

LOCAL CULTURE BASED POLITICAL COMMUNICATION: CANDIDATE CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES IN MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

KOMUNIKASI POLITIK BERBASIS BUDAYA LOKAL: STRATEGI KAMPANYE KANDIDAT DI MASYARAKAT MULTIKULTURAL

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ABSTRACT

Political communication in multicultural societies faces significant challenges due to ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity, which often leads to ineffective messaging and potential conflict. This research addresses the critical need for a deeper understanding of how political candidates can effectively integrate local cultural values and symbols into their campaign strategies to build stronger relationships with diverse voters. This research aims to investigate how political candidates integrate local cultural values and symbols into their campaign strategies in multicultural communities and to understand the influence of this cultural integration on voter perceptions and engagement. Using a narrative review approach, this research synthesizes extensive literature from Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, with thematic analysis and narrative synthesis to connect the findings with Cultural Political Communication Theory, Framing Theory, and Symbolic Interactionism. The findings indicate that strategic integration of local cultural values, symbols, and rituals significantly increases voter engagement, trust, and emotional connection. Candidates who authentically incorporate local cultural elements are perceived as more relevant and legitimate, fostering a sense of belonging among voters, and increasing mobilization. Integrating local cultural values and symbols is a fundamental requirement for effective political communication in a multicultural context, strengthening symbolic legitimacy, reducing cultural conflict, and encouraging inclusive political engagement.

Keywords: Cultural Political Communication, Multicultural Society, Campaign Strategy, Local Values, Symbolic Interactionism, Voter Involvement

ABSTRAK

Komunikasi politik dalam masyarakat multikultural menghadapi tantangan signifikan akibat keberagaman etnis, agama, dan bahasa, yang sering kali menyebabkan pesan yang tidak efektif dan potensi konflik. Penelitian ini mengatasi kebutuhan kritis untuk pemahaman yang lebih dalam tentang bagaimana kandidat politik dapat secara efektif mengintegrasikan nilai dan simbol budaya lokal ke dalam strategi kampanye mereka untuk membangun hubungan yang lebih kuat dengan pemilih yang beragam. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menginvestigasi bagaimana kandidat politik mengintegrasikan nilai dan simbol budaya lokal ke dalam strategi kampanye mereka di komunitas multikultural, serta memahami pengaruh integrasi budaya ini terhadap persepsi dan keterlibatan pemilih. Menggunakan pendekatan narrative review, penelitian ini mensintesis literatur ekstensif dari Scopus, Web of Science, dan Google Scholar, dengan analisis tematik dan sintesis naratif untuk menghubungkan temuan dengan Teori Komunikasi Politik Budaya, Teori Pembingkai, dan Interaksionisme Simbolik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa integrasi strategis nilai, simbol, dan ritual budaya lokal secara signifikan meningkatkan keterlibatan pemilih, kepercayaan, dan koneksi emosional. Kandidat yang secara otentik menggabungkan elemen budaya lokal dipersepsikan lebih relevan dan sah, menumbuhkan rasa memiliki di kalangan pemilih, dan meningkatkan mobilisasi. Mengintegrasikan nilai dan simbol budaya lokal adalah persyaratan mendasar untuk komunikasi politik yang efektif dalam konteks multikultural, memperkuat legitimasi simbolik, mengurangi konflik budaya, dan mendorong keterlibatan politik yang inklusif.

Kata Kunci: Komunikasi Politik Budaya, Masyarakat Multikultural, Strategi Kampanye, Nilai Lokal, Interaksionisme Simbolik, Keterlibatan Pemilih

1. INTRODUCTION

Culture-based political communication plays a crucial role in shaping voter perceptions and participation. In multicultural societies, where ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity prevails, campaign strategies sensitive to local values can enhance the effectiveness of political messages. For example, in India, the use of election symbols that align with local cultural identities can significantly influence voter choice. Research shows that voters often choose candidates based on symbols they perceive as representing their cultural or community identity (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

Multicultural societies present unique challenges to political communication. Language barriers, differences in communication styles, and cultural misunderstandings can reduce the effectiveness of political campaigns. According to research by Dasan (2021), the main challenges in multicultural communication include language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and differences in communication styles. Suggested effective strategies include cultural sensitivity training, inclusive policies, and the use of technology.

