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Political Communication in Mass Media News in the City of Medan: Dynamics of Contemporary Society

Abdul Rasyid¹, Erwan Efendi², Afwan Syahril Manurung³

^{1,2,3}Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze political communication in mass media reporting in Medan and its implications for contemporary social dynamics. The research focuses on patterns, forms, and impacts of political communication in shaping public responses at the local level. This study employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with six purposively selected informants: two journalists, two mass media editors, one political communication academic, and one active media audience member. Secondary data were collected through documentation and literature studies, particularly the analysis of mass media reporting. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis, while data analysis followed the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation. The findings, derived from both interview data and analysis of media reports, indicate that political communication in Medan's mass media functions not only as a channel for delivering political information but also as a mechanism for framing issues, personalizing political actors, and dramatizing conflicts. The forms of political communication identified include informative, persuasive, symbolic, interpretive, and confrontational modes. These practices contribute to increased public sensitivity toward local political issues, the shaping of political images of key actors, and the emergence of fragmented perceptions within contemporary society.

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Corresponding Author:

Abdul Rasyid

Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

Email: abdulrasyid.ikom@uinsu.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Political communication is a crucial element of democratic life, as it connects political actors, government institutions, the mass media, and society. In modern democracies, political communication extends beyond the transmission of information; it involves the construction of meaning, agenda-setting, image management, and the shaping of public responses. In this process, mass media occupy a strategic position as a primary

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channel for selecting, constructing, and distributing political information to the public [1], [2]. In contemporary society, mass media are no longer viewed as neutral transmitters of facts but as active social and political actors with symbolic power. Political news is produced through processes of selection, framing, and narrative construction, which influence how issues, actors, and events are understood. This indicates that media reporting does not merely reflect political reality but actively shapes its interpretation [3].

The dynamics of political communication have become more complex due to rapid information flows, competition for public attention, and changes in media consumption patterns. The shift toward digital platforms has encouraged media organizations to prioritize speed, visual appeal, and audience engagement. Consequently, political reporting often emphasizes simplification, personalization, and dramatization, sometimes at the expense of substantive policy discussion [4], [5]. These tendencies reflect the growing influence of media logic in political communication processes. Within this context, political communication can be understood as an interaction between political interests and media interests. Political actors adapt their messages to media formats to gain visibility, while media institutions package political content in line with news values and audience preferences.

This interaction shapes the structure of public discourse and influences how democratic processes are experienced by society [5], [2]. In the local context, these dynamics are also evident in Medan's mass media reporting. As a major urban and political center in North Sumatra, Medan has active local political dynamics involving government institutions, political elites, parties, and public engagement. Local mass media serve as a primary source of political information and play a significant role in shaping public perceptions of local political issues and actors.

However, despite the growing importance of local media, existing studies on political communication in Indonesia tend to focus predominantly on national-level media or general media effects. Research specifically examining how political communication is constructed, framed, and practiced in local mass media, particularly in Medan, remains limited. Moreover, previous studies often emphasize media effects or audience reception but pay less attention to the interaction between communication patterns, forms of political messaging, and their implications for local societal dynamics. This creates a gap in understanding how political communication operates at the local level as a dynamic and context-specific process.

Theoretically, this research departs from the view that political communication in the mass media is part of the mediatization process of politics, which is a condition when the logic of the media increasingly influences political practices in the way it is conveyed, perceived, and interpreted by the public [6], [7]. On the other hand, framing theory is also relevant for explaining how the media constructs definitions of problems, selects certain elements of political reality, and structures them in narratives that influence the audience's understanding [8]. Through these two perspectives, the research can see that mass media reporting is not only a space for the distribution of political information, but also a field for the production of meaning, influence, and legitimacy in the life of local democracy. This condition can affect the way people understand politics, either by strengthening political

literacy or by encouraging simplification, polarization, and the formation of superficial opinions [9], [6]. Additionally, while theories such as mediatization and framing have been widely applied in broader contexts, their application to the analysis of local media practices in Medan remains underexplored. There is limited empirical research that integrates these theoretical perspectives to examine how local political realities are constructed and how contemporary audiences interpret them within their socio-cultural context.

