
General Election Commission Public Communication Strategy in Increasing General Election Participation in Blitar

Tiara Lora Amida¹, Sintar Nababan², Widhihatmini³, Ardian Setio Utomo^{4*}

^{1,2,3,4}Program Studi Manajemen Informasi Komunikasi, Sekolah Tinggi Multi Media, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Email: ¹tialora.mik18@mail.mmtc.ac.id, ²sintarnababan@mmtc.ac.id, ³widhihatmini@mmtc.ac.id, ^{4*}ardian@mmtc.ac.id

Abstract

The Blitar City General Election Commission (KPU) in the 2019 election succeeded in achieving the target number of public participations of 84% compared to 78% in the 2014 election. The KPU's success in increasing public participation in the 2019 election certainly had a good communication strategy. This research aims to determine the KPU's public communication strategy in increasing participation in the 2019 election in Blitar City. This research uses a qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of interviews, observation, and documentation. This research uses Lasswell's communication strategy theory, namely selecting and determining communicators, determining target audiences, using techniques for composing messages and choosing media or communication channels. The research results show that the KPU's strategy in determining communicators involves all KPU members and staff, coordinates with relevant stakeholders, and forms ad hoc bodies and Democracy Volunteers. The KPU's strategy in preparing messages is to use language adapted to the target audience, namely local and contemporary languages. The KPU's strategy in choosing media or communication channels uses online, offline, and communication channels. This strategy has succeeded in increasing community participation in accepting political stimuli, individual social characteristics, political systems, political parties, and regional differences so that socialization can be accepted and understood effectively.

Keywords: Public Communication, General Elections, Communication Strategy

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the process of exchanging information to influence and change the attitudes and behavior of other people (Cangara, 2017). It is also an essential human activity that enables a person to receive and provide information or messages according to what is needed (Asri, 2022). Communication is effective if there is a similarity of meaning between the recipient and sender of the message. In order to achieve effective communication, it is necessary to have a good and efficient communication strategy. Communication strategy combines planning and management with various approaches to achieve a goal (Suryadi, 2018). The communicator will carry out the communication strategy with a mature planning and management structure in conveying the message to the target recipient for a specific purpose.

Communication strategies are needed in every aspect, including general elections, where the public plays a significant role in the concept of a democratic country. The concept of

a rule of law and democracy requires the administration of government based on law, which originates from the people's wishes, the aspirations of the people, and for the people (Suhartini, 2019). Therefore, the election of leaders requires community participation, which is a benchmark for a country's democracy. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), democracy is said to have established participation if voting is 70%. This figure indicates the success of holding general elections by looking at the level of public participation (Widodo, 2018).

Community participation in their voting rights in general elections refers to political participation. According to Sitepu, political participation is the active participation of society in various political activities that will influence various government policies and the election of state leaders (Wardhani, 2018). Participation in general elections is a serious concern for the government and organizers because community participation determines the success or failure of elections. Political participation is a form of community involvement in a democratic government system, and according to Gaffar, general elections are the primary means of realizing democracy in a country (Efriza, 2012).

A General Election (Pemilu) is a voting process activity to elect a potential leader, and according to Effendi, elections are a means for the nation and state to carry out democracy (Rahma, 2022). However, with conditions of democratic freedom that tend to run wild and uncontrolled recently, the implementation of elections has become quite worrying (Rahma, 2022). Elections are held every five years and are known as the People's Democratic Party. Every person who has met the requirements as a voter is required to vote and become a permanent voter.

