

Ethics of Political Communication in the Media Space of Time in the Digital Era

Erwan Efendi¹, Abdul Rasyid²

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

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of digital media has transformed political communication practices by enabling faster information dissemination, broader public participation, and greater interaction between political actors and audiences. However, these developments have also raised ethical concerns regarding the accuracy, objectivity, and responsibility of political communication in digital environments. Despite extensive discussions on digital political communication, limited research has specifically examined how political communication ethics are practiced within digital mass media and how these practices influence the quality of political information and public opinion formation. This study aims to analyze the implementation of political communication ethics in digital media, identify the factors influencing its application, and examine its implications for political information quality and public opinion formation. A qualitative approach with a descriptive-interpretive method was employed. The research participants consisted of 40 journalists, editors, and media and political communication experts selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through non-participant observation of political news content, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and documentary analysis of news texts, journalistic codes of ethics, and editorial policies. Data were analyzed using an interactive model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the implementation of political communication ethics in digital media is often situational and characterized by compromises between ethical standards, market demands, and political interests. Individual factors, organizational structures, and socio-cultural dynamics within the media ecosystem influence the practice. Furthermore, inconsistencies in ethical implementation contribute to the decline of political information quality and encourage the emergence of emotional, polarized, and less rational public opinion. The study concludes that strengthening political communication ethics is essential for maintaining information credibility and promoting democratic discourse in the digital era. This research contributes to the development of political communication theory by highlighting the interaction between ethical principles and digital media dynamics, while also providing practical recommendations for media organizations, journalists, and policymakers to enhance ethical standards in political communication.

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Corresponding Author:

Erwan Efendi
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia
Email: erwanefendi@uinsu.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the landscape of political communication worldwide. The transition from conventional mass media to digital media has created a communication environment characterized by speed, interactivity, and extensive connectivity through internet-based platforms. Digital media has altered the relationship between media institutions, political actors, and citizens in the production and dissemination of political information [1]. Furthermore, the boundaries between information producers and consumers have become increasingly blurred, as audiences are no longer passive recipients but also active creators and distributors of political content [2]. This transformation has expanded opportunities for democratic participation and information accessibility, while simultaneously generating new challenges related to the ethical conduct of political communication within digital media environments. In contemporary digital ecosystems, political information circulates rapidly and reaches large audiences within a short period of time.

However, this environment also facilitates the spread of unethical communication practices, including disinformation, misinformation, manipulation of public opinion, framing bias, and hate speech. Digital media platforms have become arenas where political interests, ideological contestation, and power relations are continuously negotiated and reproduced [3] and [4]. Consequently, fundamental ethical principles of political communication, such as truthfulness, objectivity, fairness, accountability, and social responsibility, are increasingly vulnerable to compromise. Some scholars even argue that political communication ethics often appear paradoxical because political communication is frequently driven by strategic interests and persuasive objectives rather than moral considerations [5].

The challenge becomes more complex due to the influence of economic competition, political interests, and algorithmic systems embedded within digital media infrastructures. The growing pressure to attract audience attention has encouraged the emergence of click-oriented journalism that prioritizes speed, virality, and engagement metrics over information accuracy and contextual depth. In addition, platform algorithms tend to amplify emotional, sensational, and polarizing political content because such content generates higher levels of user interaction [6]. As a result, ethical political communication is no longer determined solely by journalists' professional values but is also shaped by organizational interests, media ownership structures, and technological mechanisms that govern content visibility and distribution. These developments have significant implications for democratic processes. Research has demonstrated that media practices that neglect ethical principles contribute to declining public trust in both media institutions and democratic governance [7]. Moreover, debates concerning the role of media in democracy consistently highlight ethical issues related to transparency, fairness, and the accuracy of political information [8]. In the Indonesian context, these concerns are particularly relevant because media ownership is often concentrated among actors with strong political and economic interests.

Such concentration may influence editorial decisions and contribute to political bias in news coverage [9]. Consequently, digital mass media frequently occupy an ambiguous

position as both a democratic institution and an instrument of political and economic power. Theoretically, this research is based on the ethical concept of political communication and the theory of digital public space. Political communication ethics emphasizes the importance of moral values such as honesty, accuracy, justice, social responsibility, and respect for the public in the political communication process [10]. In addition, the theory of public space explained that the media should be a deliberative space that allows the public to obtain information rationally and critically to support the democratic process [11]. Existing scholarship has extensively examined various dimensions of digital political communication. Previous studies have explored the role of digital media in spreading political disinformation and its contribution to public polarization [12]. Other studies have emphasized the watchdog function of the media in protecting public interests amid increasing political manipulation in digital environments [13]. Research has also investigated the relationship between media ownership concentration and political power, particularly within the Indonesian media system [14]. Collectively, these studies provide important insights into digital political communication; however, they primarily focus on disinformation, social media dynamics, or ownership structures as separate issues.

