

INTERCULTURAL POLITICAL COMMUNICATION: ADAPTATION STRATEGIES OF POLITICAL CANDIDATES IN PLURAL REGIONS**KOMUNIKASI POLITIK INTERKULTURAL: STRATEGI ADAPTASI KANDIDAT POLITIK DI WILAYAH PLURAL****Abdul Rahman**

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This study examines the adaptation strategies of candidates' political communication in plural areas through a pluralistic approach.narrative review. Although the dynamics of contemporary political communication are dominated by discoursemedia framing, digital campaigning, and identity politics, there is a gap in the literature regarding the adaptation of intercultural communication. This article aims to analyze how political candidates adapt their messages, channels, and communication styles to reach cross-cultural audiences. The findings indicate that candidates integrate cultural symbols, differentiate their message strategies, and utilize communication channels that suit the characteristics of plural communities. The success of this adaptation is greatly influenced by the socio-cultural context, the level of societal plurality, and the candidate's legitimacy. However, adaptation also faces challenges such as the risk of message fragmentation, conflicts between vision consistency and the need for local adaptation, and the potential for backlash if deemed inauthentic. Theoretically, this research enriches the political communication literature with an intercultural perspective and proposes a new conceptual framework. Practically, it provides guidelines for candidates to build inclusive, persuasive, and sustainable communication in diverse societies, contributing to social cohesion and healthy democracy.

Keywords:Political communication, intercultural adaptation, plural society, campaign strategy, identity politics.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji strategi adaptasi komunikasi politik kandidat di wilayah plural melalui pendekatan narrative review. Meskipun dinamika komunikasi politik kontemporer didominasi oleh diskursus media framing, digital campaigning, dan politik identitas, terdapat kesenjangan literatur mengenai adaptasi komunikasi interkultural. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana kandidat politik menyesuaikan pesan, saluran, dan gaya komunikasi mereka untuk menjangkau audiens lintas budaya. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kandidat mengintegrasikan simbol budaya, diferensiasi strategi pesan, dan memanfaatkan saluran komunikasi yang sesuai dengan karakteristik komunitas plural. Keberhasilan adaptasi ini sangat dipengaruhi oleh konteks sosial-budaya, tingkat pluralitas masyarakat, dan legitimasi kandidat. Namun, adaptasi juga menghadapi tantangan seperti risiko fragmentasi pesan, konflik antara konsistensi visi dan kebutuhan adaptasi lokal, serta potensi backlash jika dianggap tidak otentik. Secara teoritis, penelitian ini memperkaya literatur komunikasi politik dengan perspektif interkultural dan mengusulkan kerangka konseptual baru. Secara praktis, ini memberikan pedoman bagi kandidat untuk membangun komunikasi yang inklusif, persuasif, dan berkelanjutan di masyarakat yang beragam, berkontribusi pada kohesi sosial dan demokrasi yang sehat.

Kata Kunci: Komunikasi politik, adaptasi interkultural, masyarakat plural, strategi kampanye, politik identitas.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with a very high level of cultural diversity. Religiously, the majority of Indonesians are Muslim (87%), but there are also Christians (10–11%), Hindus (1.7%), Buddhists (0.7%), and smaller numbers of other religions and beliefs (Pew Research Center, 2024; Statista, 2024).

Table 1
Composition of the Indonesian Population Based on Religion

Religion	Population Percentage
Islam	87%
Kristen	10–11%
Hindu	1.70%
Buddha	0.70%
Other	<1%

Source: Pew Research Center (2024); Statista (2024)

This data confirms that despite a dominant majority, the presence of significant minority groups requires political candidates to develop adaptive political communication strategies for interfaith audiences. Furthermore, in several eastern Indonesian provinces, such as Papua, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), and Maluku, Christians constitute the majority, demonstrating local variations in the plurality map (Statista, 2024).

