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Political Marketing on Legislative Elections in Indonesia: Case Study in Central Bengkulu

Marketing político en las elecciones legislativas en Indonesia: estudio de caso en el centro de Bengkulu

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the political marketing strategy used by Indra Utama of the Gerindra party to win the 2019 legislative election in Central Bengkulu, Indonesia. The Lees-Marshment market-oriented party theory is used as the basis for this research. This study focuses on the legislative election campaign period in Central Bengkulu from 2018 to 2019. The results of this study reveal a political marketing communication strategy that has succeeded in achieving its goals. This strategy focuses on dialogical communication to opinion leaders built by legislative candidates in the context of political contestation in rural areas in Indonesia.

Keywords: Political marketing, market-oriented, dialogical campaign, Indonesian election, central Bengkulu.

RESUMEN

Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar la estrategia de marketing político utilizada por Indra Utama del partido Gerindra para ganar las elecciones legislativas de 2019 en el centro de Bengkulu, Indonesia. La teoría del partido orientada al mercado de Lees-Marshment se utiliza como base para esta investigación. Este estudio se centra en el período de la campaña electoral legislativa en el centro de Bengkulu de 2018 a 2019. Los resultados de este estudio revelan una estrategia de comunicación de marketing político que ha logrado sus objetivos. Esta estrategia se enfoca en la comunicación dialógica a líderes de opinión construidos por candidatos legislativos, en el contexto de la contienda política en áreas rurales de Indonesia.

Palabras clave: Marketing político, orientada al mercado, campaña dialógica, elecciones indonesias, Bengkulu central

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INTRODUCTION

Democracy is a way to effect regular changes in political power in accordance with applicable regulations and ethical standards in a peaceful manner (Schedler: 2002, pp. 36-50). An election is a means of manifesting those civilized principles of democracy in a government, and general elections are a product of human history in terms of managing sovereignty in the midst of the people (Hyde: 2010, pp. 511-527).

A democratic political system in which government power is gained through general elections is ideal because it is equipped with infrastructures like political parties, parliament, fair laws, and guaranteed protection of civil/human rights (Harmes: 2020, pp. 201-232).

According to Schedler (2002), elections function as:

- 1- procedures for replacing power or routine political positions;
- 2- a mechanism to select leaders;
- 3- peaceful conflict resolution to avoid violence resulting from changes in leadership and articulation of interests; and
- 4- channels to access the societal sphere of power.

Elections become a measure of democracy because they give members of society the opportunity to participate in articulating their attitudes towards the government and their country (Sukma: 2009, pp. 317-336). In the context of elections, candidates for legislative members lead the public for direct involvement in the process of electing the head of state or the executive to the legislative election. Aspinall & Mietzner (2019) explain that community political participation serves political aspiration, so the democratic process requires massive and voluntary public involvement.

In terms of election activities, every candidate must carry out a campaign to seek mass support (Hyde: 2010, pp. 511-527; Umejaku, 2020). One strategy to win as many votes as possible is political marketing – a series of activities or processes used by political organizations, candidates, and individuals to make, communicate, give, and exchange value promises with voters-consumers, political party stakeholders, and the wider community. They have myriad goals and, in general, look for effective strategies to compete with the challenges of democracy (Aguenane, 2020; Tazri et al.: 2020, pp. 68-76).

mass media is a great force to relay political messages from parties and can change people's perceptions of candidates (Briandana: 2019a, pp. 764-775; Briandana: 2019b, pp. 72-85; Dwityas, Briandana et al.: 2020, pp. 306-314; Razzaq, Maqbool, & Hameed, 2019). Budianto & Erlita (2020) note that political communication is a way to convey messages to the public to obtain their participation or support; constituents can learn the aspirations of the people in government for the next five years (and which leaders are role models).

Indra Utama was one of the legislative candidates in the 2019 election who was elected as a member of parliament for Central Bengkulu with 1,300 votes –the higher number of votes in the history of the electoral district IV for the Gerindra Party. Indra Utama's strategy and success team is interesting because it differed from those of most legislative candidates. Indra Utama did not have a great IT team or a team of sub-district coordinators and village coordinators. Yet Indra Utama still won the election in Central Bengkulu. Therefore, researchers will analyze the political marketing strategy used in 2019.

Communication Strategy

Littlejohn & Foss (2009) state that communication strategies function to disseminate communicative messages that are informative, persuasive, and systematically instructive to the target to obtain optimal results. According to Rogers (2000), a communication strategy is designed to change human behavior on a larger scale through the exchange of new information. In order to formulate a communication strategy, it is necessary to account for the supporting and inhibiting factors of each component (Dwityas et al.: 2020, pp. 307-316). Macnamara and Gregory (2018) explain the stages of the communication strategy as follows:

- 1- observing problems,
- 2- planning and making programs,
- 3- taking action to communicate, and
- 4- evaluating work programs.