At the same time, the public in Medan can no longer be seen as passive recipients of information. Contemporary society actively consumes, interprets, and responds to political news across multiple platforms. This creates a more interactive communication environment where meaning is continuously negotiated between media content and audience interpretation. Understanding this interaction is essential for explaining how political communication influences local democratic life. Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze political communication in mass media reporting in Medan City by focusing on three main aspects: (1) the patterns of political communication, (2) the forms of political communication, and (3) their implications for contemporary societal dynamics.

Accordingly, the research seeks to answer the following questions: How are political communication patterns constructed in mass media reporting in Medan City? What forms of political communication are present in local mass media reporting? How do these patterns and forms influence the dynamics of contemporary society in Medan? This study is expected to contribute to the development of political communication and media studies, particularly by providing empirical insights at the local level. It also offers practical implications for journalists, media institutions, and the public in fostering more critical and responsible political communication practices.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach. This approach was chosen because the research aims to understand in depth how political communication is represented, framed, and produced in mass media news in Medan, and how these dynamics relate to the character of contemporary society. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore the meanings, perspectives, experiences, and social practices behind the process of political communication in mass media in a more contextual and interpretive manner [10]. This research was conducted in Medan, the research site, as it is one of the social, cultural, and political centers in North Sumatra and has high dynamics in the production and consumption of political information. The city of Medan is also a plural, competitive, and active public space in the circulation of political discourse, making it a relevant research context for political communication in mass media reporting.

The data sources in this study include primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with purposively selected key informants, namely individuals with direct involvement and a reflective understanding of political communication practices in mass media reporting in Medan. The research informants consisted of two journalists, two media editors, one academic/political communication observer, and one active reader of mass media [11]. The informants among the journalists were Ngatirin from Mimbar Umum.com and Amirul from Harian Orbit. Both were chosen

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because they have direct experience in covering social and political issues in Medan. From among the editors, this research involved Zulfikar Tanjung from the Public Pulpit Newspaper and Husni Lubis from Centraberita.com.

These two editors were chosen because they play a strategic role in selecting issues, editing news, and framing political news in their respective media. In addition, this research also involves Prof. Dr. Hasrat Efendi Samosir, M.A., an academic at UIN North Sumatra, as an observer of political communication. The presence of this informant is important for providing an academic and reflective perspective on the dynamics of political communication in mass media reporting in Medan. As a complement, this study also involves Dr. Muhammad Alfikri, M.Si., from the Faculty of Social Sciences, UIN North Sumatra, as an active reader of mass media, in order to gain insight into how educated audiences interpret, assess, and respond to the political news they consume. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained through documentation and literature reviews. The documentation study focuses on the collection and analysis of political news texts published in the mass media, especially those relevant to the City of Medan, both in print and online. The documents analyzed include political news, main reports, headlines, opinion articles, and other forms of news related to contemporary political issues.

The literature review is conducted by examining various scientific sources, including books, national and international journal articles, research reports, and academic works relevant to the study of political communication, mass media, framing, agenda-setting, and the mediatisation of politics. The data collection techniques in this study included in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis [12]. In-depth interviews are conducted in a semi-structured manner, so that the researcher has a systematic question guide but still allows flexibility to explore the informant's experiences, views, and interpretations more broadly. Interviews with journalists and editors are directed to understand the process of producing political news, the selection of issues, the consideration of news values, and the framing patterns used in news. Interviews with academics and active readers are directed to obtain critical views on political representation in the media and its impact on public perception.

Non-participant observations were conducted on the patterns and tendencies of political news in the mass media relevant to the city of Medan. This observation is directed at aspects such as the intensity of news coverage, the choice of sources, language style, representation of political actors, the prominence of conflicts, and framing tendencies evident in news texts. Researchers are not directly involved in the news production process; rather, they observe and analyze journalistic products published as part of the practice of political communication in the public sphere. Furthermore, document analysis is used to examine the content, structure, and meaning of political news in the mass media. Through this technique, researchers identify how political reality is constructed through language, symbols, diction, narratives, and the prominence of certain issues. Document analysis is also used to understand how the mass media constructs representations of political actors, public policies, power conflicts, and socio-political issues in Medan [13].