Identity diversity is also reflected in public perceptions of the relationship between religion and national identity. A Pew Research Center survey (2024) found that 86% of Muslims in Indonesia consider that being Muslim is an important part of one's identity as an Indonesian, while only 21% of Christians who share similar views. These differences in identity perceptions indicate a potential gap in the reception of political messages, requiring political candidates to adapt their communication strategies to ensure acceptance across communities.

The phenomenon of identity politics is gaining strength globally, including in Indonesia. One implication is the emergence of a tendency for religious or ethnic-based political mobilization, which can exacerbate social polarization. In Indonesia, the young voter segment is the audience most frequently exposed to political issues, particularly through digital media. A 2023 survey by the Katadata Insight Center showed that 68.3% of Indonesian youth are frequently exposed to political news, with 10.8% of them very often.

The high level of political exposure among the younger generation, coupled with the diversity of cultural identities, demonstrates that political communication cannot be achieved with a single strategy. Political candidates need to develop intercultural communication strategies that can reach cross-cultural audiences while managing potential resistance arising from identity politics.

Political communication studies in the last two decades have been dominated by discourse on media framing, digital campaigning, as well as identity politics. Research on media framing generally highlights how candidates and political parties construct certain issues to influence public opinion, both through mainstream media and social media (Entman, 2004; Chong & Druckman, 2007). Meanwhile, digital campaigning has become a focus along with the development of information technology, particularly social media, which allows candidates to reach voters more widely, quickly, and personally (Vaccari, 2015; Kreiss, 2016). Identity politics has been widely studied in the context of how ethnic, religious, and ideological affiliations are used as instruments of political mobilization (Laclau, 2005; Mietzner, 2019).

Although these three topics provide an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of contemporary political communication, there is a gap in the literature that has not been widely touched upon, namely Intercultural communication adaptation of political candidates in plural areas. This issue is crucial because a political communication strategy that is successful in one community group may not be effective when applied to a group with a different cultural background. In a multicultural society like Indonesia, where ethnic, religious, and linguistic

diversity is very high, a candidate's ability to adapt interculturally is a crucial determinant in building political legitimacy and social acceptance. Unfortunately, previous studies have been limited in systematically examining how candidates adapt to cross-cultural communication in a heterogeneous political arena.

This study aims to close this gap by reviewing relevant literature to answer the questions: How do political candidates adapt their communication strategies in the context of cultural plurality? By using the approach/narrative review This research will explore the patterns, strategies, and mechanisms of political communication adaptation used by candidates in various multicultural contexts. The primary focus will be on identifying the forms of message adaptation, communication styles, and communication channels used by candidates to reach cross-cultural audiences.

This objective is not only descriptive but also analytical, namely to evaluate the extent to which intercultural adaptation plays a role in increasing the effectiveness of political communication and strengthening candidate legitimacy amidst social diversity. Furthermore, this study is expected to produce a more comprehensive conceptual framework regarding intercultural political communication, by integrating relevant theories such as Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1973), Cultural Resonance Theory (Snow & Benford, 1988), as well as Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory (Gudykunst, 1995).

Academically, this research is expected to expand the body of political communication theory by presenting an intercultural perspective. The integration of political communication theory and cross-cultural communication theory can yield new insights into how political communication strategies are influenced not only by media and issue factors, but also by the cultural context of the audience. Thus, this study has the potential to encourage the development of conceptual models of intercultural political communication, which has so far rarely been touched on in international literature.

Furthermore, the practical contribution of this research is highly relevant for political candidates, political parties, and communication consultants. In a pluralistic society like Indonesia, understanding cross-cultural communication strategies can help candidates avoid identity-based political polarization that can potentially divide society. Instead, intercultural adaptation strategies can be utilized to build more inclusive, persuasive, and sustainable political communication. This not only increases candidates' electoral chances but also contributes to strengthening social cohesion and a healthy democracy.