In 2024, there will be at least 57 countries, including members of the European Union, with democratic parties like Indonesia. This major event will involve around 49% of the world's population and 60% of Gross Domestic Product. In the United States, elections will be held on November 5, 2024, to elect presidential, senate, and House of People's Representatives candidates. Taiwan will hold elections this year on January 13, 2024. Taiwan's elections this year will also shape Beijing's approach to the self-ruled island that the United States has repeatedly threatened to invade. Bangladesh will also hold elections this year on January 7, 2024. There is a growing issue that this Bangladesh election has the potential to be held one-sided. The Awami League currently rules Bangladesh, and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will hold power for a fourth consecutive term. Meanwhile, the main opposition and several other parties said they would boycott the election. Meanwhile, in India, the General Election Commission is preparing to hold the next election in 2024. However, it has yet to be discovered when the election will be held. Meanwhile, India will hold elections twice to elect parliament and president. India operates a parliamentary system of government, meaning that representatives elected in elections will occupy the lower house, also called the Lok Sabha. However, India's electoral system is a simple majority system. Party officials said that the 543 electoral districts have different castes and social structures. This means that party leaders face a huge challenge in adapting campaign themes to each constituency. Additionally, the party system in India needs to be more cohesive. In the last election, 40 parties managed to enter parliament, making it difficult to form a coalition government.

Society has a dynamic level of political participation, and one of the problems is related to motivation, where the majority of people admit that their choice of leader candidates is driven by transaction factors and elements of emotional closeness, even ignoring the vision and mission which should be used as a measure in choosing (Liando, 2016). In fact, in its development, elections have not been able to become a means of transforming social change in the desired direction (Subiyanto, 2020). It could even be said that at

almost the same time, the ongoing practice of democracy has also given rise to various distortions and paradoxes, which are often worrying (Sutisna, 2023).

Furthermore, the election law needs to be revised, especially concerning candidate requirements. So far, the applicable regulations have yet to provide boundaries for which people are eligible to become candidates and which are not. Because there are no restrictions, the result is that people often choose wrongly or do not want to vote because they do not like the candidates presented (Liando, 2016). This is one of the tasks of organizing elections, namely the General Election Commission (KPU) as a state institution with the authority and responsibility to organize elections. In Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections, the general election organizing institutions are the KPU, the Election Supervisory Body, and the Election Organizer Honorary Council (DKPP) as one election organizing unit in Indonesia. Apart from being the election organizer, the KPU is also obliged to attract public participation and achieve national participation targets as an indicator of the KPU's success in increasing election participation. Even though political rights and civil liberties have been guaranteed by the constitution and political participation of the community has become more comprehensive, at the empirical level, elections are still unable to deliver the Indonesian people genuinely sovereign (Zuhro, 2019).

This research took place at the General Election Commission (KPU) in the city of Blitar, one of the cities in Indonesia, which has this role based on KPU Decree Number 10 of 2018 concerning Socialization, Voter Education, and Community Participation in the Implementation of General Elections. The Blitar City KPU is increasing community participation through outreach so that people understand the importance of their voting rights in elections. This is an implementation of the justice policy transition, which is increasingly intensive, along with the transition toward consolidation (Nastiti, 2022).

Efforts to increase public participation in elections require an effective and systematic public communication strategy. This communication strategy is a plan that involves a combination of the communication elements themselves, namely the communicator, message, channel, and target recipient. Socialization to increase public participation in elections is needed at every election so that people become more aware and understand the importance of their voting rights because the implementation of elections provides benefits for the welfare of society, as a tool of democracy, a means of community participation, a solution to changing leadership, legitimizing elected leaders, a place for people to submit aspirations, socialize and build relationships (Hidayat, 2020).

Based on data from the KPU for the city of Blitar, the public participation rate in the 2014 election reached 78%, while in the 2019 election, it increased to 84%, with a total number of voters using their voting rights of 97,133 voters from the total Permanent Voter List (DPT) for the city of Blitar of 113,544 people. This data shows the success of the Blitar City KPU in increasing public participation in the 2019 elections. This success certainly has a good, structured, and systematic communication strategy. Although, in general, the implementation of simultaneous elections in 2019 has left various problems, one of which is the phenomenon of repeat voting (Kambo, 2021). However, in this case, communication strategy refers to the public communication strategy of an institution, namely the KPU of Blitar City, which is aimed at a broad audience, namely the people of Blitar City. It is interesting to know more about the public communication strategy carried out by the KPU of Blitar City in its efforts to increase public participation in elections. 2019 in the city of Blitar. The urgency of this research is to learn more about the Blitar City KPU's public communication strategy for increasing public participation in the 2019 election, especially in welcoming the 2024 and subsequent elections, considering that the 2019 election is a benchmark for the 2024 election where one of the targets is not only a

