



Issue Management in Political Marketing: A Case Study of the North Sumatra Regional Election in 2024

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ABSTRACT

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North Sumatra has become an interesting political battleground, particularly between the Bobby Nasution-Surya and Edy Rahmayadi-Hasan Basri candidate pairs, ahead of the 2024 regional elections. This paper explores these political dynamics through a qualitative descriptive approach, utilizing in-depth interviews with political observers and potential voters, as well as document analysis to collect primary and secondary data. Thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns in issue management strategies. The research reveals the key issues that influence people's preferences, such as infrastructure development, public services, and health. The findings show an increase in community engagement, especially among the younger generation, who are becoming more critical in their choices. Inclusive and transparent communication strategies are key to building public trust, while social media plays an important role in shaping perceptions of candidates, despite the challenges of disinformation. The conclusion of this study emphasizes the importance of strategy adaptation by candidate pairs to meet public expectations and drive the desired positive change in North Sumatra.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary democratic process, political marketing has emerged as a pivotal element, serving as a conduit between potential leaders and voters (Yang et al., 2016; Jakesch et al., 2021). This phenomenon has assumed particular significance in the context of general elections. Political marketing can be conceptualized as a strategy or tactic employed by political parties or candidates to market political products (Zunaria & Ruliana, 2022). In the context of *pemilihan kepala daerah* (regional head elections), political marketing assumes even greater significance, particularly in regions characterized by intricate social and political dynamics (Basha, 2023; Shahbazi, 2024). In Indonesia, *pemilihan kepala daerah* represents a pivotal component of the democratic system, serving not only as a conduit for the selection of regional leadership but also as a crucible for the articulation of political, social, and economic dynamics. Elections not only mirror the community's aspirations but also unveil the political strategies employed by candidates to garner voter support (Coombs, 2025; Song, 2025).

In contemporary democratic politics, political marketing has evolved into an essential component. Effective communication strategies and the adept management of issues are crucial for success in this domain (Coombs, 2022). In the context of the North Sumatra Regional Head Election in 2024, the focus on issue management assumes particular relevance. Issue management can be defined as a proactive process of managing

developing issues, trends, or events that have the potential to affect an organization, whether positively or negatively (Rahmawati et al., 2023). In this context, issue management endeavors to transform these issues into opportunities to enhance the image of political products. This management is not merely related to the manner in which prospective leaders present themselves; it is also related to how they respond to and manage issues in society. The cultural and social diversity that characterizes North Sumatra poses an additional layer of complexity to this challenge.

North Sumatra is a province characterized by its rich multiculturalism, with a variety of ethnic, religious, and economic backgrounds, creating a unique political dynamic in which each group has different aspirations and needs. In the 2024 North Sumatra regional election, issue management becomes even more important given the many challenges faced by the candidates, including allegations of corruption, nepotism, and criticism of the work programs implemented. The theoretical purpose of management in political marketing is to identify, analyze, and manage problems that arise in society. Management is a strategic process that can be used by political organizations to influence their reputation and garner support. One of the most important political events in Indonesia, the 2024 North Sumatra Election, demonstrates how public attention can determine the success or failure of a candidate's campaign.

In the context of the North Sumatra Regional Head Election in 2024, the two candidate pairs that garnered significant public attention were Bobby Nasution–Surya and Edi Rahmayadi–Hasanuddin. The adept management of issues by these two pairs assumes paramount importance in shaping voter perceptions and determining the direction of public support. Bobby Nasution, who has experience serving as Mayor of Medan and is the son-in-law of former President Jokowi, has the advantage of strong political connections and support from the center. Conversely, Edi Rahmayadi is a candidate with substantial leadership experience, having previously served as the governor of North Sumatra, often referred to as the incumbent. It is imperative that both candidates demonstrate the capacity to discern, formulate, and manage issues pertinent to the constituents' needs and aspirations in North Sumatra, a province characterized by a rich tapestry of cultural and social diversity. Issue management is a critical component of candidate image construction, as evidenced by the seminal work of Grunig & Hunt (1984), who demonstrated that public perceptions of political organizations are profoundly influenced by the manner in which public relations and campaign teams address emergent issues. Building upon these findings, Cutlip et al. (2006) underscored the pivotal role of a meticulously designed communication strategy in ensuring the persuasiveness, relevance, and credibility of messages disseminated to the public.