Local symbols, language, rituals, and values have a significant influence on shaping voters' perceptions of candidates. In India, election symbols have a significant impact on voter choice. Research shows that voters often choose candidates based on symbols they perceive as representing their cultural or community identity (Cambridge University Press, 2023). Furthermore, the language used in campaigns can also influence voter perceptions. The use of local languages in political communication can increase emotional closeness between candidates and voters and strengthen the message conveyed (Dasan, 2021).

The field of political communication has indeed expanded significantly, yet it often addresses overarching messaging frameworks, media practices, and political strategies while neglecting the intricate nuances of local cultural contexts. Analyzing how candidates employ political messaging through traditional media or digital platforms reveals essential trends; however, it frequently lacks a clear understanding of cultural adaptability within specific communities (Herkman, 2012). This oversight is particularly critical in multicultural societies characterized by diverse ethnic, religious, linguistic, and traditional elements that complicate the political landscape. Ignoring cultural diversity can lead to ineffective political messaging and, in some cases, even create friction or conflict within communities (Wagner et al., 2023; .

Recent studies suggest that effective political communication must leverage local cultural symbols and practices, which involves adjusting messages to resonate with the community's values and rituals (Li et al., 2019)Backstrom, 2025). For example, candidates who employ culturally polite communication strategies significantly enhance the effectiveness of their outreach, demonstrating the importance of showing cultural intention and sensitivity (Li et al., 2019). In multicultural contexts, this approach can lead to increased voter mobilization and engagement, as candidates who celebrate the diversity of their constituents through culturally relevant messaging often see better electoral outcomes (Wagner et al., 2023; Doering, 2019). Thus, the literature points to a pattern where tailored, culturally-informed communication results in more meaningful interactions and broader community participation in political processes (Hartaman et al., 2023)

Furthermore, there is an evident gap in the academic literature regarding comprehensive models that blend local cultural nuances with political campaigning strategies in diverse societies. While the concepts of political culture are crucial to understanding community engagement, there remains a need for frameworks that explicitly incorporate

cultural understanding into political messaging (Ramos, 2024). As observed with various community leaders and candidates, integrating local cultural knowledge not only aligns political narratives with constituents' identities but also fosters a collaborative political atmosphere that respects and embraces diversity (Grodach, 2012; Tupytsia & Khmelnykov, 2023).

In conclusion, bridging the gap in political communication literature requires an emphasis on localized cultural contexts that shape political engagement and candidate messaging. Increased attention to how local cultural dynamics influence electoral practices will enable political actors to craft messages that are not just broadly palatable but also deeply resonant within specific communities.

Furthermore, although several studies have shown that the use of cultural symbols can influence voter perceptions (Cambridge University Press, 2023), empirical evidence regarding the mechanisms by which campaign strategies adapt to multicultural contexts remains limited. This suggests the need for further research to systematically investigate how candidates integrate local values and symbols into campaign strategies, and the implications of this integration on voters' perceptions and political participation.

Based on the identified gaps, the main research questions are formulated as follows: **“How do political candidates integrate local cultural values and symbols into their campaign strategies in multicultural communities?”**. This question is investigative in nature and emphasizes aspects of candidate strategic practices and voter perceptions, which simultaneously opens up opportunities for contributions to cultural-based political communication theory (Cultural Political Communication Theory, Framing Theory, Symbolic Interactionism).