2. METHODS

2.1. Research Approach

This research uses an approach/narrative review. Different from systematic literature review which emphasizes a very strict process of searching and selecting articles with explicit protocols, narrative review This approach provides greater flexibility in exploring literature relevant to the focus of the study. This approach was chosen because the issue of adapting political communication in an intercultural context is still relatively new and has not been discussed systematically. Therefore, a more open literature review is needed to capture the diversity of perspectives, theories, and existing cases (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). Thus, narrative review allows researchers to integrate cross-disciplinary findings, ranging from political communication, cross-cultural communication, to political sociology studies, in order to build a more comprehensive understanding.

2.2. Literature Search Base

The literature reviewed was obtained from several internationally reputable academic databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), And Google Scholar. Scopus and WoS were chosen because of their broad coverage of peer-reviewed journals and recognized academic quality, while Google Scholar was used to supplement the search and capture publications that

may not be indexed in commercial databases but are still academically relevant. This strategy is expected to reduce selection bias and ensure diversity of literature sources.

2.3. Search Strategy and Keywords

The literature search process is done by using a combination of keywords arranged based on the focus of the study. Some key keywords include: political communication, intercultural communication, cultural adaptation, plural society, And political campaign strategies. These keywords are combined with Boolean operators (AND, OR) to broaden or narrow the search as needed. For example:

- “political communication” AND “cultural adaptation”
- “intercultural communication” AND “political campaign strategies”
- “plural society” AND “political communication”

In addition, the processbackward search(see references used in the article) and forward search(tracking articles that cite key articles) was also performed to find additional relevant literature.

2.4. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To maintain the quality of the study, the selected articles must meet several inclusion criteria, namely:

1. Explicitly discusses political communication issues related to cross-cultural adaptation.
2. Focuses on case studies in countries with plural societies, both ethnically, religiously, and socio-economically.
3. Published in peer-reviewed journals, with a minimum publication period of the last 10 years (2014–2024), except for relevant and fundamental classical theories.
4. Written in English or Indonesian.

Meanwhile, articles of a naturenon-scholarly(e.g. media reports or popular opinion) as well as articles that only discuss political communication in general without touching on the intercultural dimension were not included in the study.

2.5. Literature Analysis and Synthesis Procedures

The literature analysis process was carried out in several steps. First, articles that met the inclusion criteria were read in their entirety to identify political communication strategy adaptation patterns used by candidates in the context of cultural plurality. Second, the findings from various studies are classified based on socio-cultural context, for example, based on ethnicity, religion, or differences between urban and rural areas. This classification is important for understanding the variation in communication strategies according to audience characteristics.

Next, it is doneliterature synthesiswith the aim of finding common patterns, identifying differences in strategies across contexts, and uncovering conceptual gaps that have not been widely researched. This synthesis process is also aimed at extracting opportunities for theory development, for example by integratingCommunication Accommodation Theory, Cultural Resonance Theory, and contemporary political communication theory. In this way, the study not only presents a summary of the existing literature but also offers new insights that can enrich the discourse on political communication in plural societies.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Forms of Candidate Communication Adaptation Strategy

Literature review shows that political candidates in plural societies generally do communication adaptation to ensure their political messages are acceptable to cross-cultural audiences. These forms of adaptation can be categorized into three main dimensions.

3.1.1. Message adaptation

Candidates in modern electoral politics utilize various communication adaptation strategies to resonate with their audiences effectively. One prominent strategy involves modifying political narratives to reflect symbols, values, and cultural norms pertinent to the electorate. For instance, in regions marked by significant ethnic or religious identities, candidates often articulate messages that emphasize communal values such as harmony, solidarity, and collective identity (Brigg et al., 2016). In the Indonesian context, the principle of "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity) serves as a strategic narrative to foster moral legitimacy and inclusivity, leveraging a culturally resonant message that appeals to Indonesia's diverse populace (Brigg et al., 2016). This approach underscores the interplay between local cultural constructs and political messaging in shaping voter perceptions and behaviors.

