

Unveiling Hybrid Communication: Political Strategies in Central Java and Insights from Salatiga

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Abstract

This article analyses the configuration of political communication strategies employed by legislative candidates in the local electoral context of Salatiga, a multicultural city in Central Java. Recent scholarship on local political communication in Indonesia has broadly examined campaign practices in a fragmented manner, often separating face-to-face interactions, digital media use, and social networks. Drawing on a systematic review of existing studies, this study demonstrates that local political communication operates through a hybrid strategy that integrates interpersonal communication, digital platforms, and socially embedded networks within a normative framework of Tolerance. Using McNair's political communication framework, this study argues that different communication channels perform distinct yet complementary functions. Face-to-face communication plays a central role in identity building and in gaining support by fostering trust and social legitimacy. At the same time, digital media primarily serves as an information source and tool, expanding the reach of messages, particularly among younger voters. Simultaneously, community-based networks and opinion leaders mediate political messages and align them with local social norms, thereby enhancing message acceptance. The findings further show that Salatiga's culture of tolerance functions not merely as a social backdrop but also as an active discursive boundary that shapes acceptable political narratives. This study contributes to the literature by offering an integrated theoretical model of local political communication that emphasizes the contextual orchestration of communication functions in multicultural settings.

Keywords: Strategy; Political Communication; Legislative Candidates; Local Elections, Digital media

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Introduction

Effective communication is the most important element in electoral politics because it is the primary means by which political actors engage voters, articulate policy positions, and build trust-based relationships. In the context of contemporary democracy, political communication has undergone a significant transformation with the rapid development of digital technology, altering how political messages are produced, distributed, and received by the public (Castells 2009). The global literature suggests that political campaigns no longer rely on traditional mass media and face-to-face interactions but are increasingly integrated with digital platforms, personalized messaging, and hybrid media strategies, reshaping the structure of political mediation (Chadwick 2013).

Collectively, international studies show that social media has become a significant arena for shaping public opinion, mobilizing voters, and constructing an emotional political image (Enli 2017; Kreiss 2016). However, the literature shows that digital political communication is rare. Contemporary candidates are increasingly combining issue-based communication with personal narratives, visual storytelling, and long-term political branding practices to strengthen their emotional attachment with voters (Baamonde-Silva, Dafonte-Gómez, and Bastón Carballo 2025; Trexler 2024). This dynamic intensifies electoral competition in fragmented political spaces (Bärbieru 2022; Grigoryan 2025; Kuyucu 2018; Messini 2025).

In the Asian context, the use of digital communication innovations shows a more context-specific pattern than a uniform one. Studies have confirmed that political

communication practices in the region closely intersect community-based networks, cultural norms, and deep-rooted social ties (Borja-Orozco 2022; Remondes, Abreu, and Oliveira 2025). Thus, the digitization of political communication does not replace interpersonal practices; instead, it is negotiated and adapted according to local social structures. Asian literature has consistently demonstrated that candidates shape the success of political communication by effectively integrating digital strategies with prevailing social and cultural expectations.

Research in Indonesia's legislative arena demonstrates the presence of this adaptive pattern, particularly in legislative contestations. Various studies have shown that social media provides a relatively inexpensive, direct, and cross-generational communication channel (Priyowidodo et al., 2019; Hikmat, 2021). However, political actors rarely deploy digital communication as a stand-alone strategy. Legislative candidates still rely heavily on face-to-face interactions, community engagement, and framing of local issues to build trust and political legitimacy with voters (Mardhiah et al. 2024). Simultaneously, the high public demand for ethical and transparent campaigns continues to strengthen amid ongoing concerns over the practice of money politics (Jatmiko and Handayani 2019). Recent studies have also highlighted the growing use of data-driven approaches, such as social media sentiment analysis, in designing political communication strategies that are more responsive to the dynamics of public opinion (Tanaja et al. 2024).