The objectives of this study were formulated to align with the research questions and identified literature gaps. This study aims to identify local culture-based political communication strategies by exploring the cultural elements used by candidates, including symbols, rituals, and local languages. Furthermore, this study focuses on assessing the suitability of political communication strategies to the characteristics of multicultural societies and examining campaign adaptation mechanisms to cultural diversity. This study examines how candidates adapt political messages to local values, norms, and symbols to optimize voter acceptance, while also identifying obstacles and challenges that arise in the process of adapting these strategies. Furthermore, this study seeks to understand the influence of the use of cultural symbols and values on voter perceptions by assessing their impact on engagement, trust, and loyalty. Finally, this study also compares voter responses based on demographic factors and cultural affiliation to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Academically, this research contributes to enriching the political communication literature by developing a Cultural Political Communication model that integrates candidate campaign strategies with a multicultural context. Furthermore, this research provides empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of integrating cultural symbols and values in shaping public perceptions and political participation. This research also broadens understanding of Framing and Symbolic Interactionism theories in the context of multicultural political communication. From a practical perspective, the research findings can be utilized by candidates and political practitioners to develop more effective campaign strategies that are sensitive to cultural diversity. Another expected implication is the creation of political campaign guidelines that can prevent cultural conflict, increase voter engagement, and build trust through culturally relevant communication. Furthermore, this research has the potential to

produce an operational framework for political practitioners in measuring the effectiveness of local culture-based communication strategies and serve as a reference in formulating inclusive political communication policies in multicultural societies.

2. METHODS

2.1 Design of the Review

This research uses a narrative review with a descriptive and analytical approach. A narrative review was chosen because it allows researchers to synthesize a broad and diverse body of literature, identify research trends, theoretical gaps, and patterns of local culture-based political communication strategies in multicultural societies. This approach also allows for more flexible analysis than a systematic review, as it focuses on contextualizing findings and theoretical elaboration, rather than simply quantifying previous research results.

Furthermore, narrative reviews allow for the integration of qualitative and quantitative findings from previous studies to build a holistic understanding of how political candidates utilize local cultural symbols, language, rituals, and values in their campaigns. This approach allows research to produce a conceptual framework that integrates political communication theory with the actual practice of campaigning in multicultural societies.

2.2 Data Sources and Search Strategy

Data sources are selected from leading academic databases to ensure the quality and reliability of the literature:

- Scopus: The largest database for peer-reviewed articles, covering social sciences, communication, and politics.
- Web of Science: Provides multidisciplinary literature and highly reputable scientific sources.

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria:

1. Peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and case studies related to cultural political communication.
2. A study examining candidate campaign strategies within a multicultural context.
3. Articles that discuss the use of symbols, language, rituals, or cultural values in political communication.

Exclusion criteria:

1. Articles that are not politically related, such as pure cultural studies with no campaign relevance.
2. Literature that only discusses cultural theory without an empirical connection to political communication practices.
3. Popular documents, blogs, or media opinions that have not undergone peer-review.

The selection process was carried out in two stages: screening of titles and abstracts, followed by a full-text review to ensure relevance to the research focus.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Integration of Local Cultural Values

The integration of local cultural values into political campaigns is a critical aspect of effective political communication, especially in multicultural societies. Political candidates often customize their messages to resonate with the beliefs, norms, and practices of the communities they target. This tailoring enhances the symbolic connection with voters and respects the social and historical contexts that shape community identities. In countries like India and South Africa, candidates have strategically employed local symbols and cultural references pertinent to specific ethnic groups to foster a sense of belonging among voters, thereby increasing voter engagement and identification with the candidates (Supriyanto et al., 2019).

In Indonesia, the integration of local culture into political discourse is similarly evident, where candidates have employed local languages, traditional proverbs, and culturally relevant references in their campaigns. Such strategies have been particularly effective in building emotional connections with diverse voter bases. Research indicates that when political messages are infused with local cultural elements, voters are likely to perceive the communications as more relevant and reflective of their cultural identities (Çingir & Subramaniam, 2023; , (Prastiwi, 2013). For example, the use of languages such as Javanese and cultural narratives drawn from local traditions has been shown to resonate deeply with voters' senses of identity and community, reinforcing their support for candidates who honor these cultural significances (Prastiwi, 2013).

Moreover, the effectiveness of these culturally attuned messages can be significantly amplified through the use of modern communication platforms, including social media. Candidates leveraging these technologies can engage more effectively with constituents, especially in regions characterized by a rich tapestry of languages and cultures. The adaptation of political messages to reflect local values and cultural narratives has proven crucial in enhancing voter mobilization and aligning political objectives with community aspirations (Syukri et al., 2023). Studies demonstrate that voters exhibit a preference for candidates who authentically engage with their local cultural context, as this engagement often translates into perceived authenticity and relatability (Harun et al., 2023).

