

Indonesian Election Commission's Political Communication during COVID-19 Pandemic: Case Study in the 2020 Denpasar Mayor Election

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Abstract

Objectives: This study aims to elucidate the political communication organized by the Denpasar City General Election Commission (KPU) during the 2020 Denpasar Mayor Election.

Methods: Employing a qualitative approach, this research involves observation, surveys of Denpasar residents, and in-depth interviews with key sources.

Results: The findings reveal that the Denpasar City KPU led the political communication efforts, supported by organizing teams at the sub-district and village levels, as well as the village government. The messages conveyed included election logistics, preferred leadership qualities, and health protocols, all aimed at ensuring voters' secure voting rights. These messages were disseminated through both traditional and digital channels, including interpersonal and mass communication. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, digital media emerged as the primary channel for political communication across various groups. However, this communication strategy did not significantly increase public political engagement, due to factors such as candidate dynamics, the impact of the pandemic, and the culturally diverse community's varying interest in politics.

Conclusions: This study highlights the role of the pandemic in enhancing collaboration between central election institutions and community-based bodies. In this context, the key factor for successful political communication during political events is the digital literacy of diverse stakeholders.

Keywords: Political Communication; General Election Commissions; Denpasar City; General Elections for Regional Heads.

الاتصال السياسي للجنة الانتخابات الإندونيسية خلال جائحة كوفيد 19-دراسة حالة في انتخابات رئيس بلدية دنباسار 2020

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ملخص

الأهداف: تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى توضيح الاتصال السياسي الذي نظمته لجنة الانتخابات العامة لمدينة دنباسار (KPU) خلال انتخابات رئيس بلدية دنباسار 2020.

المنهجية: باستخدام طريقة نوعية، تتضمن هذه الدراسة مراقبة، واستطلاع آراء سكان دنباسار، وإجراء مقابلات معمقة مع مصادر رئيسية.

النتائج: تكشف النتائج أن لجنة الانتخابات العامة لمدينة دنباسار قادت عملية الاتصال السياسي بمساعدة فرق تنظيم على مستوى الأحياء والقرى، وكذلك حكومة القرية. شملت الرسائل لوجستيات الانتخابات، وصفات القيادة المفضلة، وبروتوكولات الصحة، وتهدف إلى ضمان حقوق التصويت للأمناء للناخبين. تم نقل هذه الرسائل عبر قنوات تقليدية ورقمية، تشمل الاتصال الشخصي والجماعي. في ظل جائحة كوفيد 19-، برزت الوسائط الرقمية كقناة رئيسية للاتصال السياسي بين مختلف المجموعات. ومع ذلك، فشلت هذه الاستراتيجية الاتصالية في زيادة المشاركة السياسية العامة بشكل كبير بسبب عوامل تشمل ديناميات المرشحين، وتداعيات الجائحة، واهتمام المجتمع الثقافي المتنوع في المنطقة بالسياسة.

الخلاصة: تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على دور الجائحة في تعزيز التعاون بين المؤسسات الانتخابية المركزية والهيئات القريبة من المجتمع. في هذا السياق، العامل الأساسي في نجاح الاتصال السياسي خلال الأحداث السياسية هو الوعي الرقمي لأصحاب المصلحة المتنوعين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاتصال السياسي، لجان الانتخابات العامة، مدينة دنباسار، الانتخابات العامة لرؤساء المناطق.

1. Introduction

General elections play a vital role in upholding democracy, serving as a mechanism for people to exercise their sovereignty and establish a government rooted in democratic principles. The process of general election consists of basic concepts of popular sovereignty, for instance freedom, equality, majority rule, and accountability. Therefore, the successful election depends on political awareness which influence citizen involvement in elections.

Political participation directly affects citizens' perception of the legitimacy of the governing body. A higher level of political participation signifies that people are actively engaged in and comprehending state affairs. Conversely, lower political participation generally suggests a lack of interest in or appreciation for state-related matters. This reduced participation is evident in the non-voting demographic during elections. Therefore, to enhance political engagement, the KPU carried out information dissemination.

The General Election Commission (PKPU) Regulation Number 8 of 2017 outlines the dissemination of election information, voter education, and community involvement in the election of local leaders. The aims include spreading information about election stages, schedules, and programs; boosting public understanding of their electoral rights and responsibilities; and increasing voter turnout. Through information dissemination, the public is expected to become informed about election procedures and recognize the significance of their participation. The election information dissemination considered various targets, including family-based voters, first-time voters, female voters, individuals with disabilities, marginalized groups, community organizations, and governmental bodies, among others. By catering to these categories, political communication through information dissemination is expected to enhance participation across all segments of society. To achieve these goals during the 2020 Denpasar City elections, the KPU received assistance from various organizations and actively engaged the community.

Despite the efforts in political communication through information dissemination, the participation rate in Denpasar City's 2020 elections experienced a decline. The chairman of Denpasar City's KPU projected for a 77.5 percent participation rate in the 2020 election (Jaya, 2020). However, based on quick count data from Denpasar KPU, the Commissioner for Information Dissemination, Voter Education, and Community Participation stated that 46 percent of the eligible voters did not partake in the Denpasar City Election (Tabelak, 2020). This indicates that only 54 percent of the total registered voters exercised their right to vote. In comparison, the participation rate was 56 percent during the 2015 regional election. Irrespective of allowing Covid-19 patients to vote in the 2020 election, only three such patients participated (Tabelak, 2020). As a result, this situation prompts questions about the effectiveness of Denpasar City's KPU's approach to political communication in the 2020 mayoral election.

This issue is crucial for discussion because using inappropriate political communication channels can lead to ineffective strategies, resulting in wasted public funds and discouraging political participation. Therefore, it is important to discuss the political communication channels that have been utilized to map out the various tools for distributing political messages and assess how these tools can effectively promote political participation.