At the provincial level, research on Central Java shows that legislative candidates widely use digital platforms such as Instagram, Facebook,

and WhatsApp to build political visibility and convey messages to voters (Anas et al. 2025; Hkikmat 2021) Nonetheless, most studies agree that such digital communication is still one-way and informative, while interpersonal communication and community-based networking remain the primary sources of political trust formation (Mahsun, Elizabeth, and Mufrikhah 2021) In addition, research also shows that female candidates are increasingly mobilizing gender-based networks and social capital to navigate structural barriers and increase their political electability (Wulandaria et al. 2024). The findings in Semarang City reinforce this pattern by showing that legislators combine digital communication with interpersonal and cultural practices to maintain political legitimacy in the eyes of constituents (Dimara, Mubarak, and Dian 2024).

Although the existing scholarship has extensively examined political communication in Central Java, relatively few studies have focused on small cities. The city of Salatiga, as a small, multicultural, and relatively highly educated town supported by an active civil society, presents a different socio-political configuration compared to big cities and rural areas (Takayasa 2023). Existing studies show that interpersonal communication and emotional closeness remain the main mechanisms in building trust and political legitimacy of legislative candidates in Salatiga (Hikmat 2021). However, until now, there has been no systematic synthesis that explains how the pattern of political communication at the provincial level in Central Java has been adapted and negotiated in the context of a small, interpersonal city like Salatiga.

To understand these dynamics, scholars require an analytical framework that integrates political actors, message constructions, and communication channels. McNair's Political Communication Theory emphasizes the interconnectedness among political actors, messages, and the media in the public sphere, thereby providing a relevant conceptual foundation for analyzing the practice of political communication in a localized electoral context (McNair 2011). This framework enables a more comprehensive understanding of how legislative candidates negotiate the use of digital communication, traditional media, and interpersonal interactions within specific sociocultural contexts.

There are at least three main research gaps, as identified through a synthesis of the existing literature. First, most political communication studies address media use and voter engagement without directly linking them to the strategic behavior of legislative candidates at the local level. Second, there has not been a systematic review that bridges the findings at the provincial level in Central Java in the context of a plural, highly interpersonal small town, such as Salatiga. Third, research on digital platforms tends to downplay the roles of religious networks, communities, and face-to-face interactions in the analyses of local political communication. To address this gap, this study conducted a Systematic Literature Review of scientific publications published between 2020 and 2025 on the political communication strategies of legislative candidates in Central Java, with a special focus on their implications for understanding political communication in Salatiga. Through a thematic synthesis of key

findings, this study aims to map patterns, tensions, and gaps in the literature and make conceptual contributions to understanding the integration of digital and interpersonal communication strategies in small cities.

Method

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) to examine political communication strategies used by legislative candidates in Central Java, with a particular focus on the implications for the city of Salatiga. The literature was sourced from academic databases and institutional repositories, including Google Scholar, ScienceDirect (Elsevier), and university repositories, covering publications from 2020 to 2025. Following a structured identification, screening, and eligibility process, 17 relevant studies were selected for analysis. The study employed narrative synthesis as the analytical technique, systematically examining each article to identify research objectives, methodological approaches, principal findings, and contextual settings.

McNair's political communication framework was employed as an analytical lens to guide the coding and thematic synthesis of the reviewed studies, particularly in categorizing communication practices according to their functions of informing, agenda-setting, identity-building, and gaining support. This approach enabled the study to move beyond descriptive comparison by linking empirical findings to established theoretical functions of political communication while remaining sensitive to local socio-cultural contexts.

The literature selection process was carried out through several systematic stages to filter relevant articles, such as Identification: This study conducted an initial search using a

combination of keywords across multiple databases, yielding 120 articles. Second, screening: The researcher removed 15 duplicate articles, leaving 105, which were then screened based on titles and abstracts to exclude irrelevant or overly general studies. At this stage, the screening process excluded 80 articles that did not align with the study's analytical focus.

