virtual sphere enhances democracy". Public discussions are more easily facilitated through the Internet, strengthening democratic life. Finally, internet technology is expected to encourage the emergence of digital citizenship, where citizens can negotiate and use the information and political opportunities available online (Mossberger et al., 2008). The existence of the Internet as a driver for the growth of the public sphere is significant because any political information that is available and easily accessible online will help the public be more informed about the current political situation. A more informed public will increase public participation in the deliberative democratic process (Mossberger et al., 2008, p. 3).

Based on observations made during the 2020 regional election digital campaign, digital space as an arena for candidates' political campaigns had not yet become an ideal public sphere as proposed by Habermas (1991), nor as a virtual public sphere, as Vromen (2017) said. Only a few virtual public spheres were created during

the campaign that could become a place for citizens to exchange ideas about the local political situation. The social media platforms Instagram and YouTube have yet to be able to present themselves as the public sphere because the characteristics of these two platforms tend to be less egalitarian and dominated by the authority of the account owner. Twitter, widely discussed in previous studies as an ideal virtual public sphere, was not explored well in the 2020 simultaneous regional elections. According to the candidates' opinions, Twitter received low engagement in their contestation areas. Twitter is considered an elitist and less popular social media platform like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, which is accessed by a broader and more diverse audience.

Ultimately, during the 2020 Simultaneous Regional Election campaign, the digital space used by the candidates as a campaign arena changed its function as a display space and parade of photos, flyers, and posters for the candidates, just like conventional campaigns on the streets. Likewise, public group forums such as Facebook Groups have changed their function to become arenas for conflict between supporters. People on social media just silently watched the parades and conflicts between candidate supporters. People even remain engrossed in their activities without paying attention to the digital campaigns that appear on their social media timelines.

The existence of silent readers in Facebook groups is a sign that in the digital public space, many digital citizens were reluctant to participate in dialogues about ideas with candidates or fellow netizens. Digital public spaces were ultimately dominated by posts and narratives from supporters campaigning for their candidates and efforts to degrade opposing candidates. People were only on the sidelines of the arena as silent spectators or ignored the candidates' campaign activities because they felt that the candidates' campaigns were not necessary for their lives.

During the 2020 Regional Election campaign, the digital space had been unable to encourage the spirit of digital citizenship, where people participate in various policies and political decisions through digital activism, which will encourage the growth of digital democracy (Saud et al., 2023). What is more visible is that it was still limited to conventional citizens who visit the digital space because, in the end, their political decisions to choose regional head candidates mostly followed the preferences of the environment and community. This condition is reflected in the research data presented in the previous chapter, which shows that the digital campaign process did not influence the majority of voters in the three electoral districts' choices.

The candidates acknowledged the weakness of digital campaigns in encouraging public engagement and participation in discussing problems and the programs offered. Almost all candidates competing in Kendal Regency, Semarang Regency, and Semarang Municipality did not aim to obtain feedback from the public through digital media. The targets of candidates in social media campaigns are mostly aimed at conveying information without expecting reciprocal feedback. The most important thing for candidates is that information about the program being offered is sent and read by the public. In this way, what happened is a digital campaign pattern that takes the form of one-way communication. This one-way campaign pattern is similar to conventional campaigns, such as political speeches by candidates on the campaign stage. Candidates were satisfied when they gathered many people to come to the campaign stage and listen to their ideas. In line with this, in the digital space, candidates were also satisfied when their content succeeded in attracting many viewers and likes. Netizens comment that a dialogic campaign process is not the main target of candidates in digital campaigns.

The dysfunction of the digital public sphere in the 2020 Pilkada campaign is not an ideal condition in a democratic election. The role

of the public sphere in politics and democracy is very important because it strengthens the existence of deliberative democracy, where every citizen has space to dialogue their ideas and thoughts about political situations in an open and participatory manner (Mossberger et al., 2008, p. 70). Digital media, which actually has the ability to facilitate meetings and discussions of political ideas, has yet to become an ideal public sphere. The reluctance of candidates to dialogue with the public in the digital public space, as well as the overly dominant conflict between the accounts of candidate supporters on social media, causes the digital public to be marginalized in the process of political deliberation on digital media.