The effective use of narratives is further contextualized within political campaign strategies that adapt to various democratic backgrounds. Successful electoral communication necessitates an understanding of the electorate's characteristics, which can vary significantly across different political systems, ultimately influencing the tactics employed by candidates (Strohmeier, 2013; Ma & Choy, 2003). The evolving landscape of political campaigns has seen a transition towards narratives that address social divisions while simultaneously promoting unity (Corona, 2024). This is particularly evident in multiethnic societies, where appeals to shared values can mitigate tensions and promote a cohesive national identity.

Moreover, the dynamics of issue salience and ownership play a critical role in how candidates construct their narratives. Understanding which issues are paramount to constituents allows candidates to frame their messages in ways that resonate deeply with voters, thus enhancing their electoral viability (Bélanger & Meguid (2008) and incentivizing the tailoring of communication strategies that align closely with constituents' priorities and values. This necessity for alignment is further highlighted in the analysis of political frameworks, where candidates must navigate complex social and political landscapes to convey messages that not only resonate but also mobilize (Plaut et al., 2018).

In conclusion, the adaptation of candidates' communication strategies in electoral contexts reflects a nuanced interplay between cultural symbols, collective values, and issue-based narratives. As these elements converge, candidates are better positioned to cultivate identity and unity among their supporters, particularly in diversely populated regions. This strategic narrative construction is critical for fostering legitimacy and electoral success in a competitive political landscape.

3.2. Channel adaptation

The selection of appropriate communication channels is critical for effective political campaigning, particularly as demographic shifts influence voter engagement strategies. In urban areas characterized by high digital penetration, candidates increasingly leverage social media platforms—such as Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram—to engage younger and more cosmopolitan voters (M et al., 2023). The preference for these digital channels stems from studies indicating that young voters tend to be adept at utilizing new media to access political information and engage with campaigns (M et al., 2023). For instance, research demonstrates that a significant portion of Generation Z perceives politics as largely influenced by the dynamics among political figures (Garrett, 2019), aligning with findings that suggest younger voters significantly use social media for political engagement, particularly in terms of expressing political opinions and seeking entertainment (Abid & Harrigan, 2020).

Conversely, in rural or traditional communities, face-to-face communication methods remain paramount for political engagement. Research indicates that interpersonal dynamics—such as community leadership, local forums, and religious gatherings—are more effective in these contexts, highlighting the necessity of adapting communication strategies to fit audience preferences (Razak et al., 2023). Additionally, scholarly work has demonstrated that civic engagement initiatives, such as volunteering, can foster greater political participation among youth by enhancing their confidence and commitment to political processes (Razak et al., 2023). This phenomenon underscores the need for candidates to tailor their outreach tactics based on the socio-cultural context of their target audiences.

Moreover, the differing efficacy of online engagement tools versus traditional communication methods further emphasizes the importance of channel adaptation in political discourse. While social media has transformed the landscape of political participation for younger demographics, there remains a significant demographic of voters who respond better to traditional communication, necessitating candidates to adopt a dual-faceted approach (Lees & Praino, 2022). The understanding of distinct voter segments—formed by factors such as age, location, and socio-economic status—compels candidates to thoughtfully choose their communication mediums to maximize engagement and foster a sense of political inclusivity among diverse voter populations (Shahzad et al., 2024).

In summary, the evolution of political communication strategies reflects a growing recognition of the need to adapt to varying audience preferences across urban and rural landscapes. A strategic integration of both digital and traditional channels can effectively enhance voter outreach and engagement, ensuring a broader and more inclusive political participatory framework.

3.4. Style adaptation

Effective adaptation of communication styles in political contexts, particularly through the use of local languages and cultural symbols, significantly influences public reception and support. Candidates who utilize the language and symbols familiar to specific communities can foster emotional connections and underscore shared identities, leading to a more favorable reception (Emeilia & Muksin, 2020). Additionally, the adaptation of communication styles in intercultural settings enhances persuasive effectiveness, highlighting the critical role of style adjustment in communicating messages (Pruvli, 2014). These findings are particularly evident in political environments such as Indonesia, where the deliberate use of regional languages is a strategic move towards cultivating a sense of belonging and identity among voters.

