



## **Utilizing Discourse Semantics for Public Opinion Formation and Political Campaigns on Social Media**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to analyze how social media, particularly Instagram, is utilized as a political campaign tool by Dedi Mulyadi through the account @dedimulyadi71. Employing Teun A. Van Dijk's model of critical discourse analysis, the research explores three main dimensions: text structure, social cognition, and social context. The data were collected from uploaded content including photos, videos, captions, hashtags, and public comments, which were then examined qualitatively to uncover ideological meanings and the political communication strategies employed. The findings reveal that Dedi Mulyadi utilizes visual narratives and emotionally charged language to construct a populist image one that is close to local culture and responsive to social issues. This strategy enhances his connection with voters and fosters high levels of public engagement. Instagram proves to be an effective alternative campaign space for shaping public opinion and mobilizing political support in the digital era, characterized by post-truth dynamics and symbolic populism.

**Keywords:** *Semantics; Public Opinion; Political Campaigns*

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana media sosial, khususnya Instagram, digunakan sebagai alat kampanye politik oleh Dedi Mulyadi melalui akun @dedimulyadi71. Dengan menggunakan model analisis wacana kritis Teun A. Van Dijk, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi tiga dimensi utama: struktur teks, kognisi sosial, dan konteks sosial. Data dikumpulkan dari konten yang diunggah termasuk foto, video, caption, tagar, dan komentar publik, yang kemudian diperiksa secara kualitatif untuk mengungkap makna ideologis dan strategi komunikasi politik yang digunakan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Dedi Mulyadi menggunakan narasi visual dan bahasa yang penuh emosi untuk membangun citra populis yang dekat dengan budaya lokal dan responsif terhadap isu-isu sosial. Strategi ini meningkatkan hubungannya dengan para pemilih dan mendorong keterlibatan publik yang tinggi. Instagram terbukti menjadi ruang kampanye alternatif yang efektif untuk membentuk opini publik dan memobilisasi dukungan politik di era digital, yang ditandai dengan dinamika pasca-kebenaran dan populisme simbolik.

**Kata Kunci:** *Semantik; Opini Publik; Kampanye Politik*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The rapid development of information and communication technology over the past two decades has fundamentally transformed patterns of social interaction, information acquisition, and public opinion formation. One of the most significant impacts of this transformation is the emergence of social media as a new arena for public communication. No longer limited to personal interaction, social media now functions as a strategic arena for contemporary political activities. The growing public distrust in mainstream media and formal political institutions has driven a shift in political communication towards digital platforms, enabling direct and interactive engagement between political actors and the public (Nasrullah, 2015).

As a product of digital technology, social media offers a two-way communication model that allows audiences not only to receive but also to produce informational content (Effendy, 2003). In the political context, this creates opportunities for politicians to convey ideas and construct their public image without the mediation of traditional media filters. Among the most influential platforms in visual political communication is Instagram. With its emphasis on visual content and ease of interaction, Instagram enables the delivery of political messages that are personal, emotional, and symbolic (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

The phenomenon of digital political campaigning has become increasingly prominent in Indonesian elections post-2024. Politicians have utilized social media to build their image and gain public legitimacy through narrative approaches that combine visual symbols and concise text (Suryani, 2018). One such figure is Dedi Mulyadi, a public figure from West Java, who actively uses his official Instagram account, @dedimulyadi71, to showcase his daily activities, reflecting closeness to ordinary people, social concern, and reverence for local cultural values.