high voter participation rate but also the quality of the voters themselves (Evita, 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication is generally known to be a process of conveying messages from the sender to the recipient. According to Rogers, communication is a process of exchanging messages between two or more people to gain in-depth mutual understanding (Cangara, 2017). Communication is said to be effective if the sender interprets the message received the same way (Asriadi, 2020). The similarity of meaning in effective communication is determined by how the message is understandable and influences the recipient's interpretation.

Communication strategy combines planning and management with a planned approach to achieving a goal (Suryadi, 2018). A communication strategy in an organization is related to communication management issues that are adapted to management functions. Selecting a strategy in communication planning is a crucial step that determines the success of achieving an organization's communication goals.

Communication strategy includes communication planning. Communication planning consists of how the message is sourced, the message processing process, and how the message is used in the communication process. The nature of communication strategy is integrated with communication planning. The nature of communication strategy is inherent in all communication actors, which begins with strategic thinking from the leaders of an organization or institution (Suryadi, 2018). The characteristics of the communication strategy in question include:

1. Integration from communication planning studies,
2. Involving the role of the communicator's credibility,
3. Requiring precise communication planning and settings, and
4. Communication planning can be used in various situations.

In practice, communication strategies are directed at the public, so according to Dennis Dijkzeul and Markus Moke, public communication is defined as activities and communication strategies aimed at specific target audiences (Subandriyo, 2020). Furthermore, public communication is often called collective communication, speech communication, rhetorical communication, public speaking, and audience communication. In public communication, there is a process of conveying messages by an organization or institution to a broader audience. Communicators in public communications convey messages using mass media, online media, and other media channels to reach a more comprehensive and specific audience. Straightforward delivery of message packaging, promotion, and socialization is now possible with interactive multimedia devices such as social media platforms (Ardian S. U., 2023).

The basis of a public communication planning strategy is the communication elements themselves. According to Lasswell, the essential elements of communication are "Who says what, to whom through what channels, and what effect" (Cangara, 2017). Furthermore, in formulating communication planning strategies based on Laswell's communication theory, care needs to be taken in selecting and determining communicators because communicators in communication activities are the main actors as sources and controls. The success and failure of communication are determined by the communicator as the compiler and sender of the message to the audience. Therefore, communicators must have communication skills and creativity to demonstrate credibility as representatives of an organization. Communicators also have a role in determining the image of the organization they support.

At least three requirements must be possessed as a communicator, including 1) Credibility, meaning that the communicator must be able to attract the attention and trust

of other people. A communicator's credibility plays a vital role in persuasively conveying a message. The message conveyed by the communicator determines the perspective of other people. The communicator's credibility is an essential indicator in an organization's public communication planning strategy, which determines the effectiveness of the message and the audience's perspective on the message conveyed. According to Berlo, indicators of a communicator's credibility are having communication skills, extensive knowledge, an honest and friendly attitude, and being able to adapt to society's social and cultural system. 2) Attractive, meaning that the communicator must have an attraction mechanism to influence public attitudes. The attractiveness of communicators comes from physicality, abilities, and similarities. According to Mill and Anderson, their research found that the physical attractiveness of attractive communicators more easily arouses a person's attitudes and thoughts. 3) Power, meaning that the communicator must have the power to influence the public. Communicators with power and influence over their followers will more easily convey the desired message and impact. For example, an institution collaborates with influencers as a communication strategy to convey a particular program. Influencers with a broad following indicate great power over the public, resulting in a significant impact. This is what organizations need to consider when collaborating with influencers by looking at the segmentation of their followers and the target audience for the program that will be delivered (Cangara, 2017). A communicator will be successful in communicating if he can change the attitudes, opinions, and behavior of the communicant through the mechanism of attraction if the communicant feels that they are participating with him (Ria L., 2021).