Despite the growing body of literature, limited attention has been given to the empirical practice of political communication ethics within digital mass media organizations. Existing studies tend to discuss political communication ethics from a normative perspective or examine structural media issues without adequately explaining how ethical principles are negotiated, applied, or compromised in everyday journalistic practices. Consequently, there remains a significant research gap between theoretical discussions of political communication ethics and the practical realities of digital media operations. Furthermore, little empirical evidence is available regarding how individual, organizational, and technological factors interact to influence ethical decision-making in political communication and how these practices affect the quality of political information and public opinion formation. The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive examination of political communication ethics within digital mass media by integrating ethical perspectives with digital public sphere theory. Unlike previous studies that focus separately on disinformation, media ownership, or political polarization, this research investigates how political communication ethics are practiced, negotiated, and shaped by structural, organizational, and technological factors in digital news production.

The study also explores the implications of ethical practices for information quality and democratic public discourse, particularly within the Indonesian digital media context. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the implementation of political communication ethics in digital mass media, identify the factors influencing its application, and examine its implications for political information quality and public opinion formation. By addressing these objectives, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the ethical challenges faced by digital media organizations in contemporary political communication. This research contributes theoretically to the development of political communication and media ethics studies by providing empirical evidence regarding the interaction between ethical principles and digital media structures. Practically, the findings are expected to assist journalists, media organizations, regulators, and policymakers in strengthening ethical standards and

promoting responsible political communication practices. Ultimately, the study supports efforts to create a more credible, objective¹¹ and democratic digital public sphere capable of enhancing the quality of public discourse in the digital era.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach using an interpretive descriptive method. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to explore the meanings, experiences, and social dynamics underlying the implementation of political communication ethics in digital mass media. The interpretive descriptive method enabled the researchers to understand how ethical principles are perceived, negotiated, and applied by media practitioners within the context of contemporary digital journalism. This approach is particularly relevant for examining ethical issues in political communication, which are often shaped by subjective interpretations, organizational cultures, and contextual factors that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurements. [15]. The study was conducted between January and April 2026 through observations of political news content published on major Indonesian digital news platforms and interviews with media professionals and communication experts. The research focused on the Indonesian digital media environment due to its dynamic political communication ecosystem and increasing concerns regarding media ethics, political polarization, and information quality.

The participants consisted of online journalists, editors⁷, and scholars specializing in media studies and political communication. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on predetermined criteria, including: (1) a minimum of three years of professional experience in journalism, media management, or political communication research; (2) direct or indirect involvement in political news production or analysis; and (3) willingness to participate in in-depth¹⁹ interviews and provide reflective insights regarding ethical practices in digital media. The number of participants was determined according to the principle of data saturation. Data collection was discontinued when additional interviews no longer³ generated new information, themes, or insights relevant to the research objectives. [16]. This study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained from in-depth interviews with journalists, editors, and media experts, as well as observations of political news content published on digital media platforms. Secondary data included journalistic codes of ethics, editorial⁷ policies, institutional documents, academic literature, and published political news articles relevant to the research topic.

Data were collected through three complementary techniques: Non-participant Observation. The researchers systematically observed political news content in digital mass media to identify patterns of ethical practice, news framing, objectivity, and adherence to journalistic standards. Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews. Interviews were conducted using flexible interview protocols that allowed participants to share their experiences, perceptions, and reflections concerning political communication ethics in digital media environments. Document Analysis. Documentary materials, including news texts, editorial guidelines, media policies, and journalistic²¹ codes of ethics, were analyzed to understand the normative framework governing political communication practices. The use of multiple data collection methods enabled methodological triangulation and enhanced the credibility of the

findings [17]. The primary research instrument was the researcher, supported by several auxiliary instruments. These included semi-structured interview guides, observation protocols, field notes, audio recording devices, and document analysis checklists. The interview guide was developed based on the theoretical framework of political communication ethics and digital public sphere theory to ensure consistency and relevance in data collection.

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the findings, the study adopted the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, prolonged engagement with the data, and member checking with selected participants. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and procedures. Dependability was established through systematic documentation of the research process and analytical decisions. Confirmability was ensured by maintaining an audit trail and minimizing researcher bias through continuous reflection and cross-verification of findings [18]. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of qualitative data analysis. The analysis involved three interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary materials were coded systematically and grouped into categories and themes representing ethical practices, influencing factors, and implications for political information quality and public opinion formation. The thematic interpretation was conducted iteratively throughout the research process to ensure analytical depth and consistency [19]. This study adhered to established ethical standards for research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, all participants were informed about the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequences [20]. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before interviews were conducted. Participant anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by removing personally identifiable information from transcripts and research reports. All collected data were used solely for academic purposes and stored securely to protect participants' privacy.