Third, for Eligibility, A total of 25 articles that passed the previous stage were then reviewed in full to assess their suitability based on inclusion criteria (covering: studies discussing political communication, legislative campaign strategies, or political participation in the local context, especially in Salatiga and other regions of Indonesia) and exclusion criteria area on international politics, non-political communication, or studies that were not relevant to the local legislative context).

Furthermore, after the review process, 10 articles were excluded because their research focus was not relevant or purely theoretical, or because they lacked a field context. Finally, 17 articles were deemed acceptable and included in the study. The study employed narrative synthesis as the analytical technique, systematically examining each article to identify its research objectives, methodological approaches, principal findings, and regional or case-study contexts. Through this process, the study conducted cross-study comparisons to identify patterns of similarity and difference, and to assess each study's contribution to understanding political communication at the local level. In addition, the synthesis process identified research gaps that have not been widely discussed in the literature, particularly in the context of Salatiga as a multicultural city. These gaps include the limited.

Results and Discussion

This study synthesizes findings from 17 selected studies through narrative thematic analysis. The results indicate that a combination of interpersonal engagement, digital media utilization, cultural context, and structural

conditions of voter participation shapes the political communication strategies of local legislative candidates in Salatiga. Five dominant themes have emerged from the literature.

Table 1
Literature Review Results

No	Title	Author	Method	Research Procedure	Results
1	Political Communication of PKB Candidates from Ulama and Non-Ulama Families in Kendal Regency	Rizkyyawan (2014)	Qualitative	In-depth interviews and comparative analysis	Social background influences the use of religious symbols and political communication strategies.
2	Female Candidates and Clientelism in Indonesian Elections	Mahsun, Elizabeth, & Mufrikhah (2019)	Qualitative	Interviews and analysis of women's organizational networks	Islamic women's organizational networks influence female candidates' communication strategies.
3	A Political Communication Regulation Model	Jatmiko, Hartiwiningsih, & Handayani (2019)	Normative qualitative	Analysis of political communication regulations	Regulation of political communication is necessary to ensure fair political education.
4	Political Communication Strategy of Incumbent Candidates in the 2019 Legislative	Isti (2019)	Qualitative	Interviews and campaign documentation	Incumbents rely on legacy networks, track records, and continuous communication with voters.

5	Election in Pati Regency Contestation Behind Tolerance in Salatiga	Ali, Sofyan, & Arenggoasih (2020)	Qualitative	Critical discourse analysis and interviews	Tolerance operates as an arena of social and political contestation.
6	Political Communication Strategy of M. Miftah in Winning the 2019 Election in Salatiga	Widarwati (2020)	Qualitative	Interviews, observation, and documentation	Candidates achieve electoral success through face-to-face communication, voter character mapping, and SWOT analysis
7	The Effectiveness of PDIP Political Advertising on TikTok Among Gen Z in Salatiga	Pratama & Prayitno (2022)	Case study	Digital campaign observation and engagement analysis	TikTok-based visual campaigns effectively capture young voters' attention.
8	Political Communication Strategy of PKB Legislative Candidates in Salatiga	Pimay (2023)	Qualitative	Interviews and analysis of campaign activities	Candidates use personal approaches, religious symbols, and Nahdlatul Ulama networks to build closer ties with voters.
9	Participation of Migrant Students in Elections in Salatiga City	Salsabila, Sardini, & Wijayanto (2024)	Descriptive qualitative	Interviews and documentation	Administrative barriers do not altogether hinder political participation.
10	Local Legislators' Political Communication Strategies in Semarang City	Dimara, Mubarok, & Kurdaningsih (2024)	Qualitative	Field study and interviews	Face-to-face communication, cultural symbols, and social networks strengthen electability.
11	Political Marketing Communication Strategies of PDI-P and PKB	Amien & Zuhdan (2024)	Qualitative	Interviews and campaign material analysis	Candidates integrate direct communication and political marketing to

