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Campaign Strategy through the Online Newspaper 'Radar Bekasi' in Building Popularity (A Case Study of a Member of the Regional People's Representative Council from the Gerindra Party, Electoral District IX, West Java Province in the 2024 General Election)

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze political campaign strategies through online newspaper media in shaping the popularity of the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) members from the Gerindra Party in Electoral District 9 of West Java (Bekasi Regency) during the 2024 General Election. The main focus of this research is the use of local online media, particularly *Radar Bekasi*, in supporting the visibility and electability of legislative candidates. Online media is chosen for its ability to reach the public widely, quickly, and interactively, especially among young voters, the middle class, and urban communities. A qualitative descriptive approach with a case study method was used, involving in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation of elected candidates and campaign content published in the media. The findings show that consistent use of *Radar Bekasi* (1–2 times per month) significantly increased candidates' popularity through news coverage, advertorials, opinion articles, and reports on socio-political activities. Seven key factors influencing the effectiveness of this strategy include media reach, credibility, limitations of face-to-face campaigns, interactivity, public perception, digital media consumption trends, and editorial professionalism. The study also reveals a mutualistic relationship between candidates and local media in the campaign context. It is concluded that online newspaper media serves not only as an information platform but also as a strategic actor in shaping political image and legitimacy at the local level. These findings highlight the importance of digital media in modern campaign strategies that are adaptive and grounded in the power of political communication.

Keyword: Political campaign, online media, popularity, DPRD, Radar Bekasi, communication strategy.

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 General Election in Indonesia is a significant moment in the nation's democratic journey. In this election, 24 political parties participated, including 18 national

parties officially registered as contestants. Additionally, there are 6 local political parties from Aceh, reflecting the region's special status and autonomy as stipulated by the Aceh Governance Law. One of the national parties competing is the Great Indonesia Movement Party (*Gerindra*), known for its strong support base and its prominent role in national politics. Under the leadership of Prabowo Subianto, Gerindra continues to promote a vision of sovereign, self-reliant, and character-based national development. For the 2024–2029 term, Gerindra nominated 7 candidates for the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) in West Java Electoral District IX, with two elected: Bn. Holik Qodratulloh and Irpan Haeroni.

One of the rapidly developing mass media forms in the digital era is online newspapers. According to Richard Holliman (2010), online media can be defined as media connected to a network (e.g., via the Internet, intranet, or SMS). In simple technical terms, networks require connectivity and interoperability between computing devices and involve digital information that can be stored, searched, retrieved, and efficiently shared (either synchronously or asynchronously), and if necessary, across multiple locations and time zones. Online media are characterized by being accessible without time and distance limitations, enabling participatory interaction through comment sections, being customizable to user interests, and capable of disseminating information to either limited (one party) or broad (many parties) audiences.

According to the Press Council data cited by Pratiwi (2024), there are 1,819 verified media outlets: 989 are digital media, followed by print media (436), television (376), and radio (18). The rapid development of digital media is inseparable from society's dependence on new media. People have become accustomed to consuming information and communicating through electronic devices. Smartphones are considered practical and free tools for accessing diverse information. Online newspapers have become a crucial tool for social movements to communicate messages, mobilize support, and gain public attention. In the pre-digital era, mass media played a major role in amplifying the voices of social movements such as the Civil Rights Movement. These movements relied on media coverage to highlight issues of injustice and inequality, thereby raising awareness and generating public support (Gitlin, 1980).

Through campaign coverage and political advertisements, electronic media help influence voter decisions, both in favor of or against certain parties or candidates (Charles Obot, 2020). Obot also explains that the media essentially assist individuals in forming their sense of 'reality' and influence societal norms. Online newspapers serve as important platforms for political parties or candidates to reach the public online, especially as not all citizens can be reached through direct campaigns such as rallies. The use of online newspapers in campaign coverage and political advertisements has the potential to influence voting decisions. Research in Nigeria (Obot) found that factors influencing voting include money/goods, geo-ethnic considerations, perceptions of fairness, media coverage balance, and the persuasive power of campaign messages. This study recommends that online newspapers can influence voter decisions by upholding principles of fairness, balance, equal opportunity, and equal access for all parties and candidates.

Griffin (1991) explains how the media often choose and highlight certain topics, leading the public to prioritize these issues in their daily lives. This is because the media possess agenda-setting power to determine the content of information and spotlight important issues, bringing them to headlines, in-depth discussions, or broader coverage, thus perceived as important by society. Piriya Santi & Phuengpha (2024) describe three positive roles of online newspapers: Providing current, diverse, and comprehensive information; Helping the public understand government policies and social issues; Serving as a forum for public discussion and expression of opinions.