27 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

3.1.1 Ethical Practices of Political Communication in the Mass Media Space in the Digital Era

This section presents the findings derived from observations of political news content, in-depth interviews with journalists, editors, media observers, and communication scholars, as well as documentary analysis of editorial policies and journalistic ethical guidelines. The analysis focuses on three interconnected themes: (1) the implementation of political communication ethics in digital media, (2) factors influencing ethical decision-making, and (3) the implications of ethical practices for political information quality and public opinion formation. The study involved five key informants representing different perspectives within the digital media ecosystem. Informants included two online journalists, one editor of a national digital news outlet, one political communication scholar, and one media observer. All participants possessed professional experience exceeding three years in

journalism, media analysis, or political communication research and were directly involved in understanding political news production and dissemination in Indonesia's digital media environment.

The findings indicate that the implementation of political communication ethics in digital mass media is largely situational and continuously negotiated between professional ethical standards and the structural realities of digital journalism. Although ethical principles such as accuracy, balance, independence, honesty, and public accountability remain formally recognized within journalistic codes of ethics, their application is frequently challenged by the demands of speed, audience engagement, and market competition. Interview data revealed that digital media organizations operate under significant pressure to publish political news rapidly in order to maintain audience attention and competitive visibility. As explained by an editor, "*In digital media, speed is a top priority. If we are late in publishing political news, audiences can immediately move to other media outlets. Sometimes verification continues even after the news has been published.*" (Informant I)

This finding suggests a shift from a verification-oriented journalism model toward an attention-oriented model, where immediacy often competes with accuracy. Such conditions support the argument that political communication ethics in digital journalism are increasingly shaped by the logic of the attention economy rather than solely by professional journalistic norms. From the perspective of political communication theory, these findings reinforce the argument that media digitalization has transformed political communication into a more performative and audience-driven process. Political information is frequently packaged in ways that maximize visibility and engagement rather than encouraging critical democratic deliberation.

The second major finding concerns the structural factors influencing ethical decision-making in digital media. Analysis revealed that ethical practices are shaped not only by journalists' professional values but also by organizational interests, media ownership structures, audience segmentation strategies, and algorithmic mechanisms that determine content visibility. Several participants emphasized that controversial and emotionally charged political issues receive greater media attention because they generate higher levels of user engagement. A political communication observer stated, "*Controversial political issues are more likely to become headlines because they increase clicks and user interaction. Media organizations often focus on political conflict rather than explaining policy substance in depth.*" (Informant II)

This finding demonstrates how economic incentives embedded within digital media systems influence editorial priorities. Newsworthiness is increasingly evaluated through audience metrics such as clicks, shares, comments, and engagement rates. The study also found that political news framing is not entirely neutral. Organizational interests and media affiliations frequently influence editorial decisions regarding issue selection, source inclusion, and narrative emphasis. A political journalist explained, "*Not all political issues receive equal attention. Some issues are highlighted more because they align with the media's direction or appeal to specific audiences.*" (Informant III).

Similarly, a communication scholar noted, "*Framing in digital media is not only a journalistic matter but is also influenced by economic and political interests. There are*

pressures that encourage media organizations to choose narratives that are safer or more beneficial for particular actors." (Informant IV). These findings support framing theory, which argues that media organizations actively construct reality through selective emphasis and interpretation. The study demonstrates that framing practices in digital political communication are closely connected to broader power relations operating within media institutions. The third finding concerns the consequences of ethical compromises for democratic communication. The analysis indicates that the increasing dominance of economic interests and algorithmic logic contributes to the declining quality of political information and the emergence of more polarized public discourse. Participants consistently reported that audiences are increasingly exposed to simplified, emotional, and conflict-oriented political content. According to a media observer, "*Social media algorithms make people more likely to encounter content that matches their existing emotions and viewpoints. As a result, polarization and information echo chambers become stronger.*" (Informant V)

This finding suggests that algorithms do not merely distribute information but actively shape patterns of information consumption and public interpretation. Political information becomes filtered through personalized digital environments, limiting exposure to alternative viewpoints and reducing opportunities for rational democratic deliberation. From the perspective of public sphere theory, these developments indicate a distortion of the democratic function of digital media. Rather than serving as a deliberative space for informed discussion, digital public spaces increasingly prioritize visibility, emotional engagement, and ideological reinforcement. Consequently, public opinion formation becomes more emotional, polarized, and less dependent on factual political information.