	Legislative Candidates in the 2024 Election in Magelang Regency				enhance campaign appeal.
12	Political Communication of Millennial Legislative Candidates in the 2024 Sragen Legislative Election	Paradita, Itasari, & Maserona (2024)	Qualitative	Interviews and social media content analysis	Millennial candidates combine direct interaction and social media to construct political identity.
13	Communication Strategies of Salatiga City Government in Branding as a Gastronomy City	Kurnia & Huwae (2024)	Qualitative	Analysis of municipal government communication strategies	Government actors strategically deploy cultural narratives as a core component of their communication practices
14	Analysis of the Decline in Votes for the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) in the 2024 Legislative Election in Salatiga City	Arsyad, Alfirdaus, & Martini (2025)	Analytical qualitative	Analysis of legislative election results and interviews	Weaknesses in political communication and changing vote behaviour are driving the decline in PDIP's electoral support.
15	Social Media Strategy of the Salatiga Regional Police	Shobron & Arenggoasih (2025)	Qualitative	Social media content analysis	Political actors use social media to build public legitimacy and institutional trust.
16	Acceptance of "the Others" in the Inclusive City of Salatiga	Anas et al. (2025)	Policy studies	Policy document analysis and implementation review	Inclusive policies strengthen social Tolerance in the local political context.

17	Analysis of the Effectiveness of Legislative Candidates' Political Marketing Communication Strategies	Vigo (2025)	Qualitative	Analysis of campaign communication strategies	Campaign effectiveness depends on integrating messages, media, and communication approaches.
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Based on a systematic review of 17 literature sources, four main interrelated themes emerged regarding political communication strategies at the local level, particularly in the context of Salatiga: the persistent dominance of face-to-face communication, the growing role of digital media as a complement, the influence of urban multiculturalism on message formulation, and structural factors that influence voter participation.

1. The Dominance of Face-to-Face Communication in Local Politics

The literature consistently demonstrates that face-to-face communication remains the dominant strategy in local politics in Salatiga. Legislative candidates and elected members primarily build closeness with constituents through direct meetings, and routine personalized interactions emphasize familiarity and trust. Empirical studies conducted in Salatiga indicate that successful candidates rely heavily on interpersonal engagement to understand voters' social characteristics and establish durable political relationships (Widarwati 2020). These findings suggest that political support at the local level is firmly rooted in personal contact rather than solely mediated through digital or mass communication channels.

More specifically, Pimay (2023) demonstrates how PKB legislative candidates in Salatiga strategically employ face-to-face communication to construct what he terms political closeness" with their constituents. The notion of closeness is critical because it captures the emotional and relational dimensions of political communication that digital media cannot replicate easily. Direct interaction enables candidates to cultivate personal bonds and emotional attachment, which in turn form the basis of long-term constituent loyalty (Pimay 2023).

Scholars have observed a similar phenomenon in neighboring regions of Central Java. Research conducted in Semarang confirms that direct communication, the use of cultural symbols, and sustained interaction with constituents are central to maintaining legislative electability (Dimara, Mubarok, and Dian 2024). Compared to other districts such as Magelang, Sragen, and Pati, this trend is even more pronounced. These studies show that interpersonal approaches remain the core of campaign strategies, even when complemented by digital media and political marketing techniques (Amien 2025, Tiatira 2020).

When synthesized, these findings indicate that personal trust constitutes the primary currency of local electoral politics. Studies

conducted in both Salatiga and Semarang, despite differences in political actors and local contexts, have consistently demonstrated that voters assess candidates based on perceived closeness, cultural compatibility, and social embeddedness. Face-to-face communication has emerged as the most effective mechanism for building and validating this trust, as it allows candidates to engage directly with everyday voters.

Therefore, the persistence of face-to-face communication does not indicate resistance to technological change or a failure to adopt digital innovations but rather reflects a deliberate strategic choice grounded in its continued effectiveness within specific socio-political contexts. Instead, it demonstrates a rational strategic choice in a political environment where actors actively value personal relationships, community endorsements, and cultural legitimacy. While digital media may be effective in expanding reach and visibility, face-to-face interaction remains superior in fostering meaningful engagement and persuasion at the grassroots level.