The objective of this study is to analyze the political communication strategies employed by the Denpasar City General Election Commission (KPU) during the 2020 Denpasar Mayor Election. Specifically, the study examines the communication channels used by the KPU and evaluates citizens' perceptions of the materials distributed during the election. Additionally, the study investigates the impact of these political communication strategies on citizens' political participation in the 2020 Denpasar Mayor Election.

The research questions addressed in this study are:

1. What political communication strategies were implemented by the Denpasar City General Election Commission (KPU) during the 2020 Denpasar Mayor Election?
2. What are citizens' perceptions of the materials distributed by the Denpasar City General Election Commission (KPU) during the 2020 Denpasar Mayor Election?
3. How do these political communication strategies impact citizens' political participation in the 2020 Denpasar Mayor Election?

2. Literature Review

2.1 General Election in Indonesia

Democracy, a hallmark of modern governance, stands as a cornerstone of many nations worldwide, including Indonesia. Within Indonesia, a pivotal aspect of democracy is the conduct of general elections, known as "Pemilu" – an abbreviation combining "pemilihan" (election) and "umum" (general). The term "pemilihan" stems from the root "pilih," connoting careful and purposeful selection. In the context of the Indonesian Dictionary, "pilih" entails a deliberate choice process, prioritizing excellence, and the designation of individuals or candidates. Conversely, "umum" signifies inclusivity, encompassing the entirety without focusing on specific or limited aspects (*Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*, 2008).

Elections hold a significant role in democracies, serving as a focal mechanism for political transformation in terms of shaping public policy trends and elite circulation. This structured and cyclical process fosters political change, a point emphasized by Surbakti et al. (2008). This importance extends to Indonesia, where elections are a key democratic practice, aligning with the collective aspirations previously expressed by political parties, as reported by Solihah et al. (2018). In Indonesia's democracy, elections are a means of entrusting individuals with mandates to address citizens' concerns in political deliberations. Through this electoral process, individuals exercise their rights to select representatives, an essential function given to them as the ultimate source of authority (Wardhani, 2018). Similarly in Huntington's perspective, as conveyed by Priandi and Roisah (2019), characterizes participation as citizens' endeavors to influence governmental decisions. This right bestows legitimacy, enabling citizens to hold elected officials accountable should they fail to adequately represent their constituents' needs, as indicated by Al-Fatih (2019). Therefore, based on Law no. 15 of 2011 concerning the Implementation of Elections, it is stated that "to improve the implementation of general elections that can guarantee the implementation of the political rights of the community, professional elections are needed; an election that has integrity, capability, and accountability through the General Election Commission so that public participation can be realized to support the implementation of clean, honest and fair elections in accordance with the spirit of democracy and local wisdom in Indonesia".

The quality of local democracy depends on three main aspects. Firstly, voters can exercise their right to vote. Secondly, election participants get political space. And thirdly, election organizers guarantee the technical stages and results are in accordance with the foundation of a democratic election. The first indicator, registered voters without exception is the main requirement. Then, the voter should be able to get the best information. Then, voters who exercise their right to vote should have their votes counted in full without any invalid votes. Election organizers and contestants have the same obligation to fulfill the needs of voters to be registered and then exercise their voting rights. The interests of voters are not only the obligations of the Election Organizer. Election participants must take part in educating voters to be active in updating voter data, election information, and how to vote correctly. If the election participants succeed in educating voters, the election can be held at any time (Habibi, 2020).

2.2 Political Communication Concept

Political communication has been defined by several experts. According to Susanto (2013), political communication is the delivery of politically charged messages from a source to the recipient to create an understanding of shared meaning. McNair (2017) understands political communication as a communication that involves messages and political actors, and this communication is usually related to power, government, and government policies. Political communication also can cause events which are initiated by the voters and this events influence policy making process (Bidwell et al., 2019). Based on this definition, it can be understood that political communication is carried out to obtain a common understanding between political actors regarding a political phenomenon and can provoke citizens to involve in political events.

Political communication has five main components, namely political communicators, political messages, media used in political communication, political communication audiences, and the consequences of communication in politics (Nimmo, 1978). Political communicators are actors who have the ability to carry out political communication. When someone becomes a political communicator, the role of the actor that is attached to the profession one has and the institution in which the actor is sheltered affects the actor's role as a political communicator. The second component is the political message.

Political messages can contain symbols, language, and public opinion. These three components are used by political communicators to communicate their ideas and understanding to the public to achieve their political goals. The audience's response to political communication is different from the message conveyed because of the different characters of the audience. Public response affects the communicator's participation in elections. Therefore, messages have great power in influencing political participation. In addition, political messages also shape the credibility of political communicators (Susanto, 2013).

To ensure political messages reach the political communication audience, political communicators must determine political communication strategies. Political communication strategy is formulated by determining the form of communication used. First, interpersonal communication is informal communication carried out between community leaders, political elites, or political actors so as to produce emotional bonds between communicators and communications and form a common perception and political participation. Interpersonal communication can be done with a one-step flow of communication or a two-step flow of communication. One step of communication is used when the audience has a high level of homogeneity and has a good emotional closeness with the communicator. If the target audience for political communication is heterogeneous, then the two-step flow of communication pattern must be chosen. The second form of communication is mass communication. This communication is done by involving the mass media as a tool to shape the knowledge, attitudes, and political behavior of the community. If you use this form, the communicator needs a gatekeeper as the successor and translator of political messages to the target of political communication. This gatekeeper is an actor who has the capacity to convey political messages (Setyarahajoe, 2013). Moreover, in communication, disinformation often arises in digital media, taking the form of deception. In certain instances, this disinformation has the potential to cause harm, while in others, its intent is explicitly malicious (Freelon & Wells, 2020).

Susanto (2013) has explained the dynamics of political communication in general elections. This study emphasizes the elite of political parties and legislative candidates as political communicators in facing the general election. Political party elites who are political activists and members of the legislature should use political messages that show partiality to the people so that political messages conveyed by members of the DPR (House of Representatives) voice the interests of all the people. This emphasis is what distinguishes this study from the research conducted by Susanto (2013). This study emphasizes more on political communication carried out by the Denpasar City KPU so that it can encourage public participation in the 2020 mayoral election. However, these two studies use the same approach, namely a qualitative approach.