3.1.2 Factors Influencing the Application of Political Communication Ethics in Digital Mass Media

This section presents the findings related to the factors influencing the implementation of political communication ethics in digital mass media. Based on data obtained through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, the study identified three major categories of influencing factors: individual factors, structural factors, and cultural factors. These factors interact dynamically and collectively shape ethical decision-making in the production and dissemination of political information within digital media environments. The findings were derived from interviews with journalists, editors, media observers, and communication scholars who possessed professional experience in digital journalism and political communication.

Participants were selected based on their involvement in political news production, editorial decision-making, and media analysis. Their professional backgrounds provided diverse perspectives regarding ethical challenges in contemporary digital media practices. Analysis of the data revealed that ethical challenges in political communication are not solely determined by the professional integrity of journalists. Instead, ethical practices are influenced by multiple interconnected factors operating at individual, organizational, technological, and societal levels. Among these factors, structural pressures associated with digital media economics and algorithm-driven content distribution emerged as the most influential forces affecting ethical decision-making. The first category of findings relates to

individual factors, including ethical awareness, professional integrity, journalistic idealism, and personal commitment to ethical standards. Participants generally demonstrated a strong understanding of the importance of accuracy, verification, balance, and public responsibility in political reporting. However, the findings indicate that workplace demands and organizational pressures frequently challenge individual ethical commitment.

One journalist explained, *“Some journalists understand the importance of verification and balanced reporting, but editorial pressure and traffic targets require us to work very quickly. In certain situations, journalistic idealism is difficult to maintain fully.”* (Informant I). This finding suggests that ethical awareness alone is insufficient to guarantee ethical practice when journalists operate within highly competitive digital media environments. Although professional values remain important, their implementation is often constrained by production deadlines and performance expectations. The second and most dominant category involves structural factors. These include media ownership, organizational policies, economic interests, audience metrics, platform algorithms, and competition among digital media organizations. Participants consistently reported that digital media institutions increasingly rely on audience engagement indicators such as clicks, views, shares, and interaction rates. Consequently, editorial decisions are often influenced by considerations of audience attraction and market performance.

An editor stated, *“Media organizations now depend heavily on clicks and engagement. Controversial political news is usually prioritized because it attracts public attention quickly and contributes to media traffic.”* (Informant II). The findings indicate that economic incentives encourage the production of sensational, emotional, and conflict-oriented political content. Furthermore, algorithmic systems used by digital platforms amplify content with high engagement potential, creating additional pressure for media organizations to adapt their news production strategies to platform preferences. Document analysis also revealed that speed and visibility have become central priorities in digital journalism. As a result, ethical principles such as verification, balance, and contextual reporting may receive less emphasis compared to audience engagement objectives.

The third category of findings concerns cultural factors related to digital communication practices and public media literacy. Participants emphasized that contemporary audiences tend to consume information rapidly and often prefer short, emotionally appealing, and easily accessible content. According to a media observer, *“Today’s digital audiences are more likely to believe provocative headlines and short information snippets without thoroughly examining the accuracy of the content.”* (Informant III). The findings suggest that limited media literacy contributes to the vulnerability of audiences to misinformation, political manipulation, and emotionally driven political narratives. The study also found that digital communication culture encourages selective information consumption, where individuals are more likely to engage with content that aligns with their existing beliefs and preferences. Observational data further revealed that political discussions within digital environments are frequently characterized by polarization, emotional reactions, and ideological reinforcement rather than critical and evidence-based deliberation.

This condition creates an environment in which ethical political communication becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. The findings demonstrate that three interconnected factors influence the implementation of political communication ethics in digital mass media. First, individual factors such as ethical awareness and professional integrity remain important but are often constrained by organizational demands. Second, structural factors, including media economics, audience metrics, platform algorithms, and competitive pressures, constitute the most significant influences on ethical decision-making. Third, cultural factors related to digital communication habits and media literacy levels affect both the production and consumption of political information. Collectively, these findings indicate that political communication ethics should be understood as a multidimensional issue shaped by the interaction of individual, structural, and cultural forces within the contemporary digital media ecosystem.

3.1.3 Implications of Ethical Practices of Political Communication on the Quality of Political Information and the Formation of Public Opinion

This section presents the findings related to the implications of political communication ethics on the quality of political information and the formation of public opinion in digital mass media. The findings are based on interviews, observations, and document analysis focusing on news production practices, information dissemination patterns, and audience responses in digital media environments. The data were obtained from online journalists, media editors, and media observers involved in digital political reporting and analysis. These participants represent different roles in the production, distribution, and interpretation of political information in digital mass media. The study also examined political news content from selected online media platforms to identify patterns of information framing and dissemination. The overall findings indicate that the ethical quality of political communication has a direct impact on the quality of political information and public opinion formation. Political information in digital media tends to be characterized by simplification, emotional Framing, and high-speed dissemination. In addition, audience consumption patterns are strongly influenced by algorithmic recommendation systems that prioritize engagement-based content.