Apart from that, determining the target audience is also a consideration in formulating a communication strategy. Determining the target audience in a communication strategy determines the success of the communication program determined by the audience. All communication activities will be directed at the target audience, so it is necessary to understand the characteristics of the community, especially the target audience. If the target audience is not interested in the program, it means that the communication activities carried out were unsuccessful. That is why communicators need to determine and know the target audience.

Another aspect of formulating a communication strategy is compiling a message, which is an arrangement of information to be conveyed by the communicator so that the audience receives and interprets it. Messages Communicators, in preparing messages, need to recognize the nature of the program to be implemented. If the program is commercial to invite the audience to buy the offered product, then the message is persuasive and provocative. If the form of the program is outreach, then the message is persuasive and educative. If the program being implemented is known to the public, then the nature of the message is informative (Cangara, 2017). The message or information conveyed also influences the success of communication (Nabilla Kusuma V., 2018).

Choosing the suitable communication media is essential in formulating a communication strategy. The choice of communication media is adjusted to the characteristics of the message and the type of media owned by the target audience. The message is distributed through mass media such as newspapers, television, and radio for a broad target community. Specific community targets are channeled through leaflets or group communication channels. When determining the type of media to be used, shifts often occur due to rapid developments and changes in media. Print, electronic, outdoor, and traditional media have been classified as old media. Internet media and social media are classified as new media. Communicators need research in determining media to find out the media used by the audience as well as the media's strengths and weaknesses.

The selection of communicators and media in conveying messages requires support and participation from the community. Participation is the involvement of individuals or groups in an activity. According to Isbandi, community participation involves identifying problems and potential in the community, selecting and making decisions for alternative solutions to a problem, implementing efforts to overcome problems, and evaluating changes that occur (Andi Uceng, 2019). Community participation focuses on the direct participation of the community in the policy-making process and decision-making processes that fulfill government and community life. Community participation in the election process refers to political participation. According to Sitepu, political participation is the active participation of society in various political activities by directly or indirectly involved in electing state leaders and influencing various government policies (Wardhani, 2018). Political participation is a natural community involvement in the democratic government system.

The level of public participation in elections determines the success of democratic elections. According to Milbrath, Factors that influence public participation in elections are 1) Acceptance of political stimuli, namely the acceptance of political stimuli, which is influenced by a person's openness and sensitivity through various personal contacts, organizations, and mass media. As a medium that provides political stimulation, mass media will encourage someone to be actively involved in politics. Online media also plays a significant role in providing political stimulation to someone who will become an actual reference for responding to material for political participation. Other factors influencing a person's response to political stimuli are knowledge, attitudes, experiences, personality, and values that apply in society. People are encouraged to participate in elections because of the stimulation they receive from mass media and online media. 2) A person's social characteristics are influenced by several factors, namely ethnic character, economic status, gender, age, and religion. Communities have different social characteristics, but despite these differences, many people are aware and care about their political rights. According to the invitation, people want to participate in the election by coming to the polling station (TPS) in their respective areas. 3) The local political system and political parties influence community participation. Characteristics of political parties in democratic countries that tend to seek mass support and fight for mass interests to attract public political participation. Various political parties in the community itself determine community participation. Even though every society has different social characteristics, many people are aware and care about their political rights and their role as a society. 4) Regional differences in environmental aspects influence people's political participation and behavior. Every safe and conducive area supports the level of public participation in elections (Wardhani, 2018).

People participate in elections based on their wishes without any authoritarian pressure. General elections are political activities related to making political decisions by voting for certain political parties to form a democratic government system. In holding elections to produce a democratic government system, the elections must be held by a stand-alone and independent state institution. The General Election Commission (KPU) is a permanent and independent national election organizing state institution. The KPU, together with the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) and the Election Organizer Honorary Council (DKKP), is a functional unit in organizing elections to elect members of the DPR, DPD, DPRD, as well as the President and Vice President. So, based on this description, this research wants to know what the General Election Commission's (KPU) public communication strategy is in increasing participation in the 2019 election in Blitar?