In the context of political campaigns, meticulously planned and coordinated communication strategies empower candidates to respond to emerging issues in a manner that not only mitigates negative impacts but also strategically transforms challenges into political advantages. The 2024 North Sumatra elections provide a compelling case study for examining the intricate and multifaceted dynamics of politics, particularly in the context of issue management between candidate pairs such as Bobby Nasution–Surya and

Edi Rahmayadi–Hasanuddin. A comprehensive examination of this research is warranted, as it encompasses diverse yet interconnected domains, including issue management, communication strategies, political marketing methodologies, and community responses. These elements collectively influence electoral outcomes. The 2024 North Sumatra gubernatorial election demonstrates the efficacy of issue management in enhancing a candidate's electability through strategic political marketing. This research examines how candidates in the North Sumatra regional election employed issue management strategies to address salient issues during the election period and how these strategies influenced public perceptions and election outcomes.

This article aims to explore several key aspects of the 2024 North Sumatra elections. First, it examines how the candidate pairs, Bobby Nasution–Surya and Edi Rahmayadi–Hasanuddin, identify and address critical issues that resonate with the needs of the people. It delves into their communication and political marketing strategies to uncover how they effectively convey these concerns to the public. Additionally, the analysis focuses on the role of social media in shaping each candidate's approach to issue management, including their efforts to tackle challenges such as disinformation. Finally, the article investigates public reactions to the issue management strategies employed by both candidate pairs, shedding light on their impact and effectiveness. The findings of this study are expected to provide several benefits. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of political communication and marketing literature, particularly in the area of issue management in local elections. Practically, the results can serve as a reference for political candidates, campaign teams, and political consultants in formulating more effective communication strategies that align with voter expectations. Furthermore, the insights gained can assist electoral commissions, policymakers, and civil society organizations in fostering a more transparent, participatory, and informed electoral process, ultimately strengthening democratic practices in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research paradigm is defined as the researcher's perspective in understanding existing realities and phenomena, and in interpreting the findings to achieve scientific truth. The present research adopts a constructivist paradigm, which prioritizes the role of experiential knowledge construction by research subjects, superseding the conventional focus on existing reality. The approach employed is descriptive qualitative, with the objective of comprehending complex phenomena in the context of political marketing issue management, particularly with regard to the 2024 *pemilihan kepala daerah* (regional head elections) in North Sumatra. This approach involves exploring the emergence and management of political issues and examining their influence on public perceptions of candidates.

The study employed a non-probability sampling technique, acknowledging that not all elements of the population have an equal probability of being selected as a sample. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, while secondary data were obtained from the analysis of related documents. Semi-structured

interviews were utilized to explore the experiences and perspectives of the research subjects. Thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns and themes within the collected data, and data triangulation was conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the information. This methodological approach facilitated the acquisition of a more comprehensive understanding of the management of political issues within the context under study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Issue Management and Communication Strategies of Candidate Pairs in the 2024 North Sumatra Regional Election

In the 2024 North Sumatra gubernatorial election, candidates Bobby Nasution-Surya and Edy Rahmayadi-Hasan Basri confront substantial challenges in identifying and managing issues that are pertinent to the community's needs. The subsequent analysis examines the manner in which these two candidate pairs addressed key issues, the communication strategies employed, the influence of social media, and the community's response to the issue management applied.

Identification and Management of Key Issues

In the North Sumatra Governor Election of 2024, the candidate pairs of Bobby Nasution-Surya and Edy Rahmayadi-Hasan Basri must confront the challenge of identifying and managing key issues pertinent to the community's needs. Employing the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) framework, an analysis can be conducted of how these two candidate pairs respond to emergent issues and how they communicate with the public within this challenging environment.