Moreover, research indicates that candidates engaging in political campaigns leverage symbolic communication to resonate with their constituencies. By employing culturally relevant symbols and narratives, they forge stronger identification with the electorate, as shown in discourse analyses of symbolic communication in political campaigns (Sipa et al., 2021; Zaluchu et al., 2019). This strategic use of symbols is essential in constructing an authentic identity that aligns with the socio-political contexts of various communities (Löffler, 2020). The implications of this research extend to how candidates can effectively communicate their messages by intertwining their political narratives with the cultural and emotional frameworks of the constituents they aim to serve, thereby enhancing their overall persuasive power (Kreiss et al., 2020).

In summary, the intersection of communication style, cultural symbols, and local languages illustrates a profound mechanism through which political figures can effectively engage with and influence their audience. Candidates' ability to adapt their communication styles effectively embodies a critical factor in navigating the cultural landscapes of their targeted voter bases (Kucharski & Rutkowska, 2019; Larrosa-Fuentes, 2022).

3.5. Determining Factors for Successful Adaptation

3.5.1. Socio-cultural context

The adaptation of political communication strategies is significantly influenced by several contextual factors, most notably in the socio-cultural domain. Ethnicity, religion, and language play crucial roles in shaping the acceptance of adapted messages. Political candidates who possess a deep understanding of cultural and symbolic sensitivities tend to build stronger emotional connections with their audiences. Koa's analysis emphasizes the impact of religious symbolism in political communication and highlights that such elements can resonate deeply with audiences, potentially overshadowing more pragmatic considerations such as rights or privileges (Koa, 2020). Furthermore, the work of Gudykunst suggests that awareness of cultural nuances enhances interpersonal communication effectiveness, indicating that politicians who successfully navigate these cultural dimensions are better equipped to engage with diverse electoral bases (Koa, 2020).

The role of nonverbal communication in politics is equally important. Laustsen and Petersen's research illustrates that nonverbal cues, including facial traits and appearance, significantly impact communication reception within political contexts (Laustsen & Petersen, 2015). Politicians perceived as attractive or competent-looking are often met with more favorable perceptions, which can influence political outcomes. This aligns with discourse on political images, where an understanding of socio-cultural factors can enhance a candidate's overall appeal.

Another critical factor is political skill, which encompasses assessing social situations and managing interpersonal relationships effectively. Usman et al. reinforce the correlation between political skill and success, illustrating that effective mentoring can enhance an individual's political adaptability and, by extension, their communication efficacy during electoral campaigns (Usman et al., 2022). This adaptability is more about recognizing and responding to socio-cultural cues that shape voter behavior than about innate talent.

The evolution of media platforms has transformed political communication, necessitating that politicians adapt their strategies to both traditional media and emergent social networks. Klinger and Svensson discuss the implications of network media logic, emphasizing the need for robust long-term communication planning, as political information retains its relevance for extended periods in the digital age (Klinger & Svensson, 2014). In this era, where information is rapidly shared and retained, political actors must tailor their messaging to fit the contextual demands of both online and offline platforms, leveraging cultural insights for greater resonance.

In summation, the success of political communication adaptation strategies is inherently tied to the socio-cultural context, which includes ethnicity, religion, language, and the dynamics of political skill. Research indicates that candidates who authentically engage with these factors, while simultaneously harnessing the power of modern communication strategies, are more likely to achieve greater connectivity with voters and overall electoral success.

3.5.2. The level of plurality of society

In examining the level of societal plurality, distinctions between regions with high diversity and those that are more homogeneous highlight the necessity of employing different political strategies for effective governance and societal cohesion. In multi-ethnic environments, such as large urban areas, candidates and political leaders are often required to articulate values of inclusivity and coexistence. This contrasts with more uniform societies, where appeals to dominant identities can be more persuasive and effective in securing support among the populace (Dunn, 2014).