Political Marketing

Marketing, which is used in politics, can help candidates/parties to form ideas about the product they want to make (Waldis et al.: 2018, pp. 18-31). The product can be in the form of issues and work programs derived from problems faced by voters (the community). Jamil & Hesti (2019) explains that the use of a marketing approach in the world of politics is known as political marketing. In political marketing, the emphasis is on the use of marketing to help candidates and political parties to be more efficient and effective in building two-way relationships with constituents and society. This relationship is interpreted very broadly, from physical contact during the campaign period to indirect communication through news coverage in the mass media (Briandana: 2019b, pp. 72-85).

Meanwhile, Harmes (2020) explains that political marketing is different from commercial marketing. Political marketing is not a concept to "sell" political parties or candidates to voters, but a concept that offers how a political party or candidate can create programs that deal with actual problems. Besides that, political marketing is a tactic to maintain a two-way relationship with the public. According to Schedler (2002) that to be successful, a candidate needs to understand the market, namely the voters and their basic needs as well as the aspirations and constituencies that the candidate wants to represent.

It can be concluded that political marketing is the overall objective and strategic actions and tactics taken by political parties or candidates to offer and sell political products to voters (the public). In the process, political marketing is not just political campaigning activities ahead of elections but includes broad political activities in the context of offering political paratai and candidate programs as political products in building images, symbols, and programs related to the public (Aspinall & Mietzner: 2019, pp. 104-118).

Political candidates/parties need a political marketing approach if they do not want to lose support from the voting community (Ahmad & Popa: 2014, pp. 97-125; Budianto & Erlita: 2020, pp. 373-381). According to Kartini & Sulaeman (2018), political marketing is not to sell political parties or candidates to voters in an exploitative fashion but must offer explanations of how a candidate could make programs that deal with actual problems. Indeed, Aspinall & Mietzner (2019) define political marketing as "the party or candidates' use of opinion research and environmental analysis to produce and promote a competitive offering which will help realize organizational aims and satisfy groups of electors in exchange for their votes." It must be continuously performed by a political party/candidate to build trust and their public image (Vitak et al.: 2015, pp. 107-114).

Lilleker & Lees-Marshment (2005) emphasize that political marketing concentrate on the relationship between the political product of an organization and market demand. The Lees-Marshment (2001) model, also known as the Comprehensive Political Marketing (CMP) model, focuses on how parties design their policies in response to market demands (voters). Not only can marketing techniques be used by parties to communicate products, but they also guide how the party should behave in the political market. Lees-Marshment (2001) argues that there are two characteristics of the CMP model:

- 1- applying a marketing approach to all party organizational behavior (not just campaigns and strategies) and
- 2- integrating political science in analysis and marketing concepts.

Market-Oriented Party (MOP)

Lees-Marshment (2001) describes the stages of the market-oriented party (MOP) model. The initial stage is to conduct research to find out what the public wants as voters. The MOP knows its electoral victory also belongs to the consumers who voted (Jamil & Hesti: 2019, pp. 449-453). The results of market research are

used as a basic reference to design political products and establish good voter relations. Several marketing stages are carried out in the MOP model:

Market research through the mass media and data on voters' political trends and behavior.

1- Product design – the party, adapts to the market to design political products.

2- Product adjustment based on factors such as the ability to fulfill promises, internal party reactions, analysis of competition with other parties, and which group will be key to supporting their idea.

3- Implementation – the party implements the MOP model at each internal level.

4- Communication – the party communicates how its platform was designed according to the wishes of the voters.

5- The campaign.

6- The election(s).

7- Delivery – the party realizes its goals in accordance with the promises made during the campaign period.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The market-oriented party (MOP) framework is used to assist researchers in answering research problems and implementing the stages of political marketing strategies.