In summary, the integration of local cultural values into political campaigns is not merely a strategic maneuver but a profound expression of respect and acknowledgment of voters' identities. This practice fosters greater emotional connections and enhances electoral engagement, ultimately shaping the dynamics of political communication in culturally diverse societies. By recognizing and incorporating local cultural values, candidates can significantly enhance their electoral appeal and establish stronger ties with their constituents.

3.2 Use of Symbols and Rituals in Campaigns

Political campaigns utilize symbols and rituals to strengthen their legitimacy and establish a connection with constituents. The effectiveness of this approach is reflected in various mechanisms that enhance voter engagement and trust. The use of local languages, cultural symbols, and participation in traditional festivals exemplifies how political actors effectively communicate their messages within a cultural context.

Using local languages in campaign speeches and social media content has significantly been linked to better voter understanding and resonance with candidates' messages. Dasgupta

and Sarkar (2021) indicate that effective political branding relies on cultural sensitivity, which is crucial for engaging local constituencies (DasGupta & Sarkar, 2021). Furthermore, the use of symbols that resonate with specific cultural identities—such as traditional flags or motifs—serves to affirm a candidate's alignment with community values (Ponnarasu, 2025). Symbols tied to cultural heritage create a sense of belonging among voters, thereby fostering deeper connections between political candidates and the electorate (Poon, 2018).

Moreover, active participation in customary festivals or rituals solidifies this bond by showcasing candidates as integral community members, rather than distant political figures. (Ponnarasu, 2025) argues that political rituals connected with sacred symbolism are pivotal for legitimizing authority in local contexts (Ponnarasu, 2025). By authentically engaging in community practices, candidates increase their visibility and elicit greater trust from voters, as such actions demonstrate respect for local traditions and values (Rogulski, 2019). Research indicates that such engagements can enhance voter mobilization, particularly in communities that highly regard their traditions, ultimately leading to increased electoral support (Nagle, 2014).

The interplay of symbols and rituals in political communication underscores the importance of cultural frameworks in shaping voter perceptions and behaviors. (Poon, 2018) emphasizes that the incorporation of symbols into political narratives can significantly influence social dynamics and the interpretation of candidates (Poon, 2018). Additionally, conducting campaigns aligned with cultural rituals signals to constituents that candidates genuinely understand and are committed to fostering relationships rooted in mutual respect (Nagle, 2014). This effectiveness is especially salient in multicultural societies, where symbols play varied roles in the politics of recognition, as outlined by (Nagle, 2014), highlighting that shared cultural experiences can enhance political engagement.

In summary, the use of localized communication, cultural symbols, and engagement in traditional practices profoundly impacts how candidates are perceived within their communities. These elements work synergistically to increase voter engagement, trust, and mobilization, ultimately contributing to the symbolic legitimacy of political figures.

3.3 Challenges in Multicultural Contexts

Political communication in multicultural societies presents various challenges, primarily stemming from cultural conflicts and symbolic misunderstandings. Cultural conflicts occur when messages from political actors favor one group, leading to resistance or backlash from others. Research indicates that moral-driven political messages can polarize opinions, as they often resonate more strongly with in-group members while alienating those from different backgrounds (Brady et al., 2017; (Guzmán et al., 2024; . This polarization is particularly relevant in multicultural contexts where diverse identities and values coexist, demonstrating the inherent tension within political messaging (Guzmán et al., 2024; (Sunarno et al., 2023; .

Moreover, symbolic misunderstandings arise when different cultural groups interpret symbols, rituals, or messages variably, thereby generating ambiguity. Political correctness, while intended to foster inclusivity, can inadvertently create fear or resentment among groups that feel marginalized or misunderstood (Guzmán et al., 2024; Moss & O'Connor, 2020). This dichotomy exemplifies the danger of poorly framed political messages, which can lead to further division instead of unity (Guzmán et al., 2024; Lægaard, 2020).