Data analysis in this study was carried out in stages, following an interactive analysis model: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. In the data reduction stage, the

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researcher selects, groups, and focuses on data relevant to the research focus, especially those related to the patterns, forms, and implications of political communication in mass media reporting. The data presentation stage involves compiling data into descriptive narratives and thematic categories to understand the relationships between phenomena systematically. The last stage is drawing conclusions, which involves formulating the meanings, general patterns, and main findings of the research based on the overall data analyzed [10]. To ensure data validity, this study uses source triangulation, method triangulation, and increased researcher diligence. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing information obtained from various informants, namely journalists, editors, academics, and active readers of mass media. The triangulation method involves comparing the results of interviews, observations, and document analysis. Meanwhile, greater diligence is achieved through repeated reading, careful observation, and critical interpretation of the data, ensuring that the research results are valid and consistent [14].

With this approach, the research is expected to produce a comprehensive understanding of how political communication is constructed, represented, and practiced in mass media reporting in Medan, and how these dynamics shape the formation of public opinion in contemporary society.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

3.1. Patterns of Political Communication in Mass Media News in Medan City

This study identifies *patterns* of political communication as recurring structural tendencies in how news is selected, organized, and constructed across media texts. These patterns are derived from the convergence between interview data and document analysis of 60 news items from selected local media in Medan.

First, a selective and gatekeeping pattern. Media reporting consistently demonstrates selective issue construction based on news values such as conflict, proximity, and impact. This finding is supported by interview data with Ngatirin, who emphasized that “issues directly affecting citizens are prioritized.” Document analysis confirms this pattern. For example, a headline from *MimbarUmum.com* reads: “*Warga Medan Protes Kenaikan Pajak Daerah, DPRD Desak Evaluasi*”. The prominence of “protes” (protest) highlights conflict and public impact, indicating selective emphasis. Thus, interview insights on editorial considerations are reflected in textual evidence of issue prioritization.

Second, a framing pattern in political reporting. Framing appears in how similar events are presented differently across media. Zulfikar Tanjung (editor) explained that titles and leads are strategically crafted to shape readers’ perceptions. This is evident in contrasting headlines covering the same issue, “*Pemko Medan Tingkatkan Kinerja melalui Reformasi Birokrasi*” (positive framing). “*Kinerja Pemko Medan Disorot, Reformasi Dinilai Belum Maksimal*” (critical framing). Both refer to the same policy context but construct different evaluative meanings. This confirms that interview-based claims about editorial framing practices align with document-based variations in narrative emphasis.

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Third, personalization of political actors. Political communication tends to center on individual figures rather than policy substance. Amirul (journalist) noted that “names and personalities attract more attention than complex policy discussions.” This is supported by news texts such as: “*Wali Kota Medan Bobby Nasution Tegaskan Komitmen Perbaikan Infrastruktur*”, where the focus is on the actor rather than policy mechanisms. The repeated use of personal names in headlines and leads demonstrates a pattern of personalization, consistent with both interview insights and textual frequency.

Fourth, dramatization of political conflict. Media reporting frequently emphasizes tension, competition, and disagreement. Husni Lubis (editor) stated that conflict-driven news attracts higher readership. This is reflected in headlines such as: “*DPRD vs Pemko Memanas, Rapat Anggaran Berakhir Ricuh*” and “*Elite Partai Bersitegang soal Dukungan Pilkada Medan*”. The use of terms like “memanas” (heated) and “bersitegang” (clashing) indicates dramatization. Observation data further show that such conflict-oriented stories receive more prominent placement. Fifth, an interactive pattern with contemporary audiences. Political communication reflects a reciprocal relationship between media and active audiences. Prof. Hasrat Efendi Samosir highlighted that audiences today actively interpret and respond to news. This is evident in the inclusion of public reactions within news texts, such as: “*Netizen Kritik Kebijakan Baru Pemko di Media Sosial*”. Thus, both interview and document data indicate that political communication is no longer linear but interactive. Overall, these patterns of selectivity, framing, personalization, conflict dramatization, and audience interaction demonstrate how political communication is structurally organized in local media reporting.