In addition, another study that discusses political communication in general elections is a study written by Budiyo (2015). These two studies used a qualitative approach and promoted social media as a medium for political communication. However, Budiyo (2015) only discusses how social media became a communication medium in the 2014 presidential election. He stated that social media is a medium that has a high potential in increasing political participation. Through social media, people can voice their aspirations in the public sphere in the digital world. However, the lack of ethics in the use of language encourages conflicts between community members that could result in destructive behavior in the community. In contrast, this study does not only discuss social media, but also conventional media used by the Denpasar City KPU in carrying out political communication to its targets.

Based on the review done, this study proposed the following hypotheses:

H1 : Social media is the most dominating channels as the source of information for the 2020 Denpasar city regional election

H2 : Voters have low confidence for general materials delivered through Denpasar City KPU information dissemination

H3 : Voters has moderate understanding on general election process delivered through Denpasar city KPU information dissemination

H4 : Language style is impactful in conveying the materials for the 2020 Denpasar city regional election

H5 : Voters have low confidence in the election material presented by the Village/District Government in the 2020

Denpasar Regional Election socialization

3. Methodology

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative techniques for data collection. Qualitative data was gathered through observations and in-depth interviews with key informants. The researcher observed communication channels, such as social media and conventional media like billboards. In-depth interview questions focused on the communication channels used and the frequency of political information dissemination. Informants were chosen for comprehensive interviews, including individuals directly involved in the political communication of the Denpasar City KPU. These informants included Denpasar City KPU commissioners, members of the Denpasar City Government responsible for information dissemination in the mayoral election, candidate pairs and their campaign teams, political party figures or elites, local government representatives, village and hamlet/neighborhood leaders, community leaders including those from traditional backgrounds, economic community leaders, leaders from civil society, religious figures, and professionals from various fields. The research utilized political communication concepts, specifically components of political communication and political communication strategies, to develop interview questions and guide the collection of necessary secondary data. The secondary data used in this research included information about registered voters in each district and the number of voters who actively participated in the election. The collected data underwent qualitative analysis, following steps such as data reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification, as outlined by Sugiyono (2010).

Quantitative data was collected by distributing questionnaires to Denpasar residents and using statistical analysis to support the findings. A total of 1,020 questionnaires were distributed among the 444,929 registered voters. The number of respondents was determined using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error. Participants were selected through an accidental sampling method. Initially, the questionnaire was distributed to the researchers' relatives, who then shared it with their own relatives who were also Denpasar residents. The researcher further distributed the Google Form link via WhatsApp groups, other social media platforms, and to individuals encountered during the data collection process. The collected data were then analyzed using the binary logistic regression method, which helped examine the relationship between independent and dependent variables.

Prior to the interview and survey, the authors obtained verbal consent from all informants, and participants wherein they agreed that the information gathered during the interview and survey would be utilized for research purposes.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Overview of Permanent Voter List and Political Participation in Denpasar City

In the Denpasar City Mayoral Election (*Pilwali*), the population of Denpasar City comprises 444,929 registered permanent voters. Among this total, 53.37 percent of voters voted for their voting rights. Considering both the additional registered voters (DPTb) and the transferred voters (DPTb), the overall population of Denpasar City residents is 53.59 percent, accounting for 239,329 individuals. Breaking down political involvement by sub-district, East Denpasar holds the highest political participation rate at 59.41 percent, trailed by North Denpasar at 55.25 percent, South Denpasar at 51.40 percent, and West Denpasar at 50.50 percent.

While East Denpasar leads in political participation, the sub-district of South Denpasar hosts the village with the most robust political involvement, namely Serangan village, with an 83.37 percent participation rate. Conversely, the lowest political participation in the South Denpasar sub-district occurs in Renon, with a rate of 39.38 percent. Tegal Harum, a village in West Denpasar, has the highest political participation, reaching 63.49 percent. This result can be attributed to the active involvement of local leaders in disseminating election-related information.

Two additional sub-districts, North and East Denpasar, exhibit a relatively lesser degree of inequality than the preceding sub-districts. In North Denpasar, Peguyangan Kaja Village has the highest political participation rate of 77.22 percent, while Pemecutan Kaja has the lowest level of political engagement (49.62 percent). Peguyangan Kaja's elevated political

participation within the North Denpasar sub-district can be attributed to its candidate pair campaign team, which concurrently serves as a local legislature member. Within East Denpasar, Penatih Dangin Puri Village records the highest political participation at 74.22 percent, while Dangin Puri Kelod Village shows the lowest at 45.43 percent. Notably, Penatih and Pedungan Villages in East Denpasar manifest relatively higher political participation rates of 75.74 percent (Penatih) and 70.94% (Pedungan), largely because these two villages are the birthplaces of the candidate pair.

The decline in public political participation in Denpasar stems from various factors. As conveyed by one of the commissioners of Denpasar City KPU, the city's political involvement is particularly influenced by the candidates competing in the elections. This reason was further validated by village community leaders. Furthermore, the decrease in public political involvement can also be attributed to the uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of enthusiasm for local elections. The diminished interest in elections is due to the inadequate use of campaign materials. Village community leaders identified several aspects contributing to low political participation, including the limited awareness of immigrant communities regarding local leadership, commitments to ceremonies and work, heightened population mobility due to issues such as COVID-19-induced job loss among migrants, inadequate direct political education that fails to emphasize the importance of participating in elections, and the circulation of political news suggesting that one of the candidate pairs is merely competing to meet the minimum requirement of having at least two candidates for the election to proceed.