METHOD

This research focuses on the KPU's public communication strategy as an election organizer in increasing public participation in the 2019 elections in Blitar. This research uses qualitative research methods to understand the meaning of a phenomenon or event. This type of qualitative research collects and produces data in the form of oral and written data from the informants who are observed. The type of research used is descriptive, which will describe the KPU's public communication strategy in increasing participation in the 2019 election in Blitar.

In this research, primary data was obtained by conducting non-participant observations and direct interviews with sources. The secondary data source in this research is from the Blitar KPU documentation. Determining informants in this study used a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is the determination of informants based on specific considerations, namely those considered to know and master the problem being studied best (Sugiyono, 2019). The selected informants can provide the required information, namely informants who truly understand the problem being studied and have the necessary information. Researchers will conduct interviews with competent sources and follow the problem topics raised in this research, namely the Blitar KPU commissioners, including:

1. Chairman of the Blitar City General Election Commission,
2. Socialization, Voter Education, Community Participation and Human Resources Division,
3. Planning Division , Data and Information.

Apart from that, this research also conducted interviews with voters from the beginner voter base and the marginal voter base.

According to Miles and Huberman, data analysis is done by reducing data, which is a form of analysis to classify, sharpen, and organize data so that verified conclusions can be drawn. Then, the data is presented, which includes organizing, unifying, and concluding information. Finally, conclusions are drawn after all the information obtained has been processed and interpreted so that a logical and accountable conclusion can be drawn from all the information (Sugiyono, 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The level of public participation is a benchmark for the Blitar KPU to determine the response to implementing public communication strategies. This strategy was prepared by reviewing community participation indicators that support increasing community participation in general elections. High participation in elections shows the success of public communication and public awareness of their voting rights. The Indonesian KPU itself sets different national participation targets for each election period. In the 2014 election, the national target for public participation was 78%, while in the 2019 election, it was 84%. The city of Blitar exceeded the KPU's national target from the 2014 to 2019 elections, achieving community participation rates in voting in the 2014 and 2019 elections with an increase of 6%. The achievement of this figure exceeds the national participation target figure. This increase in participation shows the success of the Blitar KPU's communication in influencing public awareness to exercise their voting rights by coming to the polling station. This success shows the effectiveness of the KPU's communication strategy in increasing public participation.

This increase was realized from the Blitar KPU strategy in selecting and appointing communicators by involving all KPU members and employees in various communication activities. Members and employees also act as observers and supervisors of all communication activities in the field. As Khoirul Umam, Chair of the Blitar KPU, stated,

"All KPU members and employees have a responsibility for socialization, but specifically socialization is the responsibility of the socialization and community participation division as the person in charge". This means the KPU's strategy of involving all members and employees as communicators is a strategic step. Members and employees who have fulfilled the requirements as communicators, namely their credibility, attractiveness, and strength as KPU members, can make the public pay more attention to the messages conveyed so that this strategy can influence public participation in the election.

The following strategy is to coordinate with stakeholders including the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), Blitar City Government, National and Political Unity Agency (Bakesbangpol), Ministry of Communication and Information (Kominfo) at city level, Population and Civil Disability Service (Dispendukcapil), Health Service, TNI and Polri, sub-district and sub-district level governments, as well as participants from political parties. The KPU coordinates with stakeholders using three strategies, namely, two-way coordination methods, horizontal consolidation, and information dissemination. In this case, the KPU carries out coordination as a communicator to build a communication pattern because stakeholders also have an important role in implementing elections, so stakeholders are also part of the communicator. Information obtained from Rangga Bisma Aditya as a member of the Socialization, Voter Education, Community Participation and Human Resources Division said:

"As communicators, it is, of course, essential for us to formulate a communication strategy so that the programs and mandates carried out by the Blitar City KPU can be conveyed well to the community. First, our strategy is to coordinate using a two-way method, bottom-up and top-down. Bottom-up is related to the needs of the Indonesian KPU, where the final person responsible is the Indonesian KPU, so we, the Blitar City KPU, must provide all the data required by the Indonesian KPU. Top-down regarding the Indonesian KPU ordered us to implement a communication pattern to disseminate information to the public. Second, our strategy is horizontal consolidation, meaning how we consolidate with the regional government, namely the Blitar City Government, which has established an election desk and provides a two-way communication pattern to election participants and voters. Third, our strategy is information dissemination, where we carry out a strategy to collaborate with the media and spread access to information through social media platforms."

Stakeholders are also part of communicators because they are involved in organizing elections and are directly involved in dealing with the community. In its implementation, stakeholders are actively involved in election communication, so it also influences the success of KPU communication in increasing the number of participants in the 2019 election, apart from also forming an Ad Hoc Body, which is a committee formed by the KPU to assist in the implementation of general elections at the District Election Committee (PPK) and Committee levels Voting (PPS). In its implementation, ad hoc will interact directly with the public so that ad hoc has a strategic position as a communicator in election-related communications. As stated by Ninik Solikhah as a member of the Planning, Data and Information Division:

"Outside of the structural aspects, we formed an ad hoc body to disseminate material to sub-districts and sub-districts. The target for socialization is not only outside our structure but also internally before socializing it externally, including commissioners, members, and ad hoc bodies. We recruit ad hoc bodies with special requirements at the PPS and PPK levels."

Ad hoc serves as a committee member and takes part as a communicator who deals directly with the community. Thus, ad hoc also influences the success of the KPU's public

communication in increasing election participation. The Blitar KPU's communication strategy was also carried out by forming democracy volunteers. Democracy Volunteers is a social movement program that aims to increase voter participation and quality in exercising their voting rights. This program involves the broader community as pioneers of democracy in every existing community. In this case, appointing democracy volunteers as communicators in election-related outreach is very strategic to grow public trust, which impacts increasing political participation.

The Blitar KPU's next communication strategy is to determine the target audience. The target audience for the socialization includes family-based voters, first-time voters, young voters, female voters, voters with disabilities, voters with special needs, marginalized people, communities, religious groups, democracy volunteers, internet citizens, the general public, mass media, political parties participating in the election, employees, Domestic and Foreign Election Observers, community organizations, indigenous communities, and government agencies. The audience map can be determined through surveys, media content analysis, focus groups, and open forums. The KPU collaborates with the city government and related stakeholders in mapping the target audience. Therefore, the people of Blitar were designated as the target recipients of the 2019 election outreach message as conveyed by Rangga Bisma Aditya:

"In determining the target audience, the KPU will first see whether it will target the region or the target audience. If targeting our area, we are assisted by PPK and PPS, including at the smallest level, namely KPPS, which works at the TPS. However, in the process, voter segment indicators include first-time voters, namely at least 17 years old or newly married, with a maximum of 21 years old, who are using their voting rights for the first time, young voters, namely the age limit of up to 30 years, communities, marginalized groups, for example, groups who have vulnerabilities in the economic area, disabled voters, where we went directly to the party that had coordinated disability groups. We previously collaborated with the City Government to map disability groups so that our outreach was right on target".

Using the technique of compiling messages created and determined by the Indonesian KPU, they are handed down to the KPU in each region to be conveyed to the public. The Blitar KPU adjusts the content of socialization messages according to central regulations adapted to existing local wisdom. The local wisdom referred to is the choice of language used, namely Javanese, so that the wider community can better receive the message. The choice of language is also adjusted to the target of socialization. The target audience of young people uses contemporary language and terms so that the message conveyed is genuinely well received by all targets, as stated by Rangga Bisma Aditya:

"In preparing the content of the message, all material must have been prepared by the Indonesian KPU because it is an election, and the person ultimately responsible is the Indonesian KPU. The task of the Blitar KPU is to adapt it to local languages that can be understood by the Blitar people so that we adapt it to existing local wisdom. "Apart from that, socialization with local wisdom in each city and district is different, including in the Blitar KPU itself".