This dominance of direct communication aligns closely with McNair's political communication theory, particularly regarding the functions of identity construction mobilization (McNair, 2011). Through their direct presence in community spaces, candidates symbolically demonstrate political commitment, credibility, and accessibility, which are key elements in shaping political identity at the local level. In contexts such as Salatiga, where social ties, community networks, and cultural sensitivities remain strong, interpersonal

relations serve as the primary foundation of political legitimacy. Consequently, face-to-face communication functions not merely as a campaign technique but also as a central mechanism through which political actors actively construct political meaning, generate trust, and sustain voter loyalty within local electoral politics.

2. Social, Religious, and Opinion Leaders Networks

The literature shows that face-to-face communication occurs through established social networks, especially religious networks, and community leaders. The Pimay study (2023) and Kendal Regency research (2014) show that the network of Nahdlatul Ulama, religious leaders, and ulama families as *opinion leaders* strengthens the legitimacy of candidates and expands the reach of political messages. The existence of this network is a fundamental context for local communities that still maintain strong communal ties (Pimay 2023; Rizkyyawan 2014). These leaders facilitate trust and acceptance among community members, making them crucial intermediaries in political communication. Their endorsement can significantly influence voting behavior by framing the candidates in a favorable light. Consequently, political campaigns often prioritize engagement with these networks to mobilize sufficient grassroots support (Li and Feng 2022).

From the perspective of political communication theory, the role of religious networks and community leaders in Salatiga reflects the function of gaining support as

conceptualized by McNair (2011). Support in local political contexts is not generated solely through mass persuasion but through socially embedded processes of trust building and legitimacy formation. Opinion leaders within the Nahdlatul Ulama networks, religious figures, and ulama families operate as trusted intermediaries who translate political messages into culturally acceptable narratives. Their involvement enables candidates to anchor political communication within existing moral and social structures, thereby increasing the message's credibility and acceptance among voters.

Furthermore, reliance on opinion leaders aligns with McNair's concept of identity building, in which political actors construct political identity through symbolic association and social mediation rather than solely through policy discourse. By engaging with religious and community leaders, candidates indirectly frame themselves as representatives of shared values, traditions, and communal norms. In multicultural, communally oriented societies such as Salatiga, identity building through interpersonal and network-based communication is more effective than impersonal messaging. This finding reinforces the argument that local political communication operates through deep relational dynamics, in which socially embedded actors mediate legitimacy and electoral support, rather than direct candidate-voter interactions alone (McNair, 2011).

3. Digital Media as a Means of Complementing Campaign Strategies

In addition to face-to-face communication, literature shows an increase in the use of digital

media in local political campaigns. Social media, particularly TikTok and Instagram, are used to expand the reach of messages and attract young voters (Prayitno 2022). However, the findings suggest that digital media serves as a complement, not as a replacement, to interpersonal communication. Local governments and institutions also adopt this strategy in their communication practices by using social media to actively construct public images and cultivate a sense of closeness with citizens (Meisya Kurnia and Huwae 2024; Shobron and Arenggoasih 2025).

Recent quantitative research has strengthened the argument that digital campaign messages are ineffective by showing that a significant proportion of voters fail to understand candidates' visions and missions entirely. This limitation is not due to a lack of media exposure but to weaknesses in message design, narrative clarity, and the strategic alignment between content and target audiences. These findings underscore that media visibility alone does not guarantee political understanding or persuasion, highlighting the continued importance of message quality and interpersonal reinforcement in political communication strategies (Vigo 2025).

From the perspective of McNair's political communication framework, the use of digital media in local political campaigns primarily fulfils the functions of informing and agenda-setting rather than fully achieving persuasion or identity building (McNair, 2011). Social media platforms enable candidates and institutions to disseminate information rapidly and increase message visibility. However, the findings indicate that exposure does not automatically translate into political understanding or voter

alignment. The limited comprehension of candidates' visions and missions suggests that digital communication alone is insufficient to construct meaningful political identities or to secure durable electoral support.