4.2 Communication and information dissemination by the General Election Commission (KPU) of Denpasar City

There was a significant difference from previous elections, as according to various community leaders, the COVID-19 pandemic posed challenges to the information dissemination efforts for the 2020 Denpasar City Election. The pandemic has led to reduced participation in information dissemination activities, as people's attention was diverted by their busy schedules and the general reluctance to attend events due to health concerns. This lack of involvement resulted in a dilemma, with the government urging people to stay home to curb COVID-19 cases, while elections required them to venture out. Eventually, this situation created a conundrum for field communicators and community leaders striving to encourage public participation in the Regional Election (*Pilkada*). The *Prebeker* (village leader) of Peguyangan Kangin, I Wayan Susila, along with I Wayan Sudarma, the Secretary of Peguyangan Kaja Village, explained that the pandemic hindered their efforts to effectively disseminate information, resulting in obstacles. In a similar vein, AA Putu Adi Pradana, SH, the Secretary of Pemogan Village, pointed out that the chain of information dissemination fell short in ensuring comprehensive delivery of information to the public. Meanwhile, Gede Radha Krisnanta, representing the Gerindra party, brought up the fact that pandemic-induced restrictions on face-to-face interactions escalated the resources needed for spreading information. Equally, I Wayan Eka Apriana, the Village Head of Sumerta, stressed that conducting information dissemination during the COVID-19 pandemic entailed added expenses, energy, and time. Gede Eka Saputra, Chair of the Renon Village Community Empowerment Institute, observed that the PPS (Election Committee) seemed to receive less guidance and instruction from the Denpasar City KPU. The level of guidance provided differed from previous *Pilwali* elections or the 2019 elections.

On the contrary, the Denpasar City Government asserted that no major hurdles were encountered during information dissemination activities. When considering the perspective of the primary communicator, the Denpasar City KPU, Ni Ketut Dharmayanti Laksmi, who heads the Division of Information Dissemination, Voter Education, Community Participation, and HR, indicated that significant obstacles were absent. She mentioned that the chosen information dissemination media were tailored to their budget and aligned with health program requirements. They utilized equipment and personnel within their possession to effectively conduct the dissemination. While some face-to-face dissemination plans were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, it did not lead to substantial hindrances.

Hence, this time around the Denpasar City KPU has maximized the use of information and communication technology (ICT) media such as social media and the KPU website to inform about the *Pilkada* intensely as effort to minimize the

transmission of COVID-19 (“Ciptakan Pilkada Tanpa Hoax, KPU Denpasar Apresiasi Peran SMSI,” 2020). Notably, this outreach extended beyond the KPU's official social media accounts, with involvement from local personalities like Kadek Inggit and Nanoe Biru, who helped spread information about the *Pilkada* (Riyanti, 2020). Besides, considering that social media users are predominantly millennials, the primary target is the millennial demographic, while also considering other active social media user groups within society (*Tingkatkan Partisipasi Masyarakat, KPU RI Gelar Rakor Sosdiklih*, 2020). For specific situations, SMS Blast was utilized. In addition, the Denpasar City KPU tapped into Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) and RPKD FM to keep the public updated about the election. Interactive broadcasts were conducted consistently each month from January to December 2020, tailored to the stages of each respective month. The KPU also maintained updates through WhatsApp groups involving prominent figures from the media sector, including television networks like Bali TV, TVRI, and INews TV. In a similar vein, the Denpasar City KPU took the initiative to furnish information concerning the enforcement of health protocols throughout the various phases of the *Pilkada*. This information was essential to ensure that the public's participation in the Denpasar City Election would not contribute to a surge in COVID-19 cases within the city.

The Denpasar City Election Commission took further steps by organizing online national seminars in collaboration with five universities in Bali namely Udayana University, Pendidikan Nasional University (Undiknas), Warmadewa University, Mahasaraswati University Denpasar, and Stikom Bali. These national seminars took place on two occasions. Online distribution of information was also conducted by youth groups (*Sekaa Teruna Teruni*) and stakeholders, including sub-district and village governments, as well as other ad hoc organizations. To enhance youth involvement in the Denpasar City Election, the KPU initiated a props competition, which saw active participation from the city's senior citizens. In this competition, *sekaa teruna-teruni* crafted eco-friendly information dissemination props and showcased their creations on their Instagram accounts. Beyond showcasing their work, these groups composed captions inviting the public to engage in voting and reminding them of the election date.

The Denpasar City KPU also engaged in producing promotional videos, sports advertisements, and brief clips. These video materials were broadcasted three times daily on RPKD and were strategically placed in multiple locations, including the Denpasar mayor's office waiting room, Sewaka Dharma waiting room, various parks across the city, the Denpasar morning/night market, Videotron Denpasar City, several traffic light intersections within Denpasar, and public events organized by the city government. Through these platforms, the Denpasar City KPU utilized mass communication to convey its message to the public.

Mass communication was a crucial element in educating the public about choosing their leaders. The Denpasar City KPU also participated in revamping and launching the Denpasar City KPU mascot and jingle through an online dance show. This initiative aimed to impart an understanding to the public regarding the traits that should characterize the leaders elected by the people of Denpasar City.

Additionally, the KPU engaged in interpersonal communication by promoting sub-district heads, village leaders, and hamlet leaders to create invitation-to-vote videos. These videos were then shared via WhatsApp groups of various sub-districts, villages, and hamlets/neighbourhoods in Denpasar. This approach ensured that everyone in these WhatsApp groups received reliable information about the Denpasar City Election. Consequently, it is evident that interpersonal communication led to the execution of mass communication by sub-district heads and village leaders within their respective areas.

Next, the KPU employed traditional means of information dissemination through various channels tailored for different segments of society. The Denpasar City KPU conducted face-to-face interactions with community groups that were crucial in disseminating information. This included distributing masks and shopping bags to both the local community and *Ojek* Online (online motorcycle taxi drivers), as well as providing essential items to those who need them. The distribution of masks and bags to online *Ojek* enabled the KPU to engage specific groups, encouraging them to further communicate with other communities while performing their duties. Through these contextual activities, the KPU provided information about the election day, voting date, and other pertinent details. Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Denpasar City

KPU introduced the Election Smart House initiative and carried out information dissemination in schools. This initiative was executed across all high schools (SMA) and vocational schools (SMK) in Denpasar City. Apart from targeting new voters, the Election Smart House initiative also extended its invitation to community voters and individuals with disabilities, offering them the opportunity to simulate the election process at polling stations.