According to McQuail (2003), media help establish the order of priority in society concerning issues and goals, functioning as a filter and determinant of public focus. By choosing certain issues for intensive coverage, the media signal their importance, shaping

public orientation, awareness, and attitudes on matters such as economic welfare, education and health, nationalism, religion and morality, regional identity, and anti-corruption—all related to public policy and social development direction. In the context of political communication, the issues prioritized by provincial legislative candidates are more likely to appear in online newspapers, aiming to popularize and introduce the candidates to the public. Brady, Johnston, and Sides (2006) assert that campaigns are periods before citizens make actual political choices. This phase usually increases citizen attention to politics as the election draws near. Campaign activities are more likely to stick in voters' memories closer to Election Day.

According to elected DPRD members in West Java Province, during the 2024 campaign to gain broader popularity, especially in Electoral District IX, various media were used including online newspapers, television, live streaming radio, and social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp. Based on preliminary observations, most DPRD members used online newspapers about 1–2 times a month for coverage and maximized their personal social media accounts (YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp) for outreach.

DPRD members see online newspapers as effective tools for increasing popularity because these platforms can reach all constituents. According to James Forrest and Gary N. Marks (1999), modern voters actively seek campaign information to guide their choices, influenced by partisanship, prior knowledge, beliefs, and needs (Miller, 1991). The “uses and gratifications” approach has been developed to understand the role of online newspapers during election campaigns in several ways, such as reinforcing weak tendencies, guiding decisions, providing entertainment, or simply informing voters about key events. This approach opens the possibility that in specific elections, online newspapers can have a substantial and decisive influence on outcomes (Aitkin; Lanoue, 1992). Essentially, through media, voters read, hear, and watch political issues (1980: 287). Although online newspapers contribute less to voting outcomes compared to partisanship, issues, and candidate evaluation (Jennings, 1992), they still play an important role.

Annelien Van Remoortere and Rens Vliegthart (2023) suggest that people turn to media to learn what others think, which in turn influences their own opinions. Media portrayals of a politician's or party's success or failure, especially through popularity polls, can enhance that figure's popularity. Being seen as highly popular in the media can lead to increased public approval. Media visibility plays a vital role in providing daily issue information to most citizens (Zoizner et al., 2017). It has several dimensions: First, media visibility positively influences the electoral success of political actors. Citizens are more likely to vote for candidates they recognize and know about. Media appearances allow politicians to build reputations among the public (Sheafer, 2001).

Second, it enables politicians to engage with the public. Citizen interactions with politicians are almost always mediated, making media appearances key communication channels between representatives and the public. Through the media, politicians can inform citizens about their decisions and positions, and promote their goals and plans (Strömbäck, 2008). Third, media appearances help politicians interact with other political actors. Appearing in the news allows them to set the agenda and draw attention to specific issues. In this way, political actors can influence policy-making and achieve cooperation and legislative success (Sellers, 2000).

METHOD

This research employs the constructivist paradigm, which views truth in social reality as the result of social construction and inherently relative. This paradigm emphasizes that knowledge is not something that is simply given, but rather shaped through individual

interaction with their environment, objects, experiences, and the phenomena they encounter. Knowledge is considered valid insofar as it is useful in helping individuals understand and solve problems. From the constructivist perspective, each person constructs their own knowledge through a process of interpretation, making knowledge dynamic and continuously evolving over time (Nurhidayati, 2017).

The constructivist paradigm assumes that knowledge is formed as a human construction through interactions with various objects, phenomena, experiences, and the surrounding environment. Within this framework, the researcher highlights the importance of applying grounded theory—that is, theories in political communication strategies should emerge from actual situations in the field, rather than being derived from pre-existing theories.

This study applies a qualitative approach, in which the data is not presented in numerical form, but in words, sentences, statements, and concepts. The qualitative approach is a research strategy that focuses on exploring meaning, understanding, concepts, characteristics, phenomena, symbols, and in-depth descriptions of an issue. This type of research is naturalistic, holistic, uses multiple methods, and emphasizes the quality of data obtained, which is then conveyed narratively. Generally, the aim of qualitative research is to obtain answers to phenomena or questions through systematic scientific procedures using this approach. Denzin & Lincoln (2017) state that qualitative research is conducted in a natural context with the aim of understanding and interpreting phenomena through various methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis.

