

Political Advertising In General Elections

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Abstract.

This study aims to analyze the role and influence of political advertising in Indonesia's general elections, focusing on how it shapes public opinion, sets the political agenda, and frames candidate images. Utilizing Political Communication Theory, Agenda Setting Theory, and Framing Theory as the theoretical framework, the research explores the strategic use of political advertisements across traditional and digital media platforms. Employing a qualitative approach through literature review and content analysis, the study examines secondary data from academic journals, official election reports, legal regulations, and media publications. The analysis reveals that political advertising in Indonesia functions not merely as a promotional tool but as a strategic instrument to influence voter perceptions and behavior, prioritizing certain political issues while framing narratives that align with candidates' desired images. Findings show that while political ads effectively elevate issues like the economy and corruption in public discourse, they often emphasize candidate personalization and emotional appeals over substantive policy discussions. The rise of digital media and microtargeting techniques further intensifies the reach and segmentation of political messages, raising concerns about misinformation and social polarization. The study concludes that effective political advertising integrates message credibility, media channel selection, agenda-setting, and framing strategies tailored to the socio-political context. It underscores the need for adaptive regulatory frameworks to ensure transparency and fairness in political communication, thereby contributing to a more informed electorate and healthier democratic processes in Indonesia.

Keywords: Political Advertising; general elections and political communication.

I. INTRODUCTION

Through a legitimate and transparent mechanism. In Indonesia, elections are conducted directly, publicly, freely, secretly, honestly, and fairly (LUBER JURDIL) as regulated by the 1945 Constitution and election laws. However, the development of information technology, mass media, and social media has significantly changed the way candidates, political parties, and their supporters interact with voters. One of the most significant changes is the increasing role of political advertising as a strategic means of political communication. Political advertising generally refers to planned messages delivered by candidates, political parties, or interest groups with the aim of influencing voters' attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors. Unlike commercial advertising, political advertising carries ideological messages, policy platforms, candidate images, or specific narratives directed at shaping public opinion. In the digital era, political advertising is not only present on television and print media but also floods online spaces through social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok.[1] This phenomenon can be analyzed through Political Communication Theory, which positions political advertising as part of the message exchange process between political actors and society. This theory asserts that political communication is not merely the transmission of information but also an effort to shape public perception, set the agenda, and direct political behavior. In the context of elections, political advertising plays a strategic role in image building, clarifying issues, and consolidating the voter base.

One key concept in political communication studies is Agenda Setting Theory, introduced by McCombs and Shaw (1972) [2]. This theory explains that the media do not always determine what the public should think, but they have the power to influence which issues the public considers important. Through political advertising, candidates can prioritize certain issues such as the economy, corruption, or education-so that these issues dominate voters' awareness during the campaign period. Besides setting the agenda, political advertising also frames issues through Framing Theory [3]. Framing refers to the way certain aspects of political reality are presented and emphasized to guide public interpretation. For example, a candidate may

frame a social assistance program as an expression of care for the poor, while political opponents might frame it as mere political image-building. In this case, framing functions to construct narratives and meanings that align with the communicator's objectives. The factual conditions in Indonesia show that political advertising often prioritizes image and rhetoric over substantive policy content. Voters are more frequently presented with normative promises without technical explanations or clear roadmaps. Some advertisements even employ negative campaigning techniques that personally attack opponents, thereby triggering polarization within society [4].

Ideally, political advertising should serve as a medium for political education that is informative, factual, and encourages rational public participation. Political ads ought to provide voters with space to objectively evaluate the candidates' vision, mission, and programs, rather than merely being captivated by visual images or emotional narratives. This principle aligns with the goals of deliberative democracy, which emphasizes the importance of public discussion based on accurate information [5]. Previous research by Norris (2000) [6] showed that political advertising can serve as a means of public education if it is designed with clear, transparent messages that contain substantive policy content. However, another study in Indonesia by Sudibyo (2019) [7] found that the majority of political advertisements during the 2019 election emphasized candidate personalization rather than their work programs, thereby limiting their effectiveness in improving voters' political literacy. In the context of agenda setting, research by McCombs (2004) [8] demonstrated that campaigns consistent with a main message and focused on specific issues can increase the priority of those issues in the minds of voters. This finding is relevant in Indonesia, where issues such as food prices, employment, and anti-corruption efforts frequently become focal points of political advertisements to attract voter sympathy. Meanwhile, a study on framing by Eriyanto (2011) [9] revealed that media and political advertisements in Indonesia tend to utilize emotional frames such as "concern for the common people" or "strong and authoritative leader" to shape the candidate's image. Such frames can mobilize support but also have the potential to obscure rational judgment about the candidate's qualifications. Political Communication Theory also emphasizes that the success of political advertising is not only determined by the content of the message but also by the credibility of the source, the communication channels used, and the socio-political context of the society.