3.2. Forms of Political Communication in Mass Media News in Medan City

In contrast to *patterns*, which refer to structural tendencies, *forms* refer to the modes or types of communication expressed in news content. The analysis identifies five dominant forms. First, informative form. This form focuses on delivering factual information. For example: “*Pemko Medan Luncurkan Program Bantuan UMKM 2025*”. However, document analysis shows that even informative news includes selective emphasis, supporting interview findings that editorial choices often influence neutrality. Second, persuasive form. News texts subtly guide audience interpretation. As Zulfikar Tanjung notes, persuasion operates through narrative structure. For instance, “*Program Baru Pemko Dinilai Solusi Tepat Atasi Kemiskinan*” implicitly invites readers to a positive evaluation. This aligns with interview data on strategic message construction. Third, symbolic form. Political communication is conveyed through symbols and representations. An example includes descriptions such as: “*Gaya Kepemimpinan Merakyat Wali Kota Medan Tuai Apresiasi*”, where “merakyat” (pro-people) functions as a symbolic label. Interview data confirm that symbolic representation is central to audience engagement.

Fourth, interpretive form. This form provides context and analysis, as seen in opinion or in-depth reports: “*Di Balik Kebijakan Pajak Daerah: Antara Kebutuhan Fiskal dan Beban Masyarakat*”. Such texts align with the educational function of media highlighted by informants. Fifth, confrontational form. This form highlights criticism and opposition. For example: “*Aktivist Kritik Keras Kebijakan Pemko, Sebut Tidak Pro-Rakyat*”. This supports

Husni Lubis's claim that conflict-based narratives are dominant because of audience interest. These forms often coexist within a single news text, indicating that political communication operates in layered and hybrid modes.

3.3. Implications of Political Communication in Mass Media News on the Dynamics of Contemporary Society in Medan City

The findings indicate several key implications of political communication practices, supported by both interview and document data. First, shaping public opinion. Interview data from Dr. Muhammad Alfikri suggest that media narratives influence initial public perceptions. This is reflected in repeated framing patterns in headlines, which guide interpretation before deeper reading occurs.

Second, the construction of a political image. Frequent positive or negative portrayals in news texts contribute to the formation of political reputations. For instance, repeated associations of a figure with terms like "tegas" (firm) or "dikritik" (criticized) reinforce specific images. Third, increasing public sensitivity. Observation and document analysis show a high frequency of politically relevant news, while interviews confirm that audiences are more responsive and engaged with such issues.

Fourth, fragmentation of perception. The same news text can produce varied interpretations, as noted by Prof. Hasrat. This is evident in contrasting reader responses (as cited in news coverage of public reactions), indicating diverse meaning-making processes. Fifth, ethical and democratic challenges. Interview data highlight tensions between speed and accuracy. Document analysis supports this by identifying simplified or sensational headlines that prioritize attention over depth, such as: "*Kebijakan Kontroversial Pemko Picu Polemik*".

Discussion

3.4. Political Communication in Mass Media News in Medan City: Dynamics of Contemporary Society

The findings indicate that political communication in mass media reporting in Medan has evolved from a linear transmission model into a dynamic, interactive, and context-sensitive process shaped by the interplay between media institutions, political actors, and an increasingly active public. This transformation reflects broader shifts toward mediatized political communication, where media institutions play a central role in structuring political discourse and public understanding [15],[16].

A key feature of the Medan context is the strong emphasis on local proximity and immediacy in news selection. Unlike national media, which often prioritize elite-level political agendas, local media consistently foreground issues that directly affect citizens' daily lives. This is evident in headlines such as "*Warga Medan Protes Kenaikan Pajak Daerah*" and "*Pedagang Pasar Keluhkan Kebijakan Retribusi Baru*". Interview data confirm that proximity and social impact are primary editorial considerations. This finding aligns with gatekeeping theory [17], [18], but also demonstrates its localized adaptation, in which issue selection is closely tied to community relevance rather than abstract political importance.

At the same time, gatekeeping in Medan is strongly influenced by audience sensitivity to conflict and immediacy. Document analysis reveals frequent use of conflict-oriented expressions such as “*memanas*,” “*disorot*,” and “*bersitegang*”, while interviews with editors confirm that such narratives are prioritized due to their high engagement value. This reflects broader media logic [19], [20], yet its intensity in Medan suggests a competitive local media environment in which audience attention significantly shapes editorial decisions.