The research method used is the case study method. According to Hamzah (2020), the case study method aims to investigate various kinds of information in depth about several units or cases within one or more time periods. This method is often used in qualitative research that focuses on a specific case—whether it be an individual, group, organization, or event—with the goal of obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics occurring within that case (Creswell, 2014). Case studies have the main characteristics of being exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. Researchers use various data collection techniques such as in-depth interviews, participatory observation, document analysis, and archival studies to gather rich and detailed information. The diversity of data sources enables triangulation, which enhances the validity and reliability of the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Local mass media such as *Radar Bekasi* play a significant role in shaping public behavior and perspectives toward the realities they present (Elvinaro Ardianto, 2005). *Radar Bekasi* has demonstrated genuine concern for the development of local politics by actively covering various social dynamics and public aspirations. The media often engages directly in public events organized by legislative candidates, local governments, and community groups. This presence adds value by ensuring that news reporting is not one-directional but reflects public voices.

In the context of political campaigns, *Radar Bekasi* enables the delivery of political messages in a professional and balanced manner. This contributes to creating a conducive and participatory political climate, supporting sustainable development at the regional level.

“I consider Radar Bekasi to be neutral. Its function remains balanced among the legislative, executive, and judiciary branches. So far, Radar Bekasi has maintained neutrality quite well, including communication among politicians.”
— Interview with West Java Provincial Parliament Member from Gerindra Faction, Irpan Haeroni, June 24, 2025

“Radar Bekasi plays a vital role in shaping public opinion and conveying political information swiftly and measurably. As a local media outlet, it acts as a bridge between candidates and the community, particularly in voicing relevant regional

issues. Radar Bekasi shows concern for local political developments by directly covering the public's expectations and government responses. This balance is crucial for maintaining a conducive environment and effective governance."

— Interview with West Java Provincial Parliament Member from Gerindra Faction, Syahrir, June 26, 2025

As a local media outlet closely connected to both the community and political actors, Radar Bekasi plays a crucial role in maintaining balanced political information during election campaigns. According to Phuengpha (2024), media serves as a forum for public discourse and opinion expression. Radar Bekasi is recognized for upholding modern journalistic principles such as clarity, accuracy, and neutrality. The outlet strives to maintain information balance and provides equitable access to various sources, even within the politically charged context of election campaigns.

Its editorial integrity reflects a strong commitment to impartiality, resisting pressure and influence from specific political actors. Political content, including coverage of legislative candidates, is placed based on editorial standards and scheduling—not external lobbying. The editorial board's firm stance in maintaining neutrality and professionalism demonstrates that Radar Bekasi places integrity as its foundation.

This integrity signals to the public that the media is not a propaganda tool but a provider of honest and balanced information. Consequently, this presents a challenge for legislative candidates, who must rely on well-crafted, ethical, and strategic communication rather than relationships or pressure to gain media exposure. Candidates must craft campaign narratives worthy of media coverage instead of forcing the media to serve particular interests.

Through its professionalism, Radar Bekasi has built public trust as an independent and credible media outlet, strengthening its role not only as an information provider but also as a guardian of ethical local democracy.

"That's what I meant Radar Bekasi is clear, accurate, and its presentation doesn't appear biased. Whoever the subject is, they present it fairly. I think they still manage to maintain that balance."

- Irfan Haeroni, June 24, 2025

"Online media must target the right audience to ensure information is effectively delivered. We must strategize appropriately considering the age, location, and audience needs—packaging programs and goals in a way that is understandable to the public."

- Syahrir, June 26, 2025

"Radar Bekasi strives to maintain its independence. For example, Tuesdays are editorial days, so if a candidate wants their news published on that day, we usually schedule it for Wednesday. If they insist on Tuesday, we reject it."

- Interview with Radar Bekasi Editor Arisanto, June 23, 2025

Radar Bekasi is positioned as a strategic partner in composing and delivering campaign content that is relevant to public interests. In practice, the collaboration between the candidate's campaign team and the media editorial staff is close and complementary. The candidates not only provide campaign materials but also actively engage in discussions to formulate themes that touch on public concerns, such as social welfare, people-oriented economics, and access to basic services. With a planned and well-conceptualized approach, campaign messages are delivered clearly, humanely, and in a way that is easy for voters to understand.

This collaboration reflects that modern political campaigns are no longer one-way, but built through careful communication between candidates and local media. Radar Bekasi is not only a channel for information dissemination but also serves as a thinking partner in framing issues precisely and attractively. In this way, a candidate's popularity is strengthened in a more measurable manner and oriented toward the real needs of society. Such a strategy demonstrates

how local media can become a key element in winning voters' hearts through communicative and value-based campaigns.