The Denpasar City KPU continued to utilize campaign materials like fabric banners, regular banners, and billboards, which were strategically positioned across four sub-districts and in front of the Denpasar City KPU office. In an effort to bolster public political engagement, fabric banners featuring messages encouraging voting were also set up in all neighborhoods on December 9, 2020. Additionally, traditional leaders sounded the *kulkul* (a traditional Balinese instrument) to highlight the importance of the event.

The dissemination of information about various stage activities was also accomplished through print media, specifically newspapers. Furthermore, to amplify the impact of the election, the Denpasar City KPU distributed pamphlets and actively participated in tours conducted in conjunction with the Bali Provincial KPU. Through the utilization of conventional media channels, the KPU's intended audience for their political communication was the public. Also, the KPU has facilitated the close relationship between traditional leaders and their communities to enhance political participation within their respective areas.

The dissemination of information by the Denpasar City KPU was intended to enhance the comprehension and understanding of the community regarding their involvement in the 2020 Denpasar City election. This educational process was facilitated via KPU communication. In its capacity as a communicator, the Denpasar City KPU conveyed election-related messages through diverse communication channels. The conveyed messages during the information broadcasting covered aspects such as the election day and date, voting invitations, the election mascot, stages of the election process, and activities occurring at polling stations. Details regarding the specific election day, invitations to participate in voting, the progression of the local election stages, implementation of health protocols, and activities conducted at polling stations were provided to foster a clear understanding of the community's role in the Denpasar City Election. Through this information dissemination, individuals became aware of when to visit polling stations to exercise their voting rights, the requirements for casting their votes, and the procedure for voting on the actual election day.

Despite utilizing various means of disseminating information about the *Pilkada*, the Denpasar City KPU has not sought public input on what kind of information would encourage them to exercise their voting rights. Ni Ketut Dharmayanti Laksmi, the Head of the Division of Information Dissemination, Voter Education, Community Participation, and HR, noted that no public polls had been conducted to determine the information needed for the *Pilkada* implementation.

4.3 Discussion

In the realm of political communication, communicators utilized various media channels for disseminating information. Most respondents, as indicated by data from valid questionnaires, obtained information regarding the 2020 Denpasar City Election through social media (65.3%). Social media was highlighted as the most potent medium for information distribution during the COVID-19 pandemic by both HJ Yunisia, a Religious Leader, and I Wayan Sudarsana, a Denpasar City Bawaslu Member in the Dispute Resolution Division. Ketut Suarcana emphasized the importance of continuing with social media as a source of information in the forthcoming election periods. This is due to the prevailing digital era and the accelerated pace of information sharing on social media platforms.

The theoretical perspective on social media demonstrates its potential to influence the community's news agenda and even evolve into news itself (Phillips & Young, 2009). It is a significant factor in shaping and reshaping societal opinions. Serving as an alternative platform alongside TV, radio, newspapers, and magazines, which have been extensively utilized by the public, social media's rapid growth is transforming public relations within society. This dynamic medium has the power to persuade and alter public perceptions and behavior. Utilizing social media for communication can contribute to establishing or restoring reputation and trust, whether for individuals or institutions. Consequently, grasping the effective use of social media has become an essential requirement in contemporary times for facilitating productive interactions and

influential information exchange between conveyors and recipients of information within society.

In today's world, individuals use the internet in various ways to access global information. The influence of the internet and social media in daily life is virtually unlimited. Phillips and Young (2009) stated that social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and others have been adopted by 1 in 10 individuals, including workers, customers, stakeholders, politicians, and local communities. This underlines the importance of social media to facilitate broad discourse and even exert a significant influence on various issues. Apart from information retrieval, society has the capacity to evaluate the caliber of political information furnished, probe into information on a profound level, gauge the credibility of political information origins, and comprehend the advantages and disadvantages inherent in information sourced from social media, as highlighted by Hassan et al. (2020).

Phillips and Young (2009) explored a range of channels utilized in social media, including blogs, chat, email, games, short messages, social media releases, online surveys, and video sharing. These channels are utilized differently, adapting to users' preferences and goals. Williams and Edge (1996) delineated three communication technology roles facilitated by the internet and its applications: amplification, enabling information dissemination and long-distance conversations; durative, allowing information storage over time; and the introduction of alternative information through various signs, including writing and graphics.

The communication technology industry gives rise to cultural and industrial products shaped by commercial, social, legal, and political forces that interplay. In his book "The Second Media Age," Poster (2018) highlighted the transformative impact of interactive technology, network communication, and cyberspace on society. These developments are founded on social interaction and integration. Pierre Levy introduced the term "cyberculture," perceiving the World Wide Web as an open, dynamic, and interactive information environment. Moreover, new media is not solely a source of information and interaction since it has become a ritualistic means of forming distinct communities within interconnected groups. The media equation theory posits that humans treat media, including computers and cellphones, as entities akin to humans themselves. This approach delves into how new media can shape individual experiences and societal structures (Littlejohn et al., 2017).

In conjunction with social media, billboards were identified as a source of information on the election by 37.9 percent of the respondents. Despite being a conventional means of information dissemination, Gede Eka Saputra, Chairman of the Renon Village Community Empowerment Institute, noted that billboards lack effectiveness in conveying candidates' vision and mission as well as voting procedures. This is attributed to the fleeting attention people dedicate to billboard information. Additionally, the production costs for billboards are considerably higher.

Apart from social media and billboards, television and print media are also major mainstream channels. Television reached 310 respondents (30.4%) with election-related information, while 203 respondents (19.9%) relied on print media for the same purpose.