Identification of Key Issues

The candidates identified key issues through a combination of community surveys, media analysis, and stakeholder discussions, aiming to address the concerns most relevant to the public. Among the prominent issues raised, infrastructure development emerged as a priority, reflecting widespread complaints about damaged roads and inadequate public facilities. Both candidate pairs emphasized their commitment to improving infrastructure to enhance the region's quality of life. Health and public services were also highlighted, particularly the need for better access to quality healthcare and improved public service delivery. Citizens expressed a desire for clear programs to address these challenges. Additionally, the economy and social welfare were central to the candidates' platforms, with both Bobby-Surya and Edy-Hasan focusing on initiatives to boost economic growth, create jobs, and support small businesses, aiming to alleviate the economic pressures faced by the community.

Key Issues Management with SCCT

Within the framework of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), issue management can be analyzed through two key aspects: responsiveness to crises and the communication strategies employed.

The Bobby Nasution-Surya pair emphasizes innovation and technology in managing issues. Leveraging digital platforms, they aim to engage a broader audience and provide transparent information about their plans. This strategy also incorporates direct community dialogue, ensuring they address public aspirations and complaints. In the SCCT context, this approach represents a proactive crisis management strategy, designed to build trust and credibility with voters through open and forward-thinking communication.

Conversely, the Edy Rahmayadi-Hasan Basri team focuses on experience and continuity, emphasizing achievements from Edy's tenure while advocating for the continuation of existing programs. Their issue management approach highlights past successes and outlines plans for future improvements. This reflects a defensive strategy within the SCCT framework, aimed at preserving their reputation and maintaining public trust by showcasing proven results and a commitment to stability.

Social Media Influence and Challenge Management

Social media has emerged as a pivotal instrument in managing political campaigns, serving as a platform that enables candidates to engage directly with voters and disseminate information with remarkable efficiency.

The Bobby-Surya team has been known to proactively generate content that highlights their strengths and responds expeditiously to public inquiries and criticism. However, the dissemination of disinformation poses a significant challenge, as it can tarnish their reputation. To address this issue, the Bobby-Surya team employs a strategy of official posts, aiming to clarify false claims and educate their followers about the perils of misinformation. In the context of SCCT, their prompt response can be seen as a crisis mitigation strategy, aimed at minimizing the adverse effects of disinformation and preserving public trust.

Conversely, the Edy-Hasan team utilizes social media to disseminate their messages but exhibits a less proactive stance in countering disinformation. They prioritize the dissemination of accurate and transparent information to the public, though their response to criticism is occasionally perceived as tardy. To enhance their communication efforts, it is essential that they refine their crisis communication strategy, ensuring that their responses are timely, clear, and effective in addressing voter concerns.

Community Response to Issue Management Strategy

An examination of the community's responses to the issue management strategies employed by the Bobby-Surya and Edy-Hasan pairs reveals contrasting dynamics. The digital campaigns and innovative approaches employed by Bobby-Surya have been particularly well-received by the younger generation. Their active engagement in

community events has further strengthened their bond with voters, underscoring an appreciation for contemporary, interactive methods of political communication.

Conversely, the response to Edy-Hasan has been more nuanced. While they have garnered support from a loyal following, they have also encountered skepticism from segments of the public who question their ability to deliver on campaign promises. Opinions on Edy's tenure as governor are similarly divided; some commend his achievements, while others express concern over unresolved issues. This suggests that while experience may confer credibility, the public continues to demand concrete evidence of dedication to addressing key concerns.