Furthermore, McNair's framework helps to explain why interpersonal communication remains central despite technological advancements. Identity-building and gaining support are two core functions of political communication that require symbolic interaction, credibility, and relational trust, which political actors generate more effectively through face-to-face engagement and socially embedded networks. In the context of Salatiga, a place where communal ties and social trust remain strong, digital media functions as an extension of political communication rather than its core mechanism. Thus, the hybrid strategy observed in the literature reflects a functional differentiation in political communication: digital media enhances reach and agenda visibility, while interpersonal interaction consolidates persuasion and political legitimacy (McNair, 2011).

4. Culture of Tolerance as a Discursive Boundary of Political Communication

The context of Salatiga, as a multicultural and tolerant city, shapes the discursive boundaries of political communication. Many studies have confirmed that Tolerance and inclusivity are dominant values in the social life of the Salatiga community (Anas et al. 2025; Haga, Yuwono, and Muhammad 2023). In political space, these values encourage candidates to avoid messages

that are exclusive or confrontational. Tolerance is understood not only as social harmony but also as a sphere of symbolic contestation that shapes how political messages are formulated and received (Ali, Sofyan, and Arenggoasih 2020).

Political messages conveyed by candidates emphasize the values of togetherness and respect for differences. This communication strategy aims to strengthen the positive image and avoid potential conflicts in a pluralistic society. Thus, political dynamics in Salatiga affect the balance among political aspirations, social norms, and Tolerance (Ali, Sofyan, and Arenggoasih 2020).

The culture of Tolerance in Salatiga serves as a normative context and an arena for discursive contestation in political communication. In line with the findings of Ali et al. (2020) and Anas et al. (2025), Tolerance defines the boundaries of political messages considered legitimate and acceptable to the public. In McNair's political communication framework, this condition directly affects the functions of agenda-setting and identity-building because candidates are not entirely free to determine political issues and narratives but must adapt them to social norms that prioritize inclusivity and social cohesion (McNair, 2011). Thus, negotiations between electoral interests and the community's normative expectations shaped the local political agenda.

These findings align with the global literature on political communication in multicultural societies, emphasizing that political actors achieve campaign success by accurately interpreting the prevailing discursive

boundaries in public spaces. International studies assert that political messages that are exclusive or confrontational tend to be rejected in pluralistic social contexts, whereas narratives that emphasize unity, Tolerance, and shared values are more effective in building political legitimacy (Castells 2009; Chadwick 2013; Enli 2017).

From this perspective, the Salatiga case reflects a global pattern in which political communication functions not only as a tool of electoral persuasion but also as a mechanism for adaptation to social norms and the collective identity of society. The findings reinforce the argument that a discursive, socio-culturally embedded perspective best captures the nature of local political communication rather than a purely technical campaign approach.

5. Structural Barriers and Adaptation of Communication Strategies

Several studies have highlighted structural barriers to political participation, such as economic mobility constraints and administrative barriers to voting. Sidorejo's research shows that the participation rate is relatively high, but voter turnout is affected by work mobility (Pratiwi 2022 A). A similar phenomenon emerges among migrant students who sustain participation despite administrative obstacles (Salsabila and Sardini 2019).

These findings suggest that political communication strategies need to adapt to the structural conditions of voting by delivering information more precisely and using the media more effectively. These barriers often require tailored communication strategies to address the specific challenges faced by different voter

groups. Therefore, political actors must engage in adaptive messaging that resonates with local realities and barriers to participation. This study underscores the importance of contextual sensitivity in designing effective political communications for the unification media. Campaigns that increase voter participation indicate that political communication also functions as an informative mechanism to mitigate administrative constraints and the effects of social mobility. According to McNair's framework, this adaptive use of communication reinforces the function of informing and gaining support. Residents living in out-of-domicile settings face limited access to electoral information (McNair, 2011). By clarifying processes such as voter registration updates, transfer-of-vote mechanisms, and polling logistics, political actors and institutions can reduce informational asymmetries that would otherwise suppress participation. In this sense, communication is not merely persuasive but instrumental, enabling citizens to convert political intentions into actual participation (Pratiwi 2022; Salsabila and Sardini 2019).