Integrating both traditional and digital information dissemination channels emerges as a pivotal strategy for enhancing the efficacy of information sharing during the Denpasar City Election. This approach, combining conventional and digital media, effectively caters to the diverse interests and requirements of different segments within the community. This approach is particularly for individuals who are unable to attend in-person gatherings. For these individuals, digital media serves as a means of accessing essential information.

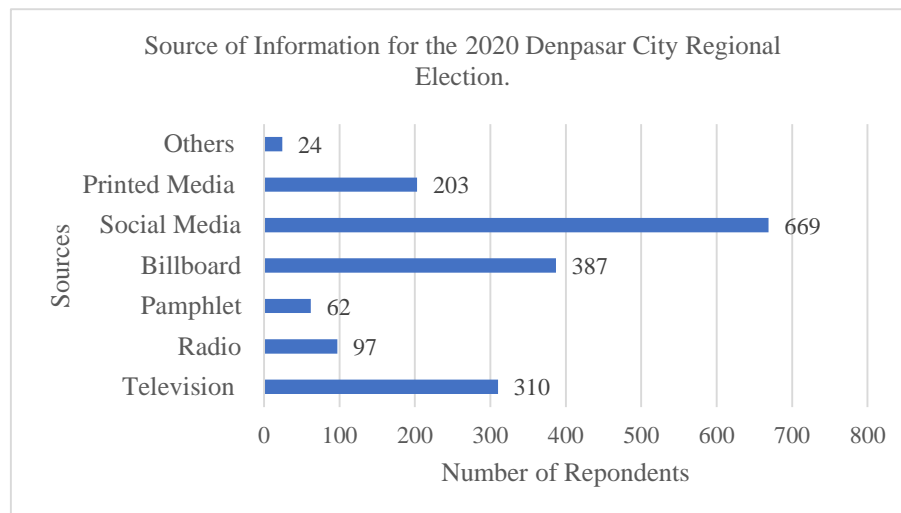


Figure 1: Source of information for the 2020 Denpasar city regional election

The primary entity responsible for disseminating information regarding the 2020 Denpasar City Election was the Denpasar City KPU. Collaboratively, the KPU worked alongside the village and sub-district organizing team to distribute information pertinent to the *pilkada*. Based on questionnaire data, a significant portion of respondents indicated that the dissemination efforts undertaken by Denpasar City KPU were compelling. Figure 2 visually represents the extent to which the information dispersion by Denpasar City KPU managed to persuade respondents regarding the presented election materials. As depicted in Figure 2, approximately 40.7 percent of respondents affirmed that the information spread by Denpasar City KPU highly convinced them about the general election materials. Conversely, only 9.5 percent of respondents expressed skepticism toward the persuasiveness of Denpasar City KPU's information dissemination. Notably, the confidence level in KPU slightly diverged from that of the organizing team. The organizing team at the village/sub-district level successfully conveyed election-related information, a fact acknowledged by many respondents. Specifically, 41 percent of respondents found the general election material presented to be convincing whereas 8.6 percent expressed strong confidence in the effectiveness of the information dissemination conducted by the organizing team in influencing their understanding of the general election material.

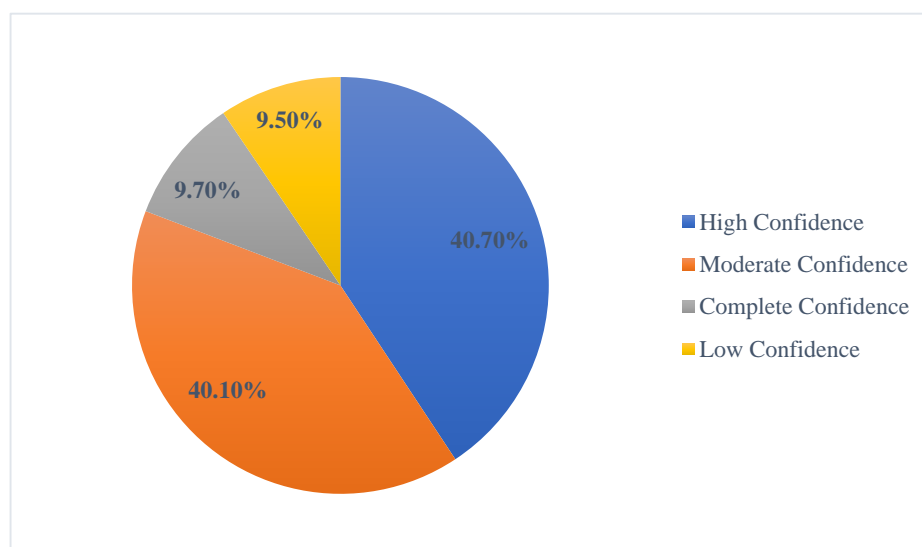


Figure 2: Respondents' confidence in general election materials delivered through Denpasar city KPU information dissemination.

Amidst alterations to the criteria for the selection of Voting Organizing Groups (KPPS), doubts arose concerning the newly formed KPPS. Ketut Suarcana, the Head of the Peace and Order Section, who also served as the Secretary of the Village Head of Penatih Voting Committee during the 2020 Simultaneous Election, highlighted that the newly elected KPPS possessed limited election experience. However, when the voting and vote-counting processes transpired on December 9, 2020, utilizing the SIREKAP application, the KPPS demonstrated remarkable competence and efficiency in their duties.

Assessing the degree to which the Denpasar City Election 2020 information dissemination, formulated by Denpasar City KPU, enhances understanding of the election process, a substantial number of respondents affirmed the comprehensibility of the information shared. The subsequent Figure 3 illustrates the extent to which the Denpasar City KPU's election message can convey understanding. According to Figure 3, approximately 44.4 percent of respondents indicated that the Denpasar City KPU's election information dissemination message for the Denpasar City 2020 election provided them with the basic understanding. Nevertheless, a total of 72 respondents (7.1%) acknowledged that they did not grasp the message put forth by the Denpasar City General Elections Commission.