In the 2024 North Sumatra regional elections, both Bobby Nasution-Surya and Edy Rahmayadi-Hasan Basri have identified key issues relevant to the needs of the community and implemented different communication strategies to convey their messages. Employing the SCCT framework, we can observe how these two pairs of candidates are attempting to address the issues that emerge and communicate with the public in a challenging environment. The efficacy with which these candidates manage these issues will significantly influence the electoral outcome, with the electorate placing their hope in the newly elected leaders' ability to effect positive change in North Sumatra.

Political Communication and Marketing Strategy

In the context of the North Sumatra Governor Election of 2024, the candidates Bobby Nasution-Surya and Edy Rahmayadi-Hasan Basri employed a range of communication and political marketing strategies to engage with voters and address salient issues. By employing Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) as an analytical framework, we can comprehensively examine how these two pairs responded to the challenges they confronted and how they cultivated a favorable image in the public's perception.

Response to Issues and Crises

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) underscores the significance of customized responses to crisis situations in safeguarding reputation and credibility. In the context of this theoretical framework, both candidate pairs navigated a range of positive and negative issues by employing distinct approaches.

Bobby Nasution-Surya adopted a proactive strategy, leveraging social media and digital platforms to communicate their plans and vision with clarity and transparency. In response to criticism and disinformation, they provided timely clarifications and addressed public concerns. This approach is indicative of a crisis management strategy that is designed to foster trust and credibility among voters.

On the other hand, Edy Rahmayadi-Hasan Basri employed a more defensive strategy, focusing on showcasing achievements from Edy's previous tenure to uphold their established reputation. Nevertheless, their delayed responses to criticism in certain instances engendered skepticism among the electorate. In the context of SCCT, this

underscores the necessity for refinement in their crisis communication strategy to ensure that messages are conveyed with clarity, efficacy, and in a timely manner.

Communication Strategy and Political Marketing

Both candidate pairs employed distinct communication and political marketing strategies to connect with the public and convey their messages effectively.

Bobby Nasution-Surya emphasized innovation and technology, leveraging social media to create engaging and interactive content. They frequently conducted direct Q&A sessions with the community, fostering a sense of inclusivity and responsiveness. This strategy not only enhanced voter engagement but also positioned them as modern leaders attuned to the needs of the public.

Edy Rahmayadi-Hasan Basri, on the other hand, focused on experience and continuity. Their campaigns highlighted achievements from Edy's tenure, aiming to reassure voters with a track record of results and a commitment to continuing existing programs. While this approach appealed to those prioritizing stability and experience, they would benefit from being more proactive in addressing criticism and demonstrating concrete plans to tackle future challenges.

Social Media Influence and Disinformation Management

Social media played a pivotal role in the communication strategies of both candidate pairs, serving as a platform for direct interaction with voters and rapid dissemination of information. Bobby-Surya actively leveraged social media to highlight their strengths, addressing public questions and criticisms promptly. In instances of disinformation, they employed official posts to clarify false claims and educate their followers, thereby demonstrating a crisis mitigation strategy consistent with the principles of SCCT. This approach aimed to minimize the negative impact of misinformation and reinforce public trust.

Meanwhile, Edy-Hasan employed social media, though they exhibited a need for greater proactivity in addressing disinformation. Their delayed response to criticism risked fostering doubt among voters. To enhance their communication efforts, it is essential that they refine their crisis communication strategies, ensuring that their messages are delivered with clarity, expediency, and efficacy to maintain and rebuild public trust.

Community Response to Communication Strategy

The community's responses to the communication strategies employed by the two candidate pairs revealed distinct dynamics. The contemporary approach employed by Bobby-Surya, marked by its digital campaigns and innovative methods, garnered favorable responses, particularly from the younger demographic. Their active involvement in community events further strengthened their bond with voters, underscoring the efficacy of an interactive and contemporary approach to political communication.

In contrast, Edy-Hasan faced mixed reactions. While they garnered strong support from their loyal following, skepticism prevailed among voters who questioned their capacity to fulfill campaign pledges. Public opinion on Edy's tenure as governor was also divided; some acknowledged his achievements, while others highlighted lingering concerns about unresolved issues. This observation underscores the public's desire for substantiated evidence of a candidate's dedication to confronting pressing issues.