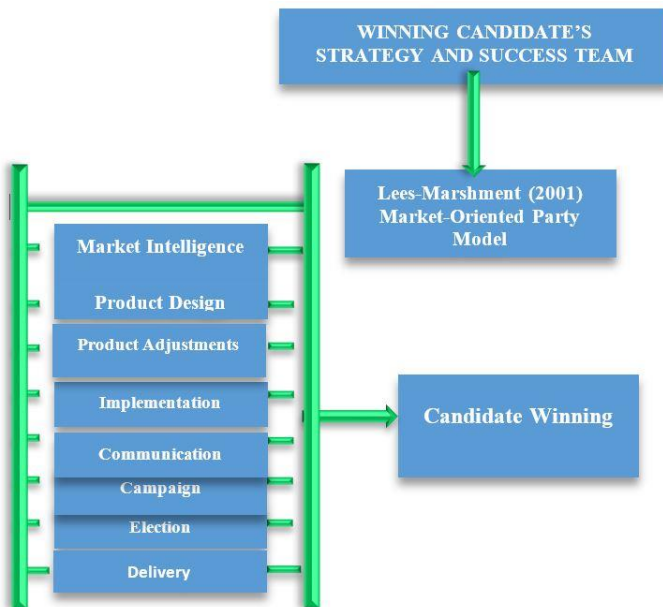


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

Figure 1 explains that the theoretical framework was used with the aim of getting an idea of how Indra Utama's political marketing was in the 2019 legislative elections for the Central Bengkulu. In this study, the Lees-Marshment (2001) theory is used as the main instrument to obtain data related to political marketing strategies. There were eight stages to win the election in Central Bengkulu.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a post-positivism paradigm. The post positivistic school views the world as a whole, and behind the fact, there are hidden emotional, feeling, and behavior elements that can be understood, understood, and felt when the researcher mingles in the real atmosphere (Lindlof & Taylor: 2011, pp. 241-281). Postpositivistic demands the union of the research subject with the object under study and its supporting subjects. Researchers choose this paradigm because it guides researchers to collect various realities and categorize them according to the research framework.

The methodology used a case study by adopting the qualitative approach through an in-depth interview. The reason the researcher uses the case study method is that the researcher wants to analyze the political marketing strategy of Indra Utama's election victory.

This snapshot case study focuses on the legislative election campaign period in Central Bengkulu from 23 September 2018 to 13 April 2019 to ascertain find an explanation of what strategies were used by Indra Utama to win. The constructivist paradigm is applied to interview material from the speakers to discover how the political communication was formed (Corbin & Strauss: 2014).

The criteria for informants in this study were those involved in Indra Utama's winning process team. The five informants were 1) Indra Utama, 2) Sudirman, 3) Muhammad Jalil, 4) Haryanto Belgi, and 5) Sultan Belin.

RESULTS

Based on the data obtained from interviews, several approaches were used by the market-oriented party (MOP) for Indra Utama to win the election.

Market Intelligence

When conducting market research before making a program (product), a candidate must first know what the voters (market) want and adjust the program accordingly (Harmes: 2020, pp. 201-232; Mensah: 2016, pp. 61-84). A special section is tasked with determining what voters need and what candidates and political parties should do, so their program fulfills voters' wishes. This can be accomplished by external professional services (e.g., survey agencies or political consultants) or candidates and political parties themselves.

In this context, Indra Utama already had social capital and knew the needs of the community. Before entering the legislative, political world, in 2010 Indra Utama served of the village in Central Bengkulu, and in 2014 he was a PDIP (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan) member of parliament in Central Bengkulu Regency. He conducted market research online and off. Online media included WhatsApp and Facebook (with almost all users on the latter service). The offline activities took the form of going door to door and attending wedding parties and socio-religious events (e.g., religious holidays, recitation, tahlilan). Market intelligence showed that improved infrastructure was the main program that interested the community, especially on the road, where damaged or missing components hamper their daily activities. In this context, Indra Utama interacted with youth groups and community leaders because their average education was high school. Based on their educational background, they could better understand what was being conveyed. Furthermore, Indra Utama also used religious figures in persuasion towards the community. In this context, Religious figures also played an important role in Indra Utama's strategy thanks to their role in society at large.

Product Design

After doing market research, product design is carried out. Product adjustments made at this stage pertaining to party programs (e.g., management, work plans, missions, and visions) and image building activities for candidates (e.g., how to act and speak the public eye).

Mietzner (2014) notes the following three qualities related to the political product:

1. The *party platform* is the main product of a political institution, which outlines its concept, ideological identity, and work program.
2. The *past record* of what has been done by political parties/candidates contributes to the formation of a political product.
3. Finally, the *personal characteristics* of a leader give a political product its image and credibility.

Indra Utama noted in 2019 that in order to make programs align with the wishes of the community, in this case, electoral district IV of Central Bengkulu Regency), societal problems must be observed, and advance communication is key. Sudirman (2019) affirmed that the programs made for Utama's campaign were "really needed by the community" according to which priorities were conveyed to them (i.e., improved infrastructure). Other programs such as "placing local sons and daughters in the field of bureaucracy" were also suggested.

Belgi (2019) states that in order to win this legislative election, there are several programs offered while continuing programs that were still incomplete, such as fighting for social infrastructure, especially in rural villages, placing our local women in the bureaucratic field, and others (Personal Communication).