The first finding shows that the quality of political information in digital media is increasingly characterized by surface-level reporting and reduced analytical depth. Media competition for speed and virality leads to the prioritization of breaking news formats over in-depth political analysis. One media observer stated, “*The media is now more focused on how fast news goes viral rather than ensuring the depth of political analysis. As a result, people receive more pieces of information than substantial explanations.*” (Informant I) This indicates that political information is increasingly fragmented and simplified, making it less informative for public understanding of complex political issues. The second finding shows that political news production is highly influenced by engagement metrics such as clicks, shares, and audience interaction. Editors tend to prioritize topics with high viral potential, particularly those involving conflict, controversy, or emotional statements. An editor explained, “*Political news that contains conflict, controversy, or emotional statements tends to attract readers more quickly than long, serious policy discussions.*” (Informant II).

This pattern demonstrates that attention-based metrics play a significant role in shaping news priorities in digital media. The third finding shows that algorithmic systems significantly influence the distribution and visibility of political information. Digital platforms tend to prioritize content that generates higher user engagement, which often includes emotionally charged and controversial political narratives. This results in unequal exposure to political information, where certain issues dominate public attention while others receive limited visibility. The fourth finding shows that public opinion in digital environments tends to be increasingly polarized. Users are more likely to be exposed to information that aligns with their preferences due to algorithmic filtering mechanisms and selective exposure behavior. A communication academic stated, “*The digital society is now more likely to react emotionally to political information without checking its validity first. Algorithms only display information that matches user preferences.*” (Informant III). This indicates that political communication in digital media contributes to the strengthening of opinion polarization and emotional response patterns. The fifth finding shows a decline in public trust in digital mass media. Participants reported that audiences increasingly perceive political news as biased, sensational, or influenced by specific interests. A media observer stated, “*People now tend to find it difficult to trust the media because a lot of political news is considered biased and too sensational.*” (Informant IV). This condition leads audiences to seek alternative information sources, which are not always verified or reliable.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Ethical Practices of Political Communication in the Mass Media Space in the Digital Era

This study reveals that the practice of political communication ethics in digital mass media is characterized by continuous negotiation between normative ethical principles and the structural realities of contemporary digital journalism. Although ethical standards such as truthfulness, accuracy, balance, independence, and public responsibility remain formally recognized within journalistic institutions, their implementation is increasingly influenced by economic pressures, audience engagement metrics, political interests, and algorithmic systems. The findings indicate that ethical decision-making in digital political communication is not solely determined by individual journalistic professionalism but is embedded within broader institutional and technological structures [21]. A significant finding of this study is that the growing emphasis on speed, virality, and audience traffic has shifted media priorities from verification-oriented journalism toward attention-oriented journalism. As digital media organizations compete for visibility in highly saturated information environments, political content is frequently designed to maximize engagement rather than facilitate informed democratic deliberation. Consequently, ethical principles are often applied selectively and situationally, depending on organizational objectives and market considerations [22]. The findings also demonstrate that political news framing is shaped by economic and political influences operating within media institutions. Audience segmentation strategies, ownership interests, and editorial priorities frequently influence the selection of issues, sources, and narrative perspectives.

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As a result, political communication in digital media cannot be understood as a neutral process of information transmission but rather as a dynamic process of meaning construction influenced by power relations and institutional interests [23]. Furthermore, the study shows that algorithmic systems play a substantial role in shaping political information exposure and public opinion formation. Digital platforms tend to amplify emotionally engaging and controversial content because such content generates higher levels of interaction. This process contributes to the emergence of polarized public discourse, information echo chambers, and a decline in the deliberative quality of democratic communication. The findings are consistent with previous studies that have highlighted the influence of digital media on political communication practices. Earlier research has shown that digital platforms facilitate the rapid dissemination of political information while simultaneously increasing the circulation of misinformation and disinformation.

The present study supports these conclusions by demonstrating that algorithm-driven media environments encourage the prioritization of emotionally charged political content over balanced and evidence-based reporting. The findings also reinforce studies emphasizing the impact of media ownership and political-economic interests on journalistic independence. Similar to previous research in the Indonesian media context, this study found that broader political and economic considerations frequently influence editorial practices. However, the present research extends existing scholarship by showing how these structural influences interact with algorithmic mechanisms and audience-driven business models in shaping ethical decision-making processes [14]. Unlike previous studies that have examined disinformation, political polarization, media ownership, or social media dynamics separately, this study provides a more integrated understanding of how political communication ethics is negotiated within digital mass media organizations. The findings, therefore, contribute to bridging the gap between normative discussions of media ethics and the practical realities of digital news production.