Countries experiencing rapid pluralization must navigate the dichotomy between authoritarian tendencies and democratic aspirations. Research indicates that support for pluralism, particularly self-expression values, evolves alongside generational replacement, where younger cohorts raised in more secure, liberalized environments advocate for inclusivity

and diversity (Dunn, 2014). Without such generational shifts, exposure to diversity may provoke backlash from individuals deeply entrenched in authoritarian value systems, thus undermining democratic consolidation (Schaap & Saarikkomäki, 2022).

Additionally, the impacts of procedural justice in diverse societies warrant attention. The theory of procedural justice often presupposes a level of societal consensus that may not exist in pluralistic contexts. The potential for conflict arising from diversity can necessitate a reconsideration of strategies within the procedural justice framework, underscoring its limitations in plural settings (Schaap & Saarikkomäki, 2022). Therefore, engaging with the multifaceted nature of societal plurality calls for an acknowledgment of diverse identities and the complexities accompanying these dynamics, facilitating dialogues and strategies that foster understanding and collaboration.

Furthermore, the concept of legal pluralism, the coexistence of multiple legal systems within a society, accentuates the challenges and opportunities presented by societal diversity. In pluralistic societies, legal frameworks often reflect varying norms and practices that coexist within the same social framework, which can lead to conflicts but also to a richer dialogue among different systems (Husain et al., 2024). In Indonesia, for instance, the intricate interplay of different religious and legal systems has shaped practices of coexistence and social harmony, demonstrating the potential for pluralistic frameworks to contribute positively to societal cohesion through enhanced inclusivity and tolerance (Hutabarat, 2023).

In summary, effective governance in diverse societies requires tailored strategies that embrace plurality through inclusive narratives and recognition of the multifaceted identities present within the society. Legal and procedural frameworks must be recalibrated to address the realities of pluralism, thereby promoting social harmony and democratic stability. Successful engagement with plurality not only enhances societal cohesion but also facilitates deeper connections among various community members across ethnic, cultural, and legal spectrums.

3.5.3. Candidate legitimacy

The legitimacy of candidates in relation to cultural identity plays a crucial role in their acceptance by voters. Candidates perceived as sharing the ethnic, religious, or social experiences of their target community tend to be more credible compared to those viewed as outsiders. Wong et al. demonstrated that cultural identity significantly influences perceptions of credibility, suggesting that a candidate's cultural background can modulate acceptance and trust among constituents (Wong et al., 2003). In a political context, these findings are critical because they indicate that voters often prefer candidates who resonate with their cultural identities, impacting electoral strategies and candidate selection (Wong et al., 2003).

Moreover, the study conducted by Spence et al. highlights the importance of ethnic identity in shaping perceptions of spokesperson credibility, noting that individuals with strong ethnic identities may enhance or diminish credibility depending on the audience's cultural background (Spence et al., 2013). This is relevant in understanding how voters evaluate candidates based on perceived shared identities; candidates from minority groups may face challenges in being regarded as credible representatives unless their messaging effectively bridges this identity gap (Spence et al., 2013). Furthermore, Hati et al. explore the intricate relationship between candidate credibility and voter identity, finding that candidate image and voter attitudes are influenced by elements of credibility and identity, emphasizing both cultural alignment and perceived integrity during elections (Hati et al., 2017).

The concept of "credibility enhancing displays" proposed by Maji et al. enriches this discussion. Their research indicates that demonstrating one's affiliation and cultural identity can significantly impact perceived candidate credibility, with those exhibiting strong cultural ties being viewed more favorably by the electorate (Maji et al., 2017). This notion aligns with Vera's discussion on how cultural identities influence citizen responses to candidates, especially

when negative information arises. A candidate's ability to sustain or improve their credibility amid such issues is influenced by their perceived connection to the cultural narrative of their target community (Vera, 2019).