This interpretation aligns with global findings on electoral participation in contexts characterized by high mobility and administrative complexity. Comparative studies show that inadequate information about voting procedures disproportionately affects mobile populations, such as students, migrant workers, and urban commuters, leading to lower turnout despite political interest. International scholarship on political communication emphasizes that effective campaigns increasingly integrate procedural information with normative appeals to participation, thereby enhancing both political efficacy and trust in

electoral institutions (Chadwick 2013; Norris 2000). Within this global perspective, the Salatiga case illustrates how localized, adaptive communication strategies operationalize McNair's informing function to address structural barriers while simultaneously supporting gaining support by signaling responsiveness to voters' everyday constraints. Consequently, political communication at the local level emerged as a critical governance tool that bridges institutional rules and citizens lived realities.

Overall, studies show that the legislative political communication strategy in Salatiga is hybrid, integrating face-to-face communication, digital media, and social networks in a culture of Tolerance Within the framework of McNair's (2011) political communication theory, this hybrid strategy reflects the functional differentiation of political communication: face-to-face communication becomes the primary medium for identity building and gaining support because it allows the formation of legitimacy and trust through repetitive symbolic interactions; digital media plays a dominant role in informing and agenda-setting by expanding the reach of messages and framing political issues; and social networks and opinion leaders mediate political messages to gain social validation at the community level. This configuration demonstrates that political actors achieve effective local political communication not through a single communicative approach. However, by coordinating and integrating various communication functions, these findings fill a gap in the local political communication literature, which tends to view communication strategies separately and descriptively. This

research contributes by presenting an integrated mapping of local political communication strategies systematically associated with McNair's theoretical framework, while placing multicultural context and Tolerance as active analytical variables in the formation of political messages and identities. Thus, this study not only extends the application of McNair's theory to the local political realm but also shows that political communication in a multicultural city like Salatiga serves as an institutional mechanism for negotiating political identity, social norms, and community cohesion, rather than solely as an instrument of electoral persuasion.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study concludes that the political communication strategies of legislative candidates in Salatiga are fundamentally hybrid, integrating face-to-face interaction, digital media utilization, and socially embedded networks within a multicultural and tolerant social context. The findings demonstrate that interpersonal communication remains the primary mechanism for building political identity and gaining voter support, whereas digital media functions as a complementary channel that enhances information dissemination and agenda-setting. Social networks and opinion leaders play a mediating role by legitimizing political messages and aligning them with local norms and values. These dynamics confirm that effective local political communication requires a single channel to provide multiple communication functions.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to political communication

scholarship by operationalizing McNair's framework in the context of local community-based politics. The findings extend the application of McNair's functions—informing, agenda-setting, identity-building, and gaining support beyond national and media-centric settings into a relational, culturally embedded local arena. Moreover, this study fills a gap in the literature by positioning multicultural Tolerance as a normative factor that shapes discursive boundaries and influences how political messages are formulated and received at the local level. Based on these conclusions, this study offers several recommendations.

First, legislative candidates and political parties should prioritize direct, sustained engagement with communities rather than digital media strategies that replace or

supplement it. Second, political communication strategies need to be sensitive to local cultural values and tolerance norms, avoiding exclusionary or confrontational narratives in multiple societies. Third, electoral institutions and local governments should strengthen information about administrative procedures to reduce the structural barriers faced by mobile and non-domiciled voters. Finally, future research should move beyond descriptive case studies by employing comparative, mixed, and longitudinal designs to examine how hybrid communication strategies evolve across different local contexts in Indonesia.

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