Product Adjustment

It is occasionally difficult for parties to adjust their platforms; this is why the candidate must be open to the opinions of others. To adhere to the MOP principle, parties/candidates must be dynamic to respect voters' wishes. An existing product can be changed if the results of market investigations show that it is not suitable. Referencing external input to improve political products ultimately minimizes their shortcomings in the eyes of the voters (Baines et al.: 2014, pp. 172-200; Kholisoh & Bylmoreno: 2020, pp. 397-414).

Jalil (2019) notes that Indra Utama is "not the only one who proposes a program to the public; most candidates have the same program." With that said, Indra Utama has an exceptional public image because he carried out his promises when he previously served as a member of the DPRD electoral district (Personal Communication)

Implementation

Implementing MOP is essential for any candidate to attract voter support. However, this activity is admittedly difficult because it is handled carefully within the party. The higher the rate of the proposed change, the greater the effort to gain internal party support and implement these changes (Ramli: 2020; Segesten & Bossetta: 2017, pp. 1625-1643).

Besides adopting a market orientation by making policies that follow public opinion, Lees-Marshment (2004) states that even the prospect of small changes may lead to a kind of "opposition" in the body of the party. This phenomenon has been experienced by the Gerindra Party, but Indra Utama faced no obstacles implementing his program, as it simply continued to address concerns he faced as a politician in the previous period. Lees-Marshment (2001) recommends that party leaders who desire a MOP orientation must heed potential problems and make a number of attempts to respond to them. Moreover, party leaders must ensure that all party elements align with this new orientation in order to accept new political products.

Sudirman (2019) stated that to carry out the programs presented earlier, and this needs to be implemented so that the public is sure that the program made is actually implemented. During the implementation of the campaign, we visit the community, and we gather the community with our ability to advise the community that we will carry out the programs delivered in an earnest step by step, and do not let the community be disappointed because they chose our candidate (Personal Communication).

Communication

Political communication and marketing are a series of processes that require consistency and ambition in their values and programs (Jamil et al., 2019, pp. 181-188; Morissan, 2017, pp. 204-220). Once adopted by an internal committee, a program is communicated by a candidate or party to the public (voters). Communication should be as early as possible and involve all party members. Many parties may change political policies but are late to communicate that to their voters, which impacts the acquisition of votes during elections (Lees-Marshment: 2006, pp. 119-125).

The public (voters) can directly assess the interrelated performance of candidates, party members, and success teams based on the delivery of the information. Communication must be designed effectively to attract people's attention. In order to get more sympathy from the voters, communication occurs when there are community events, weddings, and calamities, etc.

Indra (2019) stated that the process of communication within the parties internal that is then conveyed to the public is the key to success. By carrying out good communication that exists between candidates and party officials and between candidates, officials, and the community, will create conduciveness and cohesiveness within the party's internal so that the people think that the solidarity that is established will add positive values to the Candidates and the parties that carry it (Personal Communication).

Belgi (2019) states to communicate the program to the public so that voters believe in us in many ways, like we can by gathering the community and delivering the program, secondly by going to the community house, through people's parties or individual parties, through taking events. Usually, our team in the villages will contact us when one of their residents gets an accident, and then we will take care of residents who experience the disaster and entertain them such as providing *ustad* to provide advice during the night of *takziah* or help people who experience the disaster (Personal Communication).

Campaign

Slater & Wong (2013) state that marketing concepts can make politics more democratic by increasing the quantity and quality of information flow from voters to parties, opening channels of communication, and making candidates more sensitive and responsive to any segment of voter needs.

Campaign messages will determine an election victory (Simandjuntak: 2012, pp. 99-126). Because there are so many ways to communicate in a democratic society, Ahmad & Popa (2014) note that legislative candidates are formed in a way that will craft a positive image for themselves and their parties.

A pre-campaign activity by Indra Utama came in the form of asking for voters' blessings in the upcoming 2019 election. He also accepted community invitations, attended *mudibah* (*takziah*), went door to door, offered agricultural assistance (e.g., tools, seeds) to farmers, and provided facilities for sports in villages. All of those strategies directly aid the electoral community.

Belgi (2019) stated that Indra Utama's team in the villages would contact the community if one of their residents were in an accident and would take care of residents experiencing distress by providing *ustad* or advice during the night of *takziah* (Personal Communication).

Indra Utama's television campaign effectively improved his reputation because the district IV community has a high level of enthusiasm for television broadcasts. Banners and billboards were installed in strategic places, predominantly offline. Online media efforts were less intense and carried out by a contact person (for WhatsApp) or the candidate himself (Facebook).