Additionally, the literature emphasizes the importance of party affiliation on candidate credibility. Gervais et al. note that the broader political landscape, including the credibility of the political party, significantly shapes a candidate's legitimacy (Gervais et al., 2021). This interplay highlights the need for candidates to establish personal credibility while also aligning themselves with party values that reflect their constituents' identities, which can enhance their overall acceptance among voters.

In conclusion, the interplay between candidate legitimacy, cultural identity, and perceived credibility is a complex area of study. The notion that voters prefer candidates with whom they share cultural commonalities is well-supported by empirical findings. As candidates navigate electoral landscapes, they must employ strategies that effectively convey their cultural alignments to optimize their perceived credibility and legitimacy among voters.

3.5.4. Main Challenges

While political communication adaptation strategies offer significant opportunities to strengthen the support base, the literature also highlights a number of key challenges that arise.

1. The risk of fragmentation of political messages
Overly varied messaging can lead to a lack of clarity in a candidate's political vision. This can potentially weaken the consistency of the campaign's overarching narrative.
2. The conflict between consistency of vision vs the need for adaptation
Candidates often face a dilemma between maintaining a consistent political vision across audience segments and adapting their messages to suit local cultural values. In some cases, over-adaptation is perceived as political opportunism (Entman, 2004).
3. Potential backlash
Communication adaptations deemed inauthentic or overly instrumental can trigger resistance from certain groups. For example, the use of religious symbols by a candidate lacking spiritual legitimacy could be seen as a form of identity politics exploitation.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Interpretation of Findings in Theoretical Perspective

The examination of political candidates' communication adaptation strategies within pluralistic societies leverages critical theories from communication and intercultural studies. The findings draw primarily from three theoretical frameworks: Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), Cultural Resonance Theory, and Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory.

Firstly, Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), as articulated by Giles, offers significant insights into how political candidates tailor their communication styles to different audiences. The theory posits that candidates may utilize convergence strategies—such as adopting local dialects or culturally specific conversational styles—to enhance relatability and foster an impression of shared identity. These strategies have been shown to improve acceptance rates among diverse audiences, as they cultivate a sense of empathy and closeness. Conversely, divergence strategies—where candidates maintain a distinct communication style—may be interpreted as a deliberate assertion of authority or an appeal to a broader political ethos. This dichotomy underscores that the effectiveness of a candidate's communication adjustment is intricately linked to the surrounding social context and the perceived relationship with the target community (Gahan & Pekarek, 2012; (Benford & Snow, 2000; .

Secondly, Cultural Resonance Theory plays a pivotal role in elucidating the potency of political messages when they resonate with the audience's cultural symbols and values. Snow and Benford identify that when political narratives are infused with culturally relevant symbols—such as references to unity in multiethnic contexts or moral frameworks prevalent within religious settings—candidates gain legitimacy and approval. This highlights the role of rational discourse in political communication while accentuating the emotive and symbolic connections that influence audience perceptions and reactions. Thus, the successful framing of political messages hinges not solely on logical arguments but on their ability to establish emotional and symbolic resonance with the electorate (Benford & Snow, 2000; Flores, 2016).

Thirdly, the Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory proposed by Gudykunst provides a comprehensive lens for addressing the dynamics of candidate interaction with culturally diverse audiences. Political candidates frequently grapple with uncertainties regarding audience interpretations of their messages, compounded by anxieties over potential backlash from certain demographic groups. Successful candidates employ strategies that emphasize open dialogue and inclusive messaging—thereby mitigating uncertainties and fostering positive relations within diverse community groups. This approach is critical for candidates aiming to cultivate a supportive base amid a complex social landscape (Reshef & Keim, 2016; Benford & Hunt, 1992; Corrigan-Brown & Wilkes, 2011).

In conclusion, integrating these theoretical frameworks facilitates a deeper understanding of the strategies political candidates can adopt to navigate the intricate landscape of pluralistic societies. This synthesis reveals that effective political communication is not merely about delivering messages but about cultivating relationships through empathetic, culturally resonant, and strategically inclusive interactions.