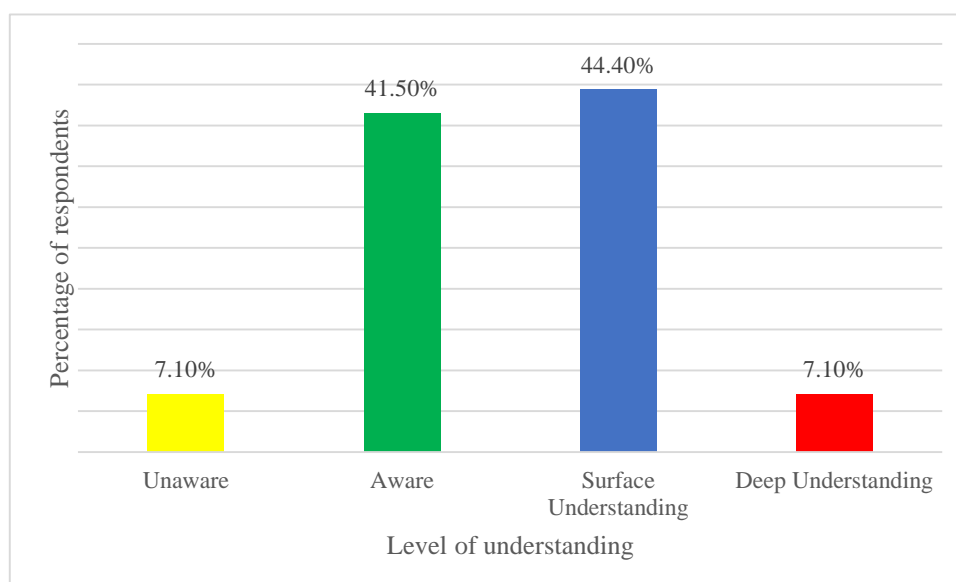


Figure 3: Respondents' understanding of the general election process delivered through Denpasar city KPU information dissemination.

Beyond the respondents' perspectives and comprehension of the election materials and procedures, the substance of the communicated information represents a crucial factor in effectively reaching and engaging the public. I Wayan Sudarsana, a member of Denpasar City *Bawaslu* within the Dispute Resolution Division, and HJ Yunisia, a Religious Leader, emphasize that furnishing information about the background of candidate pairs, along with their vision and mission, is imperative to enable individuals to make informed choices.

Regarding the KPU's choice of language, a notable 69 percent of respondents (refer Figure 4) expressed that the language employed by KPU in conveying election materials left an impactful impression about the general election. Conversely, a mere 5.7 percent of respondents indicated that the language used by KPU for delivering election materials did not leave an impactful impression. The attributes of the favored language style comprise messages conveyed through simple sentences, an injection of humor, and the use of figurative expressions. HJ Yunisia further reinforced this sentiment by expressing a preference for simplicity and clarity in language style. On the other hand, Yosep Yulius Diaz, Chairman of Flobamora Bali, endorsed a direct and assertive language style, while Yus Sudibya, the founder of the @infodenpasar

Instagram account, emphasized the community's demand for an informal and straightforward language style that connects with everyone.

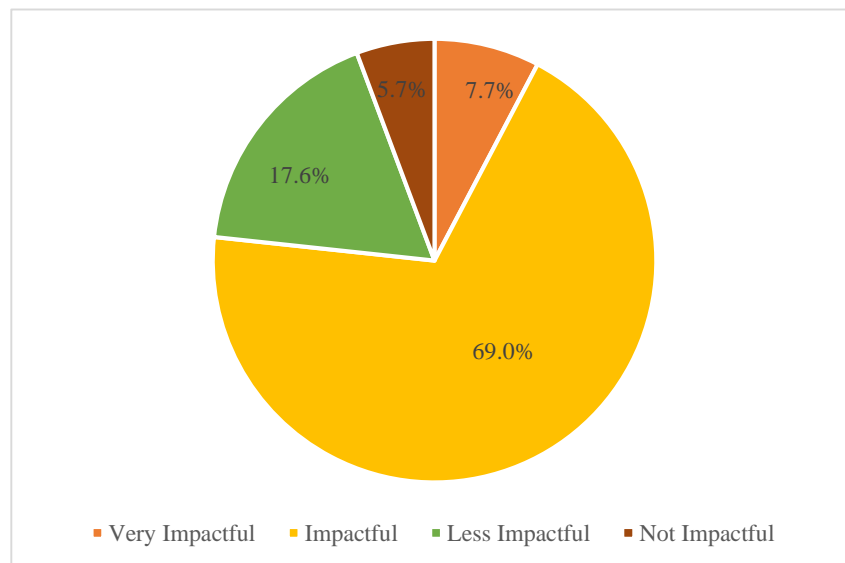


Figure 4: Impact of language style in conveying the materials for the 2020 Denpasar city regional election

The village government also contributed greatly to the information dissemination process. This local administrative body was instrumental in distributing information about the 2020 Denpasar City election. Its importance lies in its proximity to the community, which sets it apart from other tiers of government within the governance framework. This proximity allows the village government to directly engage with the village-level organizing team, which ultimately increases the effectiveness of information sharing. Luh Manik Sariniti, the Secretary of Penatih Village, stated that the Penatih Village head played a crucial role in delivering voting procedures and health protocol details for the December 9, 2020 election. This was achieved through consistent communication between various election organizers, such as PPS and KPPS members, along with other local leaders. Subsequently, the head of Penatih Village undertook community-wide information dissemination throughout the village. This briefing by village leaders showcased their dedication to spreading awareness about the *Pilkada*, which in turn bolstered the successful information dissemination for the 2020 Denpasar City Election.