The findings can be explained through the theoretical framework of political communication ethics, mediatization theory, framing theory, and public sphere theory. From the perspective of political communication ethics, the results demonstrate that ethical principles are increasingly challenged by competing organizational and technological pressures. Ethical standards remain important normative references, but their implementation is shaped by practical considerations related to market competition and digital visibility. The findings also support mediatization theory, which argues that media logic increasingly influences political processes. In the digital era, political communication is structured according to the logic of visibility, popularity, and audience engagement. Political actors and media organizations adapt their communication strategies to fit the demands of digital platforms, often prioritizing emotional appeal over substantive policy discussion. Framing theory further explains how media organizations selectively construct political reality by emphasizing certain issues, actors, and interpretations while marginalizing others. The findings indicate that framing practices are not solely journalistic techniques but are embedded within broader ideological, economic, and political contexts [14].

Finally, the findings resonate with public sphere theory. Ideally, digital media should function as a deliberative space where citizens engage in rational and informed discussion. However, the dominance of economic interests and algorithmic filtering mechanisms has transformed many digital public spaces into arenas characterized by emotional contestation, polarization, and fragmented information consumption. This condition weakens the democratic potential of digital communication and challenges the ideal of a rational public sphere. An important finding that differs from traditional normative assumptions is that journalists and editors do not necessarily reject ethical principles. Rather, they often attempt to balance ethical responsibilities with organizational demands and technological constraints. This suggests that ethical challenges in digital journalism are not simply the result of individual professional failures but emerge from structural conditions that limit the consistent application of ethical standards [24] and [25]. Another notable finding is that algorithmic influence appears to be as significant as political and economic influence in shaping contemporary political communication. While previous studies have frequently emphasized media ownership and political interests, this research highlights the growing role of digital platform infrastructures in determining which political narratives gain public visibility and influence [6]. This study contributes to the development of political communication ethics scholarship by demonstrating that ethical challenges in digital media should be understood as structural and systemic phenomena rather than merely individual ethical dilemmas. The findings extend existing theories by highlighting the interaction between ethical norms, media economics, political interests, and algorithmic technologies.

3.2.2 Factors Influencing the Application of Political Communication Ethics in Digital Mass Media

The findings indicate that the implementation of political communication ethics in digital mass media is influenced by three interconnected dimensions: individual, structural, and cultural factors. While individual factors such as ethical awareness, professional integrity, and journalistic idealism remain important, the study reveals that structural and cultural factors exert a stronger influence on ethical decision-making in contemporary digital media environments. Economic pressures, algorithm-driven content distribution, media ownership interests, and audience consumption patterns collectively shape how ethical principles are interpreted and applied in political communication practices [21]. The findings suggest that ethical challenges in digital political communication cannot be understood solely as issues of individual responsibility. Although journalists and editors generally recognize the importance of accuracy, balance, verification, and public accountability, their ability to uphold these principles is constrained by institutional and technological pressures. The increasing reliance on audience metrics, engagement indicators, and digital traffic targets encourages media organizations to prioritize speed and visibility over ethical rigor [1]. This situation occurs because digital media operate within an attention-based economy where audience engagement has become a critical source of organizational sustainability. Consequently, political content is often designed to maximize public attention rather than facilitate informed democratic discussion.

The findings, therefore, indicate that ethical compromises are not necessarily the result of weak professional values but are frequently responses to structural conditions embedded within contemporary digital media systems [14]. The study also demonstrates that digital communication culture influences ethical practices indirectly through audience behavior. The preference for short, emotionally engaging, and rapidly consumable information creates incentives for media organizations to produce content that aligns with audience expectations. As a result, ethical standards may be adjusted to accommodate market demands and platform dynamics. The findings support previous studies that have emphasized the impact of digital transformation on journalistic ethics and political communication. Research on digital journalism has consistently shown that economic pressures and audience-driven business models contribute to ethical compromises in news production. Similarly, studies on hybrid media systems have demonstrated that the integration of digital media and social media intensifies competition for attention and accelerates information circulation, often reducing opportunities for thorough verification [26].