To address these challenges, candidates can adopt several strategic approaches. One effective method is selective message adaptation, where political messages are tailored to resonate with specific audience segments while considering broader cultural sensitivities. This approach aligns with findings suggesting that messages framed to account for the audience's values are typically more persuasive (Martincová & Lukešová, 2015). Additionally, an inclusive approach—focusing on shared values and commonalities across different groups—can mitigate potential conflicts and foster a sense of unity (Sunarno et al., 2023; Mileaningrum et al., 2023)

Furthermore, engaging in local consultation is essential. Involving cultural experts and community leaders in the messaging process ensures that campaign messages align more closely with the cultural norms and values of the population being addressed. This local engagement enhances the appropriateness of the messaging and builds trust within multicultural communities, creating a synergetic relationship between political actors and the electorate (Mileaningrum et al., 2023; Adhani & Anshori, 2020). Such strategies are increasingly vital in our globally interconnected political landscape, where failure to acknowledge multicultural dynamics can lead to significant electoral setbacks and community disillusionment (Sunarno et al., 2023; Iyer et al., 2017).

In conclusion, overcoming the challenges posed by political communication in multicultural contexts necessitates a careful balancing act of tailoring messages appropriately, fostering inclusivity, and engaging local cultural stakeholders to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding.

4. DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Interpretation of Findings

The review results indicate that the use of cultural symbols in political campaigns significantly influences voter engagement and trust, particularly in multicultural societies. Cultural symbols, such as traditional motifs, customary rituals, and local languages, function as tools of symbolic legitimation that strengthen voters' emotional engagement (Ochieng, 2022; Sipa et al., 2021). When political candidates demonstrate a genuine understanding of their constituencies' cultural values and identities, they foster a sense of belonging and trust among the electorate, which can enhance political loyalty. This phenomenon is especially prominent in diverse societies, where the alignment between identity and political messaging is crucial for campaign success (Larrosa-Fuentes, 2022; Trim, 2024).

Candidates adopting inclusive communication strategies are more likely to avoid symbolic conflicts and inter-community misunderstandings, facilitating broader acceptance of their messages across various cultural groups (Kreiss et al., 2020). Engaging local cultural consultants can empower candidates to tailor their messages appropriately, ensuring they resonate with the nuances of different cultural identities (Kulau et al., 2021). This adaptive mechanism positions cultural integration not only as a symbolic strategy but as a vital element of effective political campaigning, leading to increased voter support.

Research indicates that political messaging intertwined with cultural symbols can significantly enhance voters' emotional responses. Studies have highlighted that symbols related to national identity, such as flags or specific cultural narratives, engage voters on a psychological level, strengthening their attachment to candidates (Kalmoe & Gross, 2015). Emotional appeals are crucial in capturing voter attention, particularly within political campaigns that actively seek to highlight community values (Noor et al., 2022). Furthermore,

these campaigns often leverage social media platforms to amplify cultural narratives and symbols in a manner that is accessible and relatable to a diverse audience (Ademilokun & Taiwo, 2013; Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2014).

In conclusion, the integration of cultural symbols within political campaigns is not merely a tactic for greater visibility; it is an essential strategy for fostering emotional connections and ensuring that political messages are effectively communicated across multicultural electorates. As candidates increasingly navigate complex cultural landscapes, their capacity to harness these symbols will likely dictate their success in engendering trust and loyalty within the electorate.

4.2 Theoretical Implications

This research makes a significant contribution to several theories of political communication. Within Cultural Political Communication Theory, this study demonstrates how local cultural elements can be used as effective political communication tools. These findings extend the theory to include complex multicultural contexts, where cultural adaptation strategies are key to campaign success. Furthermore, in Framing Theory, research findings confirm that framing campaign messages using local cultural symbols can influence voter interpretation and shape political opinions. Culturally based framing strategies have been shown to increase message resonance and facilitate voter mobilization.

Meanwhile, through the perspective of Symbolic Interactionism, this study illustrates that symbolic interactions through language, rituals, and cultural symbols shape social perceptions and relationships between candidates and voters. Culturally contextualized political messages create collective meanings that are accepted by multicultural communities. Thus, this study contributes an integrative framework that links symbols, rituals, and message adaptation with the mechanisms of voter perception and engagement in a multicultural context.