Says Haryanto Belgi (2019), "We brand candidates using social media, especially Facebook ... We also create contact persons for [any] input that the community wants to convey to candidates (Personal Communication).

Jalil (2019) reiterated that an effort was made to display photos online of Indra Utama engaged in social activities, mutual cooperation, competitions, and providing assistance for rural sports equipment (Personal Communication).

Election

Political marketing (in this case, the MOP model) designs programs to facilitate voter satisfaction. Candidates use their teams to identify voter needs and design products that match them (Choi: 2007, pp. 326–345). At the stage of the election, candidates and their success teams will optimize the roles of independent supervisors in both regional and central voting as person-in-charge for monitoring the voting process. In an election, the level of vote support determines whether a candidate is successful and is the key to victory. Actions are taken by candidates, parties, and success teams to ensure support reaches the targets set.

“The monitoring process in voting is the key to victory,” according to Sudirman (2019). “[Thanks to] the socialization [in] the community, [supervisors] come to the polling stations in order to cast their votes ... they wait for the vote count results at the polling stations and escort the votes to the court. The goal is to avoid the cheating that will occur.” Past elections have encountered a lot of fraud in the recapitulation of votes from the inadequacy of supervisors (Personal Communication).

Based on the findings, the program made by legislative candidates has been carefully prepared by the party in consideration of voters’ needs. This fosters disappointment in the community and ruins the party (Lewis: 2020, pp. 394-413; Paskarina et al.: 2019, pp. 21-42; Waluyo: 2020). Therefore candidates must ensure that the promises and programs made will be implemented properly after the election. They should be realistic, like the infrastructure improvements offered by Indra Utama.

Research on the market-oriented party (MOP) model proves that Indra Utama won the electoral process by following these stages. Because area IV of the Central Bengkulu Regency contains mostly villages, the road to get there is not in good shape. Market intelligence identified that many people complain about poor infrastructure in their area, so Indra Utama proposed repairing infrastructure in accordance with the program of the candidate and the party.

According to Kartini & Sulaeman (2018), the voter segmentation method is based on demographics differentiating political consumers by age, gender, income, education, occupation, and social class. Each category has different opinions of political issues (Paskarina et al.: 2019, pp. 21-42; Waldi et al.: 2018, pp. 18-31). There were specific audiences that the candidate wanted to address, namely, the youth group and religious leaders (Tazri et al.: 2020, pp. 68-76). It was easy for candidates to socialize with junior high and high school students to take part in elections in the hopes that they would invite their families to do the same. Religious figures are figures respected by the community; almost every time there is a problem in the village, religious leaders are consulted (Taufik et al.: 2014, pp. 192).

Indra Utama’s weakness was his incomplete organizational structure, but he had the advantage of being known to the public as a friendly, helpful, and trustworthy figure when he served as a member of the gods. Even though other Bengkulu legislative candidates ran on a similar platform, his chances of winning the election were higher compared to other Gerindra candidates.

DISCUSSION

The communication stage of the campaign is crucial, as it relates directly to the voting community (Kurniawati et al.: 2018; Sjahrir et al.: 2013, pp. 342-345; Sukma: 2009, pp. 317-336). Indra Utama prioritized dialogical communication by making lots of friendly visits to ulama, community leaders, and facilitators. He even went door to door to hold discussions. His approach used the regional language of the Rejang tribe, and he paid attention to the religious nuances of Islam. He showed concern for community members, particularly those affected by the disaster, and made a tribute to troubled families. He entertained people and gave lectures with sympathy. The delivery stage is the stage when the elected candidates carry out the programs promised during the campaign. This stage is crucial to maintain public trust in the party so that it will be even easier to gain votes if the candidate runs again in a future election. Indra Utama was a member of the DPRD electoral district I from 2014-2019, where he had a record of fulfilling his promises 70% of the time. This had

a very positive impact on him in the 2019 election when he was once again elected as a member of parliament in Central Bengkulu.

CONCLUSION

In addition to his religious strategy beginning one year before the campaign period, Indra Utama's political marketing successfully implemented all stages of the Lees-Marshment theory and socio-cultural concepts. This research concludes that the key to gaining public sympathy lies in the campaign dialogue in the villages, and that is why the public trusted Indra Utama in the 2019 Central Bengkulu elections.

This research is limited to the political communication strategy of a legislative member candidate who participates in regional political contestation in Indonesia, while the political communication strategy used is based on the concept of Market-Oriented Party. For further studies, it is necessary to explore various political communication strategies with different approaches and also different characteristics of voters so that an understanding of the diversity of political communication strategies in Indonesia can be developed.

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