Besides guiding efforts, the village head effectively rallied stakeholders by fostering collaboration among community leaders within the village. I Wayan Eka Apriana stated that their concerted efforts resulted in a synergistic approach, ensuring the participation of all relevant parties in disseminating information for the 2020 Denpasar City elections. Furthermore, the village head harnessed the energy of the youth, many of whom were KPPS members. They also engaged indigenous groups and neighborhood leaders, leveraging their knowledge of the local community's dynamics. An equally vital responsibility of the village head was to determine the most suitable information dissemination channels for the *Pilkada*. With a deep understanding of their respective regions, village leaders played a focal role in making this decision. I Wayan Eka Apriana, the Sumerta Village Head, echoed this response, highlighting that, in the context of Sumerta Village, a face-to-face approach supported by health and digital protocols was employed to convey *Pilkada*-related information. Considering the perspectives of the respondents (refer Figure 5), it is evident that 43 percent held the belief that the information disseminated by the Village or Sub-District Government proved to be adequate in persuading them regarding the general election materials presented. Conversely, a smaller cohort of 9.2 percent of the respondents indicated that the impact of this communication was less convincing.

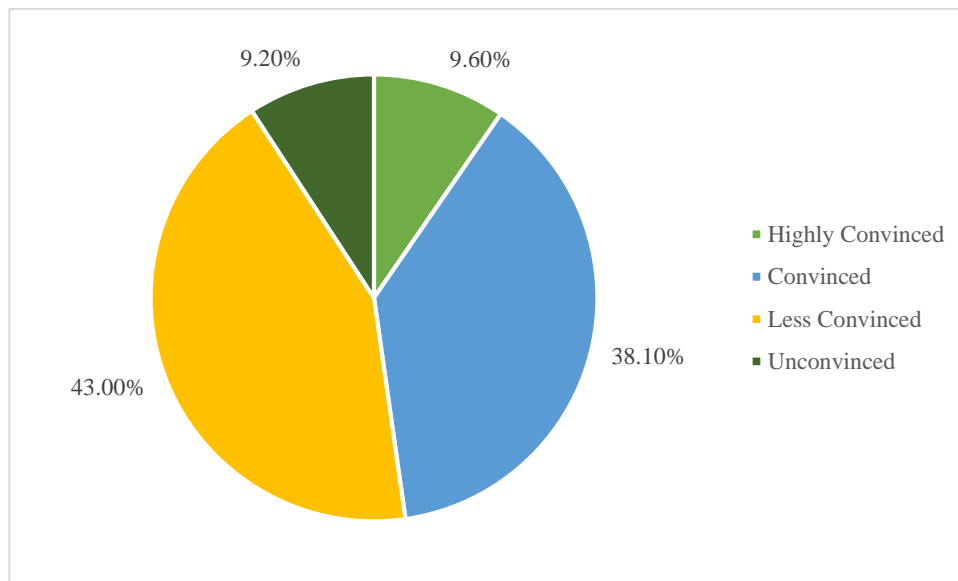


Figure 5: Respondents' confidence in the election material presented by the Village/District Government in the 2020 Denpasar Regional Election socialization

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings and analysis done, it was evident that the research objectives have been successfully achieved. In the context of the 2020 Denpasar Mayoral Election, the primary communicator driving political communication was the Denpasar City KPU. This involved disseminating information to the public and other political stakeholders. The Denpasar City KPU received support from sub-district and village-level organizing teams, as well as the village government, in effectively transmitting political messages to the public. These messages comprised details regarding election execution, desired leader traits, and information about health protocols—aimed at reassuring voters of their safety while exercising their voting rights. The messaging approach adopted by the Denpasar City KPU through information dissemination resonated well with the public, successfully convincing them of the election's smooth implementation. The language style employed left a favorable impression, enhancing the overall perception of the electoral process. Both traditional and digital communication channels were employed in conveying these messages. Particularly, digital media took center stage in political communication due to the COVID-19 pandemic, serving as the primary means of engagement with various stakeholders. The communication took on both interpersonal and mass communication forms. Although the political communication strategies already utilized traditional and digital channels as well as involved formal and informal organizations as the communicators, the communication messages cannot significantly boost the political participation. The political participation of Denpasar City residents exhibited a decline compared to prior elections. This reduction in engagement can be attributed to a multitude of factors, spanning contesting candidate dynamics, the pandemic's repercussions, and the varied interests of the multicultural community in local political affairs.

This study validates several hypotheses. It confirms that social media is the predominant channel for information regarding the 2020 Denpasar city regional election. Regarding citizen's perception, respondents have low confidence for general materials delivered through Denpasar City KPU information dissemination. Respondents also has moderate understanding on general election process delivered through Denpasar city KPU information dissemination and less confidence in the election material presented by the Village/District Government in the 2020 Denpasar Regional Election socialization. On the other hand, language style is impactful in conveying the materials for the 2020 Denpasar city regional election.

The scope of this study focuses specifically on political communication within the social, political, economic, and cultural context of Denpasar. Therefore, the recommendations derived from this research are applicable primarily to Denpasar and regions sharing similar social, political, economic, and cultural contexts. Future research should explore the

types of political messages that can encourage citizens to actively participate in elections. It should also address strategies to counter negative messages and deceptive information that may deter political participation.

6. Recommendations

Although being a metropolis, Denpasar City retains strong connections to its cultural heritage, upheld by communal communities and customary institutions. Given this, it is advisable that moving forward, entities like the KPU, *Bawaslu* (General Election Supervisory Agency), Government, candidates, and campaign teams engage in information dissemination through direct dialogues with indigenous groups. This inclusive approach should encompass *krama wed* (local villagers), *krama tamyu* (visiting residents), as well as the younger generation, including youth organizations, *sekaa*, and other traditional leaders within *banjars* and traditional villages. Facilitating communication and outreach endeavors within indigenous communities can be effectively achieved through dialogues, which become even more captivating when intertwined with entertainment mediums such as Balinese local comedy known as *bondres*, *wayang* performances, or cultural spectacles cherished by the local populace. Effectively engaging civil society groups involves adopting a dialogical approach, which can be further enhanced by leveraging respected figures who serve as role models within these communities.

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