Apart from carrying out message-composing techniques, what is no less important is choosing media or communication channels in implementing communication strategies, namely online and offline media. The Blitar KPU optimized both media to support effective communication patterns with the public. Online media includes internet-based media, namely websites, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter and WhatsApp. Offline media includes print media, radio, and television. Apart from these media, the Blitar KPU also uses group communication media, namely direct socialization, by holding discussion forums or seminars, including KPU's 'Goes To School' election courses, voter education,

and citizen forums. The Blitar KPU also established the Democracy Volunteers and Election Smart House programs. Apart from optimizing various existing media, the Blitar KPU also carries out outreach by holding public entertainment such as dance competitions and choirs for high school and equivalent students, music concerts with the theme 'Vote For Indonesia,' holding sports activities with the theme 'Election Run Vote For Indonesia,' art performances, and a selfie photo competition at election polling stations.

Of the various media used in implementing communication strategies, the KPU stated that the most influential media is group communication media, which goes directly into the field and conducts face-to-face outreach to the community so that effective two-way communication is established. Apart from group communication media, offline media is also considered adequate, such as flyers, banners, and radio talk shows, which are intensively carried out by the KPU, as stated by Ranga Bisma Aditya:

"Offline or face-to-face methods because of their effectiveness, we can bring socialization props, and they can capture the messages conveyed by the KPU, such as invitations to come to the polling stations, money politics practices, socialization or campaigns without issues of ethnicity, religion, and race, which can be conveyed well when the public participates in socialization activities or communication processes carried out by the KPU using direct face-to-face methods".

So it can be interpreted that the influence of the Blitar KPU's public communication strategy on increasing public participation is reviewed based on aspects of public participation where the public as a recipient of political stimuli requires individual sensitivity to political stimuli through personal contacts, organizations, and mass media to influence individual participation in the election. In this case, political incentives refer to Blitar KPU communication programs or activities. The public will effectively receive suitable political stimuli through good communication programs to convey electoral information.

The KPU's public communication strategy is to use group communication channels, mass media, and online media to provide political incentives to influence people's minds. Continuous communication through various media means that people who were previously indifferent and unable to follow ultimately continue to follow and receive electoral information. In this way, people's minds are influenced and then change their actions to come to the polling stations on election day. Nina Wulan, a student at Balitar Islamic University and in the beginner voter base category, confirmed that the political stimulants provided continuously had succeeded in encouraging her to follow election information according to:

"The KPU once visited my campus, namely Balitar Islamic University, in the context of election outreach, but I did not attend because I had other activities that had to be done immediately. However, I learned about the 2019 election information from banners on the streets, around the campus, and on WhatsApp social media".

Dian Kusumawati, one of the voters from the marginal voter base, also felt the impact of the KPU's public communication as a political stimulus. This impact was the acceptance of the election communication messages conveyed by the KPU, which made Dian Kusumawati, who initially did not participate, continue to follow and receive the information; according to her, "I never took part in socialization in the 2019 election at all, but I know the election information from banners, banners, and WhatsApp was also there so I kept abreast of election information at that time".

Based on this explanation, the KPU's communication strategy as a political stimulus influenced increased public participation in the 2019 elections in Blitar. Society, which

initially tended to be closed in receiving political stimulation from the KPU, was eventually able to open up because of continuous communication and through various methods with the communication programs provided. As a result, increased public participation occurred due to increased public understanding and awareness of elections. Another important thing that needs to be considered is a person's social characteristics, including economic status, ethnic character, age, gender, and religion. These differences influence a person's acceptance of the communication activities carried out. The complex differences in social characteristics mean that the KPU must develop a strategic communication strategy to reach all social characteristics of society. One of the KPU's strategies is determining the target audience by setting the requirements for being a registered voter of at least 17 years or being married and having the right to vote for life. This determination encourages people who meet the voting age requirements to participate in the elections.