4.2. Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this research makes an important contribution in expanding the political communication literature by incorporating intercultural dimensions that have so far been underexplored. Most previous research has focused more on media framing, digital campaigning, or identity politics in general, while the dimension of communication adaptation in the context of cultural plurality has not received much attention.

This research also offers opportunities to develop a conceptual model of intercultural political communication, which combines elements of message, channel, and communication style with sociocultural factors that influence the success of adaptation strategies. This model can serve as a basis for further research using an empirical approach, whether through case studies, communication experiments, or cross-cultural political discourse analysis.

4.3. Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, the results of this study provide strategic guidelines for political candidates and parties in designing inclusive communication in pluralistic societies. First, candidates need to adopt a flexible, adaptive approach, tailoring messages to the dominant symbolic values in each community without losing the consistency of their political vision. Second, the choice of communication channels must consider the socio-demographic conditions of the audience, for example, maximizing social media for young urban voters and strengthening face-to-face communication for rural or indigenous communities. Third, a communication style that emphasizes emotional closeness through local languages and cultural symbols can strengthen the candidate's bond with the community. In addition, these findings emphasize the importance of building a communication strategy that's inclusive but not trapped in exclusive identity politics. Candidates need to balance the need for local adaptation with a unifying national narrative, so that political communication functions as an instrument of integration, not fragmentation.

5. CONCLUSION

This narrative review systematically examines how political candidates adapt their communication strategies in culturally pluralistic societies, filling a significant gap in the existing literature which has largely focused on media framing, digital campaigning, and identity politics. Our findings reveal that successful political communication in diverse contexts relies on a multifaceted adaptation approach encompassing message, channel, and style. Candidates consistently modify their political narratives to incorporate relevant cultural symbols, values, and norms, as exemplified by Indonesia's strategic use of "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity) to foster inclusivity and legitimacy. Furthermore, channel adaptation is crucial, with digital platforms such as social media being leveraged for younger urban demographics, while traditional face-to-face interactions remain paramount in rural or traditional communities. Style adaptation, particularly through the use of local language and cultural symbols, plays a crucial role in forming emotional connections and strengthening shared identities, thereby enhancing persuasive effectiveness.

The effectiveness of this adaptive strategy is heavily influenced by several contextual factors. Sociocultural elements such as ethnicity, religion, and language determine the reception of political messages, with candidates who demonstrate a deep understanding of these sensitivities building stronger emotional bonds with their constituents. The degree of societal plurality also demands a tailored approach; highly diverse environments require narratives of inclusivity and coexistence, in contrast to more homogeneous societies where appeals to dominant identities may suffice. Most importantly, the candidate's legitimacy, often linked to perceptions of shared cultural identity and credibility, plays a crucial role in voter acceptance. However, this adaptive process is not without challenges, including the risk of message fragmentation, the inherent conflict between maintaining a consistent political vision and the need for local adaptation, and the potential for backlash if the adaptation is deemed inauthentic or opportunistic.

Theoretically, this study makes a significant contribution to the field of political communication by integrating an intercultural perspective, thus enriching the understanding of how communication strategies are shaped not only by media and issues but also by the cultural context of the audience. This research lays the groundwork for the development of a comprehensive conceptual model of intercultural political communication, which synthesizes elements of message, channel, and style with socio-cultural factors that influence successful adaptation. Practically, these findings offer strategic guidance for political candidates and parties operating in pluralistic societies. It underscores the importance of a flexible, adaptive approach that balances local symbolic values with a consistent political vision, judicious selection of communication channels based on socio-demographic profiles, and cultivating emotional connections through culturally appropriate communication styles. Ultimately, this study advocates for an inclusive communication strategy that transcends exclusive identity politics, fostering social cohesion and strengthening democratic processes rather than contributing to fragmentation. Future research should conduct comparative studies across diverse national or regional contexts and employ empirical methodologies, such as surveys, political ethnography, or discourse analysis, to further validate and refine the proposed conceptual model.

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