4.3 Practical Implications

The findings of this study have practical implications that can be directly applied by candidates and political consultants. First, in the context of multicultural campaigns, candidates can design strategies that emphasize the use of local languages, cultural symbols, and participation in traditional rituals as a means of building emotional connections and increasing voter trust. Second, in strategies to mitigate the risk of cultural conflict, candidates can involve local figures, conduct cultural sensitivity research, and tailor political messages to the characteristics of the target community. This approach not only minimizes the potential for symbolic conflict but also balances the interests of different cultural groups. Therefore, this research provides practical guidance for candidates in building campaigns that are more inclusive, effective, and acceptable to voters from diverse backgrounds.

4.4 Research Gap & Future Directions

While this review provides comprehensive insights, several research gaps warrant attention. First, research using a quantitative or mixed-methods approach is needed, given that the majority of current literature is qualitative or descriptive. Quantitative research can provide empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of cultural symbols on voter engagement, trust, and political participation.

Second, exploration across different geographic and demographic contexts is also crucial. Comparative studies across countries or multicultural communities can help identify both universal and highly contextualized political communication strategies. For example, a strategy that proves effective in Asia may not be relevant in Africa or Latin America.

Third, future research also needs to develop a more measurable operational framework. This includes the formulation of indicators and metrics that can be used to assess the effectiveness of culture-based campaigns. With such a framework, research results will not only provide academic contributions but also serve as practical guidance for candidates and political consultants in designing more targeted communication strategies.

5. CONCLUSION

This narrative review confirms that culturally based political communication is a fundamental element in building effective candidate campaigns, particularly in multicultural societies fraught with complex identities, languages, and social values. Strategic integration of cultural values, symbols, rituals, and language has been shown to not only strengthen a candidate's symbolic legitimacy but also increase trust, engagement, and emotional closeness between candidates and voters.

Overall, several key findings can be highlighted. First, candidates who authentically adapt local cultural elements are able to create deeper emotional connections with voters, thereby increasing political participation and a sense of belonging. Second, the use of cultural symbols and involvement in traditional rituals serve as symbolic legitimacy, reinforcing the candidate's alignment with community values. Third, an inclusive communication strategy, complemented by consultation with local cultural actors, is key to navigating identity differences in multicultural societies and minimizing potential conflict. Fourth, modern communication platforms such as social media expand the reach of culture-based messages, making them more adaptable to contemporary voter dynamics.

From a theoretical perspective, this study makes an important contribution to the development of Cultural Political Communication Theory, emphasizing how local cultural elements function as effective political media in multicultural contexts. Furthermore, the results strengthen Framing Theory by demonstrating that framing messages through cultural symbols increases voter resonance and mobilization. Furthermore, this study deepens the understanding of Symbolic Interactionism, emphasizing that symbolic interactions through language, rituals, and collective symbols shape social meanings that influence voter political behavior.

The practical implications of this research are significant. Candidates and political consultants need to design campaign strategies that emphasize the use of local languages, participation in cultural rituals, and the use of contextually relevant symbols. Furthermore, the involvement of local cultural experts and the application of cultural sensitivity research can help mitigate potential symbolic conflict and maintain inter-community harmony. Thus, this research encourages the development of an inclusive communication framework that can be operationalized to enhance campaign effectiveness in multicultural societies.

However, several research gaps remain to be filled. First, quantitative and mixed-methods studies are needed to empirically measure the impact of culture-based strategies on voter engagement and behavior. Second, comparative studies across countries and demographics are needed to distinguish universal strategies from highly contextualized

ones. Third, further research should focus on developing operational indicators and metrics that can be used to systematically assess the effectiveness of culture-based campaigns.

In closing, it can be emphasized that integrating local cultural values and symbols is not merely a tactical strategy, but a fundamental necessity for effective political communication in a multicultural society. By recognizing, respecting, and embracing cultural diversity, candidates not only strengthen their relationships with voters but also contribute to improving the quality of democracy, making it more inclusive and representative.

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