The present study also confirms findings from previous research indicating that algorithmic systems amplify emotionally engaging and controversial content. Such mechanisms increase the visibility of sensational political narratives while reducing the prominence of more analytical and deliberative forms of communication. However, this study extends previous literature by demonstrating that ethical challenges emerge from the interaction of multiple factors rather than from a single source. While earlier studies often focused separately on media ownership, algorithmic influence, or audience behavior, the present findings reveal how individual, structural, and cultural dimensions collectively shape ethical practices in digital political communication. This multidimensional perspective provides a more comprehensive explanation of ethical dynamics within contemporary media ecosystems [27]. The findings are also consistent with the theory of mediatization of politics, which suggests that political communication increasingly adapts to media logic. In the digital era, media logic is characterized by speed, visibility, engagement, and popularity. Consequently, political communication becomes increasingly oriented toward attracting public attention rather than encouraging rational democratic deliberation [28]. Furthermore, the findings support theoretical perspectives concerning algorithmic governance and digital communication culture.

Platform algorithms function as gatekeeping mechanisms that influence information visibility and public attention. At the same time, digital culture promotes selective exposure and emotional engagement, reinforcing the tendency of political communication to prioritize attention-grabbing content over substantive political discourse. An important finding of this study is that structural and cultural factors appear to have a greater influence on ethical practices than individual professionalism. This finding differs from traditional normative perspectives that primarily emphasize journalists' ethical responsibility as the key determinant of media ethics [29]. One possible explanation is the increasing dependence of contemporary journalism on digital technologies and platform infrastructures. Unlike traditional media environments, digital journalism is strongly shaped by real-time analytics, audience metrics, and algorithmic visibility.

Consequently, ethical decisions are increasingly influenced by technological and economic considerations that extend beyond the control of individual journalists. This study contributes to political communication ethics scholarship by demonstrating that ethical challenges should be analyzed as systemic and multidimensional phenomena. The findings expand existing theories by highlighting the interaction between individual agency, institutional structures, technological systems, and cultural practices in shaping ethical communication outcomes [30]. For media organizations, the findings underscore the importance of strengthening editorial independence, ethical oversight mechanisms, and verification procedures despite increasing competitive pressures. Media practitioners should be provided with institutional support that enables ethical decision-making even in highly dynamic [31]. The findings suggest that policymakers and media regulators should adopt broader approaches to promoting ethical political communication. Regulatory efforts should address not only journalistic standards but also issues related to media ownership concentration, platform accountability, algorithmic transparency, and digital literacy development. Strengthening public media literacy programs may help reduce vulnerability to misinformation, emotional manipulation, and political polarization.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study relied on a relatively limited number of participants representing specific professional groups within the digital media sector. Second, the research focused primarily on the Indonesian context, which may limit the transferability of findings to other media systems and political environments. Third, the qualitative design provides in-depth insights into ethical dynamics but does not allow measurement of the relative influence of individual, structural, and cultural factors. Future research should explore the relationship between algorithmic systems, media economics, and ethical decision-making using comparative and mixed-method approaches. Cross-national studies may provide a deeper understanding of how different political and media systems influence ethical practices in digital communication. In addition, future studies should examine the ethical implications of artificial intelligence, automated journalism, and algorithmic content moderation, as these technologies are becoming increasingly influential in contemporary political communication processes.

3.2.3 Implications of Ethical Practices of Political Communication on the Quality of Political Information and the Formation of Public Opinion

The findings of this study indicate that ethical practices of political communication in digital mass media significantly influence the quality of political information and the formation of public opinion. The results show that declining ethical standards in digital journalism, driven by algorithmic logic, economic pressures, and audience engagement strategies, contribute to the production of simplified, emotional, and virality-oriented political information. These conditions ultimately shape a more polarized and less deliberative public opinion environment [32]. The findings suggest that structural changes in the digital media ecosystem primarily cause the decline in the quality of political information. The prioritization of speed, engagement, and visibility encourages media organizations to simplify complex political issues into short and emotionally appealing narratives.

This condition reduces the depth of political analysis and limits the public's access to comprehensive and balanced information. Furthermore, the formation of public opinion is increasingly influenced by algorithmic filtering systems that prioritize content based on user engagement patterns. As a result, audiences are more frequently exposed to information that aligns with their preferences, reinforcing existing beliefs and reducing exposure to diverse perspectives. This contributes to fragmented public discourse and weakens rational democratic deliberation [3] and [22]. The findings are consistent with previous studies that report the impact of digitalization on political communication quality. Prior research has shown that digital media environments tend to encourage sensationalism, framing bias, and reduced verification in news production. Studies on algorithmic media systems also confirm that engagement-based recommendation systems amplify emotionally charged political content. This study extends previous research by integrating three dimensions of ethical practices, algorithmic governance, and audience behavior into a single analytical framework. Unlike earlier studies that often examined these factors separately, this research demonstrates how their interaction collectively shapes the decline in political information quality and the polarization of public opinion [23].