Digital campaigning relies on the power of visual and narrative elements to shape public perception, not only of political programs but also of candidates' personalities and displayed values. This results in a form of communication that is personal and emotional in nature (McNair, 2011). In this context, Instagram becomes an ideal medium for conveying political messages through its features such as photos, short videos, stories, and reels. In examining the construction of political discourse on social media, the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach proves highly relevant as it enables an indepth investigation into the relationship between language, power, and ideology embedded in digital communication practices. One of the leading figures in this approach, Teun A. van Dijk, asserts that discourse cannot be separated from the social context in which it is produced and consumed. Van Dijk identifies three main dimensions in his framework: textual structure, social cognition, and social context. Textual structure reflects how linguistic elements such as diction, language style, and

narrative are employed to convey specific meanings; social cognition refers to the collective mental processes involved in understanding and interpreting messages; while social context involves power relations, social positioning, and ideologies underlying a discourse (van Dijk, 2006). This approach is particularly useful for uncovering how political actors strategically use social media to construct selfrepresentations, frame issues, and influence public perception in a systematic manner. Based on this framework, the present study aims to analyze how the Instagram account @dedimulyadi71 is utilized as a medium for digital political campaigning that constructs a populist image. The research focuses on exploring the structure of the discourse, ideological strategies, and the social context underlying the dissemination of political messages, particularly within the digital political communication landscape shaped by the phenomena of post-truth and symbolic populism.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach using critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the primary analytical framework. The analytical model is based on the theoretical perspective of Teun A. Van Dijk, who focuses on the dynamics of political communication in digital spaces particularly in terms of uncovering power relations, ideologies, and symbolic meanings embedded within textual and visual representations on social media (Van Dijk, 2006). This research adopts a descriptive qualitative design aimed at exploring and interpreting how discourse is constructed in the Instagram posts of @dedimulyadi71, viewed as part of a digital-based political communication strategy. The main object of this study consists of various posts on the official Instagram account of Dedi Mulyadi, which feature political, social, and cultural content. The research focuses on how the political persona is constructed, how interaction with the public is presented, and how responses to societal issues are communicated through the platform.

The data sources consist of two types: primary and secondary data. Primary data include post materials such as photos, videos, captions, hashtags, and user comments. Secondary data consist of academic literature, scientific journals, and relevant books on social media, political communication, and discourse analysis theory (Kriyantono, 2014). Data collection was carried out through digital documentation methods. This involved observing, tracking, and archiving Instagram content and user interactions from @dedimulyadi71, recording captions and public comments, capturing screenshots for visual and narrative analysis, and categorizing the data based on thematic clusters such as social narratives, populist imagery, community engagement, and representations of political identity. The analysis was conducted in-depth by integrating the three dimensions of Van Dijk's model: textual structure, social cognition, and social context, in order to

understand holistically the discursive strategies employed in the political campaign.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Profile and Homepage of Kang Dedi Mulyadi's Instagram Account



The official Instagram account of Dedi Mulyadi, namely @dedimulyadi71, serves as a concrete example of how social media can be strategically utilized as a communication and political campaign tool in today's digital era. With a follower base exceeding 4.7 million and thousands of published posts, this account actively showcases various aspects of Dedi Mulyadi's activities as a politician, cultural preservationist, and public figure with strong emotional ties to the people of West Java. A wide range of visual content, including photos, short videos, and reels, is used effectively to construct his public image as a modest individual who cares deeply for marginalized communities and upholds the local values of Sundanese culture. This representation strengthens the emotional connection between the figure and his audience, while also creating a distinctive persona compared to other political actors who often appear more formal and bureaucratic. The communication strategy employed does not merely aim to convey information, but is also persuasive in nature and systematically designed to build broader political support particularly in the context of his candidacy for the Governor of West Java for the 2025–2030 period. This study confirms that social media functions as a new arena for political communication. It is not only effective in shaping a candidate's personal image but also capable of

fostering a more inclusive and interactive public participation within the framework of digital democracy.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis Using Teun A. Van Dijk's Model: A Case Study of the Instagram Account @dedimulyadi71**

This study examines how the Instagram account @dedimulyadi71 is utilized as a medium in political campaign strategies, particularly in constructing a populist image through visual and narrative approaches embedded in the posted content. Employing the critical discourse analysis model developed by Teun A. van Dijk, the analysis in this research focuses on three key dimensions: text structure, social cognition, and social context. These dimensions are applied collectively to trace the construction of meaning and political representation within the digital space (van Dijk, 2006).