"I see Radar Bekasi as a partner in composing campaign content. We collaborate well." (Interview with West Java DPRD Member from Gerindra Party, Irpan Haeroni, June 24, 2025)

"We involve Radar Bekasi with the campaign team, for example, by packaging issues with themes that show care for the community. We need to have a concept, and it must be well delivered through the media." (Interview with West Java DPRD Member from Gerindra Party, Syahrir, June 26, 2025)

The campaign team works by involving professionals in crafting communicative campaign materials that are suitable for publication in the mass media. Every piece of content whether advertorials, opinion articles, or coverage of activities—always undergoes alignment between the candidate and the Radar Bekasi team to ensure that the format and writing style meet journalistic standards. Of course, the political substance and the values of the message being conveyed are maintained so that the public can fully and consistently grasp the candidate's political vision. Politically collaborative, professional, and media-partnered campaigns demonstrate political communication that effectively and credibly packages messages while adjusting to the character of the media to reach voters.

"My campaign team consists of writers, issue analysts, and graphic designers who actively prepare campaign materials. They develop key ideas into content suitable for media publication. After the content is composed, we coordinate and review it with the Radar Bekasi team to ensure the format and writing style align with the media's standards without losing the political substance we wish to convey." (Interview with West Java DPRD Member from Gerindra Party, Syahrir, June 26, 2025)

Public responses to political campaign coverage by *Radar Bekasi* are generally positive. The media effectively presents political information in a simplified, factual manner that resonates with citizens' daily lives. Voters appreciate the clarity in understanding who the legislative candidates are, their visions and programs, and how they respond to community concerns. Communicative and accessible reporting empowers voters and fosters trust in local media as a credible, public-serving information source.

Campaign teams are systematically and professionally organized, involving key roles such as writers, issue analysts, and graphic designers. In conveying political messages via *Radar Bekasi*, communication is conducted by individuals, groups, or political organizations during a specific timeframe to convince the public of the candidate's vision and mission (Wahid, 2016). Content such as advertorials, opinion pieces, and activity reports are developed in coordination with *Radar Bekasi's* editorial team to meet journalistic standards while maintaining the intended political messages.

Radar Bekasi is a responsive local media outlet, attuned not only to the political dynamics preceding the 2024 elections but also to the broader needs of public communication at the regional level. It serves not merely as a transmitter of information, but as a strategic actor facilitating public opinion formation through issue selection, narrative framing, and determining informational relevance.

This aligns with Phuengpha's (2024) assertion that media has a positive role in providing accurate and comprehensive information while helping society make rational decisions through exposure to diverse perspectives. In practice, campaign news coverage often begins with interpreting candidates' visions in relation to their engagement with the Bekasi

community. High-priority issues receive headline treatment due to their strong public resonance. This reflects a persuasive communication approach aimed at generating public awareness through emotionally resonant, non-coercive messaging (Kaie, 1993; Jumentoro, 2001; Azwar, 2002). Editorially, *Radar Bekasi* applies three key criteria to determine the newsworthiness of campaign content:

1. The candidate's electability and political influence;
2. Alignment of the candidate's vision with local interests and media values;
3. Relevance of the issue to the current social context.

Interestingly, campaign issues are not always initiated by the candidates; *Radar Bekasi* often identifies emerging social phenomena and invites candidates to respond within their narratives. Even national issues are often localized to maintain relevance. This reflects associative persuasion, which links campaign messages with publicly resonant events (Nida, 2014).

To enhance candidate popularity, *Radar Bekasi* uses two main approaches: advertorials (paid political ads) and editorial content. Advertorials are transactional, while editorials are determined entirely by the newsroom based on editorial standards. Both serve informative and persuasive functions, influencing public opinion and voter attitudes (Syawaludin, 2024).

In the context of the 2024 legislative elections, *Radar Bekasi* played a central role in the digital media campaign strategy of Gerindra Party candidates in the 9th electoral district of Bekasi Regency. The media acted not just as a technical information channel, but also as a strategic tool to broaden political communication and shape public perception.

As a media outlet with social and cultural proximity to the Bekasi community, *Radar Bekasi* serves as a crucial intermediary between legislative candidates and their constituents. According to Ardianto (2005), local media influences how communities perceive political reality. *Radar Bekasi* actively reports on local political dynamics, not merely in response to candidates' agendas, but through a sociological reading of community concerns. Its presence during campaign events indicates that information dissemination is a two-way interaction, driven by public aspirations.

Within digital campaign strategies, *Radar Bekasi* also acts as a narrative filter that ensures information upholds journalistic ethics, objectivity, and balance. As emphasized by Phuengpha (2024), media serves as a forum for public discourse and a tool for civic education. Opinion columns, reader comments, and in-depth reporting create a dialectical space that enriches local democracy.