In the North Sumatra elections in 2024, both Bobby Nasution-Surya and Edy Rahmayadi-Hasan Basri have implemented various communication and political marketing strategies to reach voters and manage relevant issues. Using the SCCT framework, we can see how these two pairs of candidates are trying to manage emerging issues and communicate with the public in challenging situations. The efficacy with which these candidates manage these issues will significantly influence the electoral outcome, thereby shaping public expectations regarding the potential for positive change in North Sumatra under the incoming leadership.

Social Media Influence and Disinformation Management

In the North Sumatra governor election in 2024, the media, especially social media, plays a very important role in shaping public opinion and influencing voter behavior. Candidate pairs Bobby Nasution-Surya and Edy Rahmayadi-Hasan Basri must face significant challenges related to the management of information and disinformation circulating in the community.

Social Media Influence

Social media has emerged as a predominant means of communication in contemporary political campaigns. Digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter facilitate direct communication between candidates and voters, enabling rapid exchange of information. For instance, Bobby Nasution-Surya leveraged social media to disseminate campaign messages, articulate their vision and mission, and engage with the public. The campaign's innovative use of interactive content, which included images, videos, and live-streaming, effectively engaged younger demographics, a crucial demographic for electoral success. In contrast, Edy Rahmayadi-Hasan Basri also leveraged social media to disseminate their message, amplifying its reach and impact. However, a predominant emphasis was placed on the achievements accomplished during Edy's tenure. While this strategy may instill a sense of security in voters who prioritize experience, it is crucial for them to be more proactive in addressing criticism and demonstrating their ability to overcome challenges.

Disinformation Management

A significant challenge confronting both candidates pertains to the dissemination of disinformation. The rapid dissemination of false or misleading information on social media platforms has the potential to adversely impact a candidate's reputation and credibility. In response, Bobby-Surya adopted a proactive approach, seeking to address

these issues by offering clarifications through official posts and directly answering citizens' questions. This strategy appeared to be a part of a crisis mitigation approach aimed at mitigating the negative impact of misinformation. Conversely, Edy-Hasan encountered difficulties in terms of responding to disinformation. Despite their experience, their delayed response to criticism may lead to voter skepticism. In order to address these challenges, it is imperative for them to refine their crisis communication strategy, ensuring the delivery of their message is both clear and prompt.

Effective Communication Strategy

In order to effectively manage emerging issues and cultivate a positive public image, both candidates must prioritize the development of robust communication strategies. A key component of this strategy is transparency, which involves the provision of accurate and clear information to the public to foster trust. Open communication can help alleviate voter doubts and skepticism. Equally important is active interaction, such as the hosting of Q&A sessions, discussions, or open forums on social media. These initiatives not only enhance voter engagement but also demonstrate a genuine commitment to understanding and addressing the public's concerns.

Finally, public education plays a vital role. Voters must be educated on critical issues and equipped with the tools to identify and counter disinformation. This can be achieved through well-structured and clear information campaigns. Together, these strategies can strengthen public trust and highlight the candidates' dedication to addressing community needs.

The role of the media, particularly social media, in the 2024 North Sumatra elections is of considerable significance. Candidate pairs, namely Bobby Nasution-Surya and Edy Rahmayadi-Hasan Basri, are confronted with the challenge of effectively managing the circulation of information, both accurate and inaccurate, within their respective communities. By employing effective communication strategies, including transparency, active interaction, and public education, these candidates can cultivate a positive image and enhance voter trust. The efficacy with which these challenges are addressed will have a substantial impact on the electoral outcome, thereby shaping the trajectory of leadership in North Sumatra.

Community Response to Issue Management Strategies in the 2024 North Sumatra Regional Election

In the North Sumatra Governor Election of 2024, the issue management strategy implemented by candidate pairs Bobby Nasution-Surya and Edy Rahmayadi-Hasan Basri elicited a range of responses from the public. This response serves as a barometer for assessing the effectiveness of communication and the approach adopted by each candidate pair in addressing prevailing challenges.