Nina Wulan, from the beginner voter base, and Dian Kusumawati, from the marginal voter base, confirmed that setting the minimum voting age requirement encouraged them to come to the polling station. If they do not participate, they will feel pressure from the environment because they see other voters' enthusiasm for participating. As stated, "I am aware of the right to vote because I am old enough to be able to vote. My friends came to the polling station, but didn't I? So, from there, I must participate in the election whether I want to or not. Otherwise, I will be embarrassed by my age and the people around me". So, based on this explanation, the Blitar KPU strategy in determining target audiences communicated with stakeholders has effectively influenced the community. The KPU can overcome differences in the social characteristics of society by mapping them with stakeholders so that communication can be right on target. In this way, public understanding and awareness of elections increases, and public participation also increases.

In Indonesia, a democratic government system encourages people to participate in politics because of the existing political parties. During the campaign period, political parties will seek mass support to influence people's actions to participate in politics. Political parties, as participants in elections, hold a strategic position as communicators because they directly influence the public to choose candidates from their party in the election. Their communication persuades the public to help the KPU in election outreach activities so that public participation increases in the elections. As stated by Dian Kusumawati:

"I took part in the election due to encouragement from myself and the environment. Here, the political party success team invites and gathers residents to vote for candidates from their political parties. However, it is not just one party; it is also the same from several parties. So, like it or not, I also have to vote because of their encouragement".

Based on this explanation, election participants, namely political parties, played a role as communicators in the KPU's communication strategy and influenced increasing public participation. Political parties that carry out persuasive communication to directly elect candidates from their party also influence the public to vote in elections. However, aspects of regional differences need to be considered because they include environmental aspects that can influence differences in individual character and behavior. The Blitar KPU created a safe and conducive election by collaborating with the TNI and Polri. This is done to provide security and comfort for the public in voting in elections of their own free will without any authoritarian coercion from other parties. As Dian Kusumawati said, "At that time, there was a lot of police and TNI at the polling station, so during the election, I wanted to vote because I felt safe with the polling station being guarded by them". The KPU's coordinating strategy with stakeholders effectively influences public participation

in elections. The TNI and Polri, as stakeholders and communicators in the KPU's communication strategy, play an essential role in the success of the KPU because they deal directly with the community. Thus, the KPU's public communication strategy in overcoming regional differences successfully influences the public to participate in the elections.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that the Blitar KPU increased participation in the 2019 Election in Blitar by creating a public communication strategy, including a strategy for selecting and appointing communicators by involving all KPU members and employees, coordinating with relevant stakeholders, forming an ad hoc body, and Democracy Volunteers. Then, determining the target audience is considered effective in increasing community participation in accepting political stimuli, individual social characteristics, political systems, political parties, and regional differences to target socialization appropriately.

Apart from that, the Blitar KPU also implemented a strategy for compiling messages by selecting language adapted to the target audience, namely local and contemporary languages. This strategy has succeeded in increasing public participation in accepting political stimuli, individual social characteristics, political systems and political parties, and regional differences so that messages can be well understood. As well as strategies for choosing media or communication channels, namely online, offline, and group communication channels. This strategy succeeded in increasing community participation in the acceptance of political stimuli, individual social characteristics, political systems and political parties, and regional differences so that socialization could reach the entire community effectively and simultaneously.

SUGGESTION

The Blitar KPU's public communication strategy in increasing election participation in Blitar can be further improved with a more effective communication strategy for the implementation of the next election by maximizing existing media, especially social media, so that it can reach the entire community. You can invite influencers or celebs to help with socialization. Apart from that, the Blitar KPU, in implementing communications, must more optimally target every sub-district, school, campus, and various existing communities so that the entire Blitar community indeed receives information and communication.

Considering that many people enjoy creative content, the Blitar KPU can create creative content by following trends currently prevalent in society and creating challenges to attract higher public response. Meanwhile, further research is recommended to study the narrative messages created and the optimization of communication media channels used with different research method approaches.

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