The findings can be explained through Public Sphere theory, which emphasizes the importance of rational-critical debate in democratic societies. The study shows that the ideal of a deliberative public sphere is weakened in digital environments due to the dominance of commercial media logic and algorithmic content distribution [33]. In addition, Agenda Setting Theory helps explain how digital platforms and media organizations jointly determine issue salience in public discourse. However, in the digital era, agenda-setting power is no longer exclusively held by editors but is increasingly shared with platform algorithms that prioritize engagement-driven content. Selective exposure theory and the filter bubble framework further explain how individuals are increasingly exposed to politically aligned information, reinforcing ideological homogeneity. This mechanism contributes to the formation of polarized public opinion and reduces opportunities for cross-ideological dialogue [34].

An important finding of this study is that algorithmic systems not only influence information distribution but also indirectly shape ethical decision-making in journalism. This shifts the traditional assumption that ethical responsibility lies primarily with journalists. Instead, ethical outcomes are increasingly co-produced by technological infrastructures and platform governance systems [14]. Another notable finding is the weakening of public trust in media institutions. While previous studies often attribute trust decline mainly to misinformation, this study suggests that perceived bias, sensationalism, and lack of depth in political reporting are also significant contributing factors. This study contributes to political communication ethics literature by demonstrating that ethical decline in digital media should be understood as a systemic phenomenon involving interactions between media institutions, algorithms, and audience behavior [26]. For media practitioners, the findings highlight the need to strengthen editorial standards, verification processes, and ethical guidelines, even under conditions of high-speed digital competition. Journalists and editors must balance engagement pressures with responsibility for information quality.

For policymakers, the findings suggest the importance of strengthening regulatory frameworks related to platform accountability, algorithm transparency, and media ownership structures. Additionally, digital literacy programs should be expanded to improve the public's ability to critically evaluate political information [35], [36]. This study has several limitations. First, the findings are based on qualitative data from selected informants, which may not fully represent all digital media actors. Second, the research focuses primarily on the Indonesian digital media context, limiting generalizability to other countries with different media systems. Third, the study does not quantitatively measure the degree of influence of each factor on public opinion formation [4], [37]. Future research should employ mixed-method or quantitative approaches to examine the relative strength of algorithmic, structural, and cultural influences on political communication ethics. Comparative studies across different countries are also needed to understand how varying media systems shape ethical practices. In addition, future studies should explore the role of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and automated journalism in shaping political information quality and public opinion formation.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyze the ethical practices of political communication in digital mass media and to examine how these practices influence the quality of political information and the formation of public opinion within the contemporary digital communication ecosystem. The findings indicate that political communication ethics in digital mass media are practiced within a dynamic and negotiated environment shaped by individual, structural, and cultural factors. Structural pressures such as algorithmic governance, attention economy, media ownership, and competition for digital visibility are the most dominant factors influencing ethical decision-making. These conditions contribute to the production of political information that is increasingly fast, simplified, emotionally framed, and oriented toward virality. The study confirms that the weakening of ethical practices in digital political communication leads to a decline in the quality of political information and contributes to the formation of a more polarized and less deliberative public opinion. Ethical principles such as accuracy, balance, and responsibility are often compromised in favor of speed, engagement, and audience reach.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on political communication ethics by demonstrating that ethical practices in digital media cannot be understood solely as individual moral responsibility. Instead, they are shaped by the interaction between media structures, digital technologies, audience behavior, and cultural communication patterns. This finding strengthens and extends existing perspectives in public sphere theory, agenda-setting theory, and mediatization theory within the context of digital transformation. Practically, the findings highlight the need for stronger editorial ethics, improved verification systems, and institutional support for journalists operating under digital media pressures. For policymakers, the study emphasizes the importance of regulating algorithmic transparency, strengthening media accountability, and promoting digital literacy to reduce misinformation and political polarization. These efforts are essential to maintain a healthy and democratic digital public sphere.

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This study has several limitations. First, it focuses on qualitative data from selected informants in the digital mass media sector, which limits generalizability. Second, the study primarily examines the Indonesian media context, so that findings may differ in other political and media systems. Third, the study emphasizes media and expert perspectives, with limited direct representation of audience perspectives. Future research is recommended to adopt mixed-method or quantitative approaches to measure the influence of ethical practices on political behavior and public opinion more precisely. Comparative studies across different countries or digital platforms are also needed to deep²² the understanding of global variations in political communication ethics. In addition, future studies should explore the impact of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, algorithmic curation, and automated journalism on ethical standards in digital political communication.

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