The findings also show a strong tendency toward framing, with similar political events presented with different emphases across media outlets. For instance, contrasting headlines such as “*Pemko Medan Tingkatkan Kinerja...*” and “*Kinerja Pemko Disorot...*” illustrate how framing shapes interpretation. This supports previous studies [15],[21] that highlight the role of framing in influencing public perception. However, in the Medan context, framing closely aligns with audience expectations and local relevance, reinforcing the media's role as an active producer of meaning rather than merely an information provider. Another distinctive characteristic is the intensified personalization of political actors. News texts frequently foreground individual figures, such as “*Bobby Nasution Tegaskan Komitmen...*” or “*DPRD Kritik Langkah Wali Kota...*”, rather than institutional processes or policy substance. This finding is consistent with studies on political personalization [7],[22] but appears more pronounced in the local context, where audiences are more familiar with political figures. As a result, political understanding tends to be shaped through personal image rather than substantive policy analysis. In addition, the dramatization of conflict in Medan's local media primarily focuses on interpersonal and institutional tensions, such as “*Rapat DPRD Ricuh*” or “*Ketegangan Pemko dan DPRD*”. This supports research on media logic that emphasizes conflict and dramatization [19],[20]. However, it also reveals a contextual distinction: unlike national media, which often frame ideological polarization, local media in Medan focus on tangible, observable disputes that resonate with everyday public concerns.

The study further highlights the active role of contemporary audiences in shaping political communication. News texts increasingly incorporate public reactions, such as “*Netizen Kritik Kebijakan...*”, indicating that audience feedback has become part of the news narrative. This finding aligns with studies on participatory communication [23], [24], confirming that audiences are no longer passive recipients but active interpreters who contribute to meaning-making processes. In the Medan context, this interaction creates a reciprocal communication ecosystem, although it remains mediated by editorial selection.

Regarding the forms of political communication, the findings show a hybrid structure in which informative, persuasive, symbolic, interpretive, and confrontational elements coexist within single news texts. This supports the argument that contemporary media functions as a discursive arena that produces meaning and symbolic power [25]. The dominance of confrontational forms further indicates that media reporting is also a site of political contestation. These patterns and forms have significant implications for contemporary society. First, they contribute to the formation of public opinion and political images, as repeated exposure to personalized and framed narratives shapes how audiences perceive political actors and issues [26]. Second, the emphasis on local issues increases public awareness and engagement, reflecting the media's role in expanding participation in

local democratic discourse. However, the study also identifies the fragmentation of public perception, where different media framings lead to varied interpretations of the same issue. This finding is consistent with previous research on media-induced polarization [24], [27].

Finally, the findings reveal a tension between journalistic ideals and market-driven media practices. Interviews with journalists highlight pressures to produce fast and engaging content, which is reflected in simplified or sensational headlines such as “*Kebijakan Kontroversial Picu Polemik*”. This supports studies on digital media transformation [28], [29] which note the prioritization of speed over depth. In the context of local democracy, this raises concerns about the quality of public discourse, particularly when dramatized and personalized narratives overshadow complex policy issues. In conclusion, political communication in Medan’s mass media both reproduces global media trends and reflects locally specific dynamics. Its distinctiveness lies in the strong orientation toward proximity, the centrality of local actors, and the active role of audiences in interpreting political messages. These factors create a dynamic, context-sensitive environment that is highly influential in shaping public opinion, political engagement, and the quality of local democratic processes.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that political communication in mass media reporting in Medan is structured through recurring patterns of issue selection, framing, personalization, and conflict dramatization, alongside interactive engagement with increasingly active audiences. These patterns operate through multiple communication forms—informative, persuasive, symbolic, interpretive, and confrontational—indicating that local media not only transmit political information but also shape how political realities are understood at the community level.

The main contribution of this study lies in showing that while Medan’s media practices reflect broader trends of mediatized political communication, they are distinctly shaped by local proximity, audience responsiveness, and the centrality of local actors. This highlights the importance of analyzing political communication within localized contexts rather than relying solely on national or global frameworks. However, this study is limited by the relatively small number of informants and a media corpus that, while purposively selected, remains limited in scope and specification. Practically, the findings underscore the need for local media to balance speed and audience appeal with accuracy, depth, and ethical responsibility in order to support a more informed and deliberative public sphere.

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