Positive Response to Bobby-Surya Strategy

Bobby Nasution and Surya succeeded in attracting the attention of numerous voters, particularly the younger demographic, through their innovative approach and active utilization of social media. The public demonstrated a favorable response to their proactive engagement, evidenced by the high attendance at question and answer sessions and open discussions. The aforementioned candidates' approach fostered a sense of inclusivity, providing voters with a platform to articulate their aspirations and address concerns. This aspect of their campaign was met with approval, as it engendered a sense of being heard and valued among the electorate. Additionally, the transparency exhibited by Bobby-Surya in addressing criticism and disinformation was highly regarded. This approach facilitated greater access to accurate information, empowering voters to make more informed decisions. The couple's prompt responses to negative issues have been cited as evidence of their commitment to maintaining their reputation and credibility in the eyes of voters.

Skepticism about Edy-Hasan's Strategy

Conversely, Edy Rahmayadi and Hasan Basri encountered a more skeptical response from the public. Despite their experience and emphasis on the achievements made during Edy's tenure, many voters felt that their approach was less responsive to criticism and emerging issues. The perceived lack of a prompt response to disinformation and criticism contributed to the emergence of skepticism regarding their capacity to fulfill campaign promises. Critics called for substantiated evidence of the candidates' commitment to addressing prevailing concerns, particularly in the domains of health and infrastructure. Some voters felt that despite the experience, no innovation or concrete plans were offered to deal with the new challenges facing the region.

Social Media Engagement and Its Impact

Social media played a pivotal role in influencing people's responses to the issue management strategy. Bobby-Surya leveraged these platforms to engage directly with voters, fostering a sense of immediacy and engagement. The positive public response indicates a preference for a modern, interactive approach. In contrast, Edy-Hasan's approach necessitates an enhancement of its social media presence and adaptation to a more dynamic mode of communication. The presence of skeptical responses indicates a necessity for the pair to demonstrate heightened activity in addressing criticism and showcasing their strategies for overcoming challenges.

A comparative analysis of the issue management strategies employed by the Bobby Nasution-Surya and Edy Rahmayadi-Hasan Basri pairs in the 2024 North Sumatra regional elections reveals significant discrepancies. Bobby-Surya's strategy of active engagement and transparency has been met with a positive reception, fostering a favorable image. Conversely, Edy-Hasan's approach has been characterized by a perceived delay in addressing criticism, resulting in a more skeptical public response. The efficacy in navigating these challenges is poised to exert a substantial influence on the

electoral outcome. The public has expressed a strong aspiration for the elected leader to usher in a period of positive transformation in North Sumatra.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the issue management strategies of Bobby Nasution–Surya and Edy Rahmayadi–Hasan Basri Sagala in the 2024 *pemilihan gubernur* (governor election) of North Sumatra, using the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). The findings reveal heightened civic engagement, particularly among younger voters, creating both opportunities and challenges for candidates in meeting the needs of a more informed electorate. Both pairs addressed key issues such as infrastructure, public services, and economic welfare, with Bobby–Surya adopting a progressive, social media–driven approach, while Edy–Hasan emphasized experience and past achievements.

Communication effectiveness emerged as a key differentiator between the two. Bobby–Surya’s active online presence fostered trust and engagement, whereas Edy–Hasan’s reliance on traditional methods often resulted in delayed responses. Management of disinformation proved crucial, with Bobby–Surya demonstrating agility and transparency, while Edy–Hasan encountered challenges in providing timely responses. Public expectations for transparency, accountability, and tangible commitment were notably high, favoring candidates who combined innovation, proven track records, and adaptability. The 2024 *pemilihan gubernur* in North Sumatra underscores that effective issue management and communication are pivotal in shaping public perception and securing voter support in today’s dynamic political landscape.

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