From the perspective of critical discourse analysis as developed by Teun A. van Dijk, the dimension of text structure encompasses the analysis of linguistic aspects used to shape meaning such as lexical choices, sentence construction, rhetorical style, use of metaphors, and narrative flow. When applied to social media contexts, this dimension also includes the utilization of digital elements such as captions, hashtags, and visual content (photos and videos) to convey particular messages. In this case, Dedi Mulyadi's Instagram account (@dedimulyadi71) strategically employs these elements to construct an image of a populist politician who is closely connected to the people.



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dedimulyadi71 Mengedukasi rakyat soal kebenaran itu tidak mudah, tapi itu harus dan dilakukan se-elegan mungkin. #Sikap #Karakter #JawaBarat lebih sedikit  
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setiap postingan Pak @dedimulyadi71 saya belajar bagaimana seorang pemimpin yang sudah sangat matang wawasan ilmunya dan mental yang kuat untuk menghadapi segala persoalan.

Yang dulu banyak sisi tidak pernah diperhatikan, akhirnya perlahan ditunjukkan GINI LOH KALAU JADI PEMIMPIN. Sejauh ini dengan segala caranya menyelesaikan masalah, salut pisanannn. Sehat selalu dan semoga tuhan lancarkan segala niat baiknya.

### **Post and Public Comments on Kang Dedi Mulyadi's Instagram Account**

First, in terms of diction and language style, Dedi Mulyadi deliberately adopts a simple yet emotionally charged style of communication to shape his message. For instance, in one of the captions, he states: "Educating the people about the truth is not easy, but it is necessary and must be done as elegantly as possible." The use of the word "people" and the phrase "as elegantly as possible" signifies a symbolic attempt to build closeness with the public while simultaneously portraying a wise persona. Such word choices contribute to constructing his image as an empathetic leader who is genuinely concerned about society.

Second, the use of hashtags such as #Sikap, #Karakter, and #JawaBarat serves not only as content categorization tools but also as instruments for strengthening political identity. The hashtag #JawaBarat emphasizes his connection with Sundanese local culture, while #Sikap and #Karakter imply personal values that he intends to present to the public. Thus, hashtags become strategic elements for expanding message reach and engaging audiences who share affinities with these themes [Nugroho, 2020].

Third, the visual content and political narratives—consisting of photographs and short videos—are the main components through which Dedi Mulyadi communicates his political messages on Instagram. Visuals showing him interacting with citizens, particularly those from marginalized groups, serve as a representation of the social proximity he aims to cultivate. Activities such as providing aid to the poor or visiting remote areas are captured in narrative visuals, designed to foster positive perceptions among audiences.

Fourth, audience responses and interactive engagement are also part of the discourse construction that reinforces the intended political image. For example, one follower commented: "From every post by Mr. @dedimulyadi71, I learn how a leader with deep insight and strong mental capacity handles all problems." This reflects the public's reception. Positive responses from users strengthen the perception that Dedi Mulyadi is intellectually and emotionally mature, further confirming his success in managing political communication that is personal, symbolic, and persuasive through social media.

### **Social Cognition**

The social cognition dimension emphasizes how individuals and social groups—including political actors and the public—process, store, and construct collective understanding of received information. This dimension encompasses the ways in which values, ideologies, and stereotypes are shaped in the minds of the public as a result of their interaction with communicated messages, particularly through digital media. In the context of the Instagram account @dedimulyadi71, this dimension reflects how Dedi Mulyadi actively constructs public perceptions of himself, as well as how



those perceptions are received, interpreted, and responded to by his followers.