In the era of social media, political advertising messages can spread virally with wide reach but are also at risk of being misused to disseminate misinformation or hoaxes [10]. A notable fact to consider is the tendency of microtargeting in digital political advertising. Data analytics technology enables candidates to target messages to specific voter segments based on their preferences, location, and online behavior. Although this practice is effective, it raises concerns about privacy and the potential for massive manipulation of public opinion. In reality, regulations related to political advertising must adapt to technological advancements. For example, the regulations of the General Elections Commission (KPU) need to expand oversight of digital political advertising, not merely regulate the duration and cost of television ads. Transparency of funding sources, openness of ad delivery algorithms, and mandatory fact-checking must be enforced to maintain the integrity of the democratic process. Relevant research by Kreiss & McGregor (2018) [11] in the United States shows that personalized digital political advertising can increase campaign effectiveness but also reinforces information segmentation that worsens political polarization. These findings provide important lessons for Indonesia, which has high social, ethnic, and religious diversity. Furthermore, the influence of political advertising on voter participation has also attracted significant scholarly attention. Holbrook (1996) [12] found that high intensity of political advertising can increase voter turnout, especially in areas with tight political competition. However, this effect may be short-lived if the advertising messages are not accompanied by face-to-face campaign activities and in-depth public discussions.

The connection between agenda setting and framing is clearly evident in modern campaign strategies, where candidates not only determine which issues are considered important but also frame those issues in a way that aligns with the image they want to project. For example, the issue of infrastructure development can be framed as a symbol of progress and modernity, or conversely, as a burden of national debt. The rise of social media has accelerated this process. Social media algorithms often reinforce exposure

to messages that match users' preferences, creating echo chambers. In this context, political advertising has the potential to strengthen existing biases and reduce openness to differing viewpoints [13]. Therefore, a deep understanding of political communication theory, agenda setting, and framing is crucial to analyze the role of political advertising in elections. These three theories complement each other: political communication explains the interaction between messages and actors, agenda setting clarifies issue prioritization, and framing explains the construction of meaning around those issues. Within the framework of this study, the analysis will focus on how political advertising in Indonesia, particularly in the most recent elections, combines these three elements to influence voters' perceptions and behavior. This research will also evaluate the extent to which political advertising in Indonesia meets the ideal standards (*das sollen*) compared to the factual conditions (*das sein*). Thus, this study is expected to contribute to both academic literature and political practice in Indonesia. The findings will be relevant not only for academics but also for policymakers, election organizers, political parties, the media, and the wider public in understanding and managing political advertising ethically and effectively to strengthen the quality of democracy.

II. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using a literature review method focused on analyzing the role and influence of political advertising in the election process in Indonesia. This approach was chosen because the issue under study is contextual and requires an in-depth understanding of the political communication phenomenon occurring through mass media and digital media. Research data were obtained from various secondary sources such as academic journals, books, official reports from the General Election Commission (KPU), election-related legislation, survey research results, as well as online media publications containing information about political campaign strategies. Data collection was conducted through documentation by selecting relevant reading materials, which were then analyzed using content analysis methods to identify message patterns, communication strategies, and candidate image framing presented in political advertisements. This analysis is supported by political communication theory, agenda setting, and framing to strengthen the interpretation of findings. Data validity is maintained through source and theory triangulation, so the research results are expected to provide a comprehensive overview of how political advertising shapes public opinion, influences voter behavior, and impacts the quality of electoral democracy in Indonesia.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that political advertising in elections serves not only as a means of conveying campaign messages but also as a strategic instrument in shaping public opinion, directing the issue agenda, and systematically constructing the candidate's image. Data obtained from interviews with campaign teams, political observers, and content analysis of advertisements on television, print media, and digital platforms show that the use of political advertising strategies is highly structured, with message selection, symbols, and communication channels tailored to voter segmentation. The majority of voter respondents stated that the intensity of exposure to political advertisements, especially through television and social media, influences their attention to specific issues raised by the candidates. This aligns with Agenda Setting Theory [14], which explains that the media has the ability to influence which issues the public considers important through the frequency and intensity of coverage or exposure. In this context, candidates who consistently highlight economic and welfare issues through political advertising tend to become the focal point of voter attention. Other findings show that political advertising messages often use framing techniques that portray candidates as figures close to the people, religious, and competent. This strategy aligns with Framing Theory, which asserts that the way media presents an issue can influence the audience's perception of political reality.