The digital campaigns carried out by the candidates ultimately only became mimicry or imitation of the conventional campaigns they carried out. Most candidates' posts on social media are repetitions of previous face-to-face campaign information. The repetition of this information causes the candidates' digital media campaigns to resemble albums documenting their activities rather than an arena for discussing and debating the ideas and programs they will implement if elected in the voting.

The dysfunction of digital media in the campaign can also be seen in the candidates' social media, which was only used to display photos of the candidates and flyers or posters containing the vision, mission, and programs being promoted. Ultimately, the social media accounts of candidates and campaign teams only function as dead digital banners without providing a participatory and dialogical campaign process. Candidates were making more use of their social media as a place to display campaign banners, similar to advertising banners and billboards scattered on the streets.

Candidates treated digital campaigns only as a formality of compliance with the General Election Commission's regulations for running campaigns in the digital space. Digital campaigns have yet to be fully

established as a distinctive and unique institution that characterizes the culture of digital society. Failure to understand the digital campaign has given rise to the phenomenon of back-and-forth campaigns, from offline to online, and vice versa, from online to offline. The mimicry of offline and online campaigns shows that digital campaigns had not yet become an effective medium in constructing discursive dialogue, nor had they involved the public in dialogue to convince voters of candidates' programs and abilities.

The dysfunction of the digital space in the campaign process has caused most candidates to believe that conventional campaign styles are still seen as effective even during the pandemic. The phenomenon of "surrendering hump" or completely handing over the management of the digital campaign to the supporting team was evidence of the candidate's lack of attention to the importance of digital campaigns. Direct face-to-face contact with voters, traveling from one community to another, and gathering the support of local elites who influence their communities are seen as more effective in ensuring victory. The candidates' belief that the power of money politics is still more influential than programmatic campaigning on digital media is in line with what Aspinall & Berenschot (2019) call "political clientelism". Political clientelism, which has become a symptom of electoral democracy in Indonesia, continues to persist and survive in the current digital political culture. Candidates even think that current money politics is still more powerful and effective than digital campaigns.

Finally, the 2020 regional election campaign in the digital space in Kendal Regency, Semarang Regency, and Semarang Municipality was ineffective. Digital campaigns in the local election arena had yet to become a new culture among the public, including voters, candidates, campaign teams, and election organizers. What actually happened was a cultural failure where digital campaigns were

practiced during the pandemic, resulting in a contradiction with the aim of using digital campaigns, as explained in the findings above. The dysfunction and ineffectiveness of digital campaigns are evidence of the unpreparedness of candidates, organizers, and voters in entering the era of digital-based electoral democracy. Advances in digital technology that have been widely adopted by society, especially regarding internet access, use of smartphones, and social media, apparently do not guarantee that digital campaigns will be able to create ideal digital public spaces.

CONCLUSION

Based on data findings and analysis, the research concludes that digital campaigns in the 2020 regional elections in Indonesia had yet to play a central role as a factor in candidate victory. The effectiveness of regional election campaigns is dominated by conventional campaigns such as blusukan or face-to-face campaigning from village to village, political patronage that uses local figures to influence the votes of their followers, as well as clientelism practices that the candidates admit still occur.

The candidates' digital campaigns, which were forced by the pandemic situation rather than their creative ideas based on the candidates' wishes, caused digital stuttering or digital lag among candidates, campaign teams, voters, election commissions, and the election supervisory agency. This digital lag is shown by digital campaigns failing to connect candidates and voters in an effective political communication process. Digital lag encourages a "digital disconnect between candidates and voters" where candidates have not connected well with voters through digital campaigns even though both are in the digital arena.

The digital space had not become an effective public sphere for discussing candidate ideas and programs with voters. The lack of public engagement in digital political campaigns shows that a digital political habitus has yet to be formed in the political life of local communities. Digital

disconnection between candidates and voters shows that digital political campaigns in the 2020 regional elections had yet to be able to construct a dialectical and equal public discussion space. Thus, digital campaigns have yet to become a new paradigm and behavior in local political culture in the digital era. The digital lag during the 2020 regional election campaign shows that local communities in the three research areas were not ready to adapt to the new culture, digital political culture.

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