Radar Bekasi's main advantage lies in its deep reach among Bekasi residents and its understanding of informational needs based on demographic segmentation. According to Usman (2009), local media that deliver community-based content can foster stronger emotional connections. Hence, digital campaign strategies using local media not only spread messages effectively but also cultivate lasting relationships with voters.

Positive public reception of *Radar Bekasi*'s political coverage suggests that Gerindra candidates' popularity was built not instantly, but through consistent, fact-based, and context-aware communication. Voters feel more confident due to the transparency and verifiability of information, reinforcing the need for credible local media partnerships in digital campaigns.

Ultimately, the success of online campaign strategies hinges on coordination between candidates' teams and the media. Well-packaged campaign content—thematically, visually, and narratively tailored—can boost public engagement. As highlighted in interviews with Irpan Haeroni and Syahrir, *Radar Bekasi* serves as a key platform for showcasing candidates' work aligned with public needs and building sustainable positive images.

Thus, campaigning through *Radar Bekasi* is not merely about candidate visibility, but about their presence in the everyday lives of citizens through authentic, solution-oriented, and informative narratives. If managed with professional journalistic principles and a public-

interest orientation, local media such as *Radar Bekasi* can serve as powerful catalysts for building sustained popularity for Gerindra candidates in Bekasi Regency's 9th electoral district.

CONCLUSION

The use of online newspapers such as *Radar Bekasi* has proven to be an effective campaign strategy in increasing the popularity of legislative candidates from the Gerindra Party in Electoral District IX of West Java Province during the 2024 General Election. The online platform *Radar Bekasi* plays a strategic role as a bridge between candidates and the public, presenting campaign information in the form of narratives, advertorials, and opinion pieces that shape political images and convey the candidates' work on the ground. Utilizing *Radar Bekasi* offers broad visibility, especially among local voters such as the middle class, youth, and urban communities with strong access to digital media. The success of campaigns through *Radar Bekasi* is supported by relevant messaging, collaboration with local figures, and the direct involvement of the community in campaign activities covered by the media. As a result, candidates who use this media outlet experience increased public recognition, positive responses, and contributions to their electability growth.

As a local media outlet with geographical and emotional proximity to the people of Bekasi Regency, *Radar Bekasi* has become an effective political communication channel between candidates and voters. Its presence enables candidates to consistently and structurally deliver political messages based on local issues relevant to daily life. Thus, local online media not only functions as an information channel but also serves as a connector between political representation and public aspirations.

The use of *Radar Bekasi* as a campaign tool is implemented through various formats, including advertorials, event coverage, and opinion articles that reflect candidates' ideas and involvement in addressing community issues. These contents are not merely political promotions but also reflect the candidates' track records in advocating for critical issues such as education, health, infrastructure, and grassroots economics. This approach appeals to rational voters, especially middle-class and urban youth who are more critical and actively seek information through digital platforms. With communicative narratives and strong visual elements, campaign content in *Radar Bekasi* can construct a public image of candidates as present, active, and caring figures within their constituencies.

Moreover, the success of the campaign strategy through *Radar Bekasi* is further reinforced by the involvement of local figures and direct public responses. Many people positively respond to media coverage of candidates, both through direct interactions on the ground and in digital spaces such as social media. They report feeling more familiar with the candidates, understanding their proposed programs, and being more confident in making political choices. Public trust in *Radar Bekasi* as a reliable information source also plays a significant role in forming positive perceptions of candidates who actively engage with the media. In other words, the presence of *Radar Bekasi* helps expand the reach of political messages and provides stronger social legitimacy for the competing candidates.

On the other hand, *Radar Bekasi* also maintains its professionalism by positioning itself as a neutral and high-integrity information medium. Even though it collaborates on advertorials with candidates, the editorial team carefully separates advertisements from editorial content, upholds balanced reporting, and delivers journalistically appropriate information. This practice has maintained public trust and prevented the outlet from being perceived merely as a tool of political propaganda. In fact, several issues raised in the media coverage originate from editorial initiatives based on social dynamics within the community, indicating that the outlet not only waits for material from candidates but also actively helps shape informative and educational campaign narratives.

In conclusion, campaign strategies through local online media such as *Radar Bekasi* significantly contribute to building popularity and increasing the electability of legislative candidates. The media functions as a public arena that constructively connects political ideas with societal needs. The effectiveness of campaigns via *Radar Bekasi* lies in the combination of relevant messaging, strong narrative structures, positive public responses, and the credibility of the media as a local information institution. This research reaffirms the critical role of local media in the democratic electoral process at the regional level and opens new opportunities for more adaptive, participatory, and digitally grounded political communication strategies.

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