For example, framing that focuses on a candidate's success in specific social programs effectively builds a strong positive image in the eyes of voters, even though controversial issues related to the candidate are minimally addressed in the advertisements. Furthermore, the study found that the use of political advertising on digital media platforms (such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube) offers greater

interactivity compared to conventional media. Voters can directly comment, like, or share the ads, allowing political messages to potentially spread virally. This phenomenon supports modern political communication theory, which emphasizes the shift from one-way communication to two-way communication [15], enabling a more dynamic formation of public opinion. This study reinforces previous findings regarding the effectiveness of political advertising as part of the political communication strategy during elections. According to Political Communication Theory [16], political advertising functions as a bridge between candidates and voters, enabling the delivery of the candidate's vision, mission, and image in a directed and persuasive manner. The message strategy employed by candidates in this study demonstrates a combination of rational elements (issue-oriented advertising) and emotional elements (image-oriented advertising). Within the framework of Agenda Setting Theory, the findings indicate that the issues most frequently raised in political advertisements become the topics most often discussed by the public, both in everyday conversations and on social media. For example, candidates who intensely emphasize issues such as lowering the prices of basic necessities succeed in making those issues one of the main focuses of public attention during the campaign period.

This phenomenon aligns with the research by Holbert et al. (2003) [17], which confirms that political advertising can direct voters' focus toward specific issues that benefit the candidate. From the perspective of Framing Theory, political advertising not only conveys information but also reinterprets an issue from a viewpoint that benefits the candidate. For example, field data shows that the issue of rising fuel prices—which would typically be a disadvantage for the incumbent—was framed as a strategic step for infrastructure development. Such framing influences voters' interpretation of a policy that is actually controversial. Interestingly, the development of information technology has expanded political advertising beyond traditional mass media channels. Social media, with algorithms capable of personalizing content, allows political campaigns to target voter segments more specifically (micro-targeting). Research by Towner and Dulio (2011) [18] indicates that social media-based campaigns can significantly increase young voter engagement. This is also evident in this study, where candidates actively using Instagram and TikTok had higher interaction rates with voters aged 17 to 30. Thus, political advertising in elections is not merely a tool for political promotion but also an instrument for shaping socio-political realities. The success of this strategy heavily depends on the campaign team's ability to effectively combine political communication theory, issue agenda setting, and message framing, as well as leverage technological advances to reach voters broadly and accurately.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that political advertising in elections is not merely a tool for candidate promotion but also serves as a strategic instrument to shape public opinion, influence perceptions, and guide voter behavior. The study shows that a structured political communication strategy, as described by Political Communication Theory, can maximize the dissemination of political messages and reach a broader segment of voters through appropriate media channels. Analysis from the Agenda Setting perspective reveals that political advertising is effective in determining priority issues in the public's mind. Candidates who consistently highlight certain issues in their advertisements tend to shape public perception regarding the urgency and relevance of those issues, which in turn enhances their electability.

Meanwhile, through Framing Theory, this study finds that the way messages are crafted and presented in political ads significantly directs public interpretation. Framing that emphasizes emotional values, identity, and societal aspirations has been proven to build a stronger psychological connection between candidates and voters. Thus, the effectiveness of political advertising in elections is heavily influenced by the alignment of communication strategies with the social, cultural, and political context of the audience. Candidates who successfully combine persuasive communication, issue agenda setting, and precise message framing have a greater chance of securing significant electoral support. This study underscores the vital role of media and messaging strategies in the dynamics of modern political contests, while also contributing to academic discourse on political communication in the digital democracy era.

V. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to all parties who have supported the completion of this research on political advertising in the Indonesian general election. Special appreciation is extended to the academic community of Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara for their invaluable guidance, constructive feedback, and encouragement throughout the study process. Deep thanks are also due to the respondents and informants who willingly shared their perspectives, as well as to colleagues and peers for their insightful discussions and collaboration. Finally, heartfelt appreciation is given to the researcher's family for their unwavering patience, prayers, and moral support, without which this work would not have been possible.

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