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### Post and comments from netizens on Kang Dedi Mulyadi's Instagram

First, social media functions as an alternative arena for political communication. Dedi Mulyadi utilizes Instagram intensively to introduce himself, articulate his vision and mission, and demonstrate concern for contemporary social issues. Through visual uploads such as an image of him waving to a crowd from a moving vehicle he creates direct, emotional engagement. This visual representation reinforces his image as a leader who is present and genuinely connected with the people, bypassing conventional media filters.

Second, the construction of a populist image and public response is evident in his content, which consistently aligns with local values, cultural identity, and grassroots empathy. Public reactions indicate significant support and loyalty. One comment referring to him as the “beloved Governor of West Java” reflects how his culturally embedded and humble persona successfully strengthens symbolic ties with the electorate.

Third, the dominant narrative emphasizes the “People’s Leader” identity. The ideological construction portrays him as a responsive, empathetic figure who is present among marginalized communities. Visual and textual narratives consistently highlight his direct engagement with citizens. Comments expressing admiration for his social initiatives confirm the acceptance of this image by the public. the account @dedimulyadi71 serves not only as a platform for personal branding, but also as a strategic tool for shaping public opinion, influencing behavior, and consolidating

support in a digital landscape defined by post-truth dynamics and symbolic populism (Junaedi, 2022).

Fourth, the algorithmic nature of Instagram itself also plays a role in how content from @dedimulyadi71 reaches and influences audiences. The platform's algorithms prioritize engagement—likes, comments, shares—thus amplifying posts that resonate emotionally. Dedi Mulyadi's emotionally loaded and culturally embedded content is likely to be favored by the algorithm, increasing visibility and reinforcing symbolic associations in the public mind. This shows a reciprocal interaction between discourse strategy and digital infrastructure, where populist narratives not only appeal to users but are structurally favored by platform mechanics. Such synergy between content and algorithm may shape a feedback loop that deepens audience trust, emotional connection, and political alignment (Wahyoedi et al., 2023). These dynamics are crucial in the context of post-truth politics, where emotional resonance often trumps factual accuracy in public judgment.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Social media, particularly Instagram, has evolved into one of the most strategic instruments of political communication in the digital age. The findings of this study demonstrate that the Instagram account @dedimulyadi71 has been optimally utilized by Dedi Mulyadi to construct and reinforce his image as a populist political figure one who is close to the people and responsive to social issues. Through a strong visual approach and the use of emotionally resonant narratives, he is able to present himself as an authentic, grounded leader with strong cultural ties to the people of West Java. By applying Teun A. Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis approach, this study identifies a strong interconnection between textual structure, social cognition, and socio-political context in the process of shaping public opinion through social media. The interaction among these three dimensions illustrates that political communication on social media is not only informative, but also saturated with symbolic representations of power and ideological influence oriented toward image-building and the mobilization of support. Furthermore, the high level of engagement among social media users who respond to the posted content reflects a shift in the pattern of political communication—from a previously one-way model to one that is more dialogical and participatory. The support expressed through comments, aspirations, and narrative interpretations from audiences indicates that digital campaign strategies that combine visual, symbolic, and personal narrative elements are effective in enhancing the public's emotional involvement. In conclusion, social media today not only functions as a medium for disseminating political information, but also serves as a new public space that shapes political dynamics in a more direct, democratic, and emotionally connected manner. These findings have broader implications



beyond the case of Dedi Mulyadi. They reflect a shifting paradigm in political communication where digital storytelling, platform affordances, and algorithmic visibility intertwine to shape new forms of political subjectivity. Politicians who successfully merge visual discourse with cultural authenticity can leverage digital platforms not only for self-promotion but also for building long-term political capital. Additionally, this study suggests that critical media literacy is essential for audiences to navigate the post-truth landscape where emotional engagement often drives belief and decision-making more than objective reasoning. Future research should explore the intersection of discourse semantics, AI-powered recommendation systems, and the ethical boundaries of digital political persuasion.

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