

Cyberpolitics and Digital Democracy: The Role of Instagram in the 2024 Makassar City Election Campaign

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ABSTRACT

This research discusses the phenomenon of cyberpolitics as a digital democratic space with a focus on political campaigns through Instagram in the 2024 Makassar Pilwalkot. Social media, especially Instagram, is used intensely by candidate pairs to build a political image and convey work programs visually to the public. On the other hand, millennials, as the dominant social media users, utilise the platform to access political information, interact directly with candidates, and determine voting preferences. Through a literature study approach and content analysis, this research shows that digital space has great potential in expanding horizontal political participation. However, the effectiveness of cyberspace as a democratic arena cannot be separated from challenges such as symbolic participation, algorithm dominance, and digital literacy gaps. Instagram has been proven to facilitate the political participation of the younger generation. However, it has not been able to fully bridge the inequality of political representation due to digital exclusion. By applying the theories of agenda setting, political efficacy, and networked public sphere, this study concludes that the quality of political communication, information disclosure, and the critical capacity of digital citizens largely determine the success of digital democracy in cyberspace.

Keywords: Cyberpolitics, Instagram, Digital Democracy, Millennial Generation, Political Campaign.

I. Introduction

The digital age, which is part of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, has fundamentally transformed the way humans think, live, and interact, making digital technology no longer just a tool but the primary infrastructure of modern social life. Schwab (2016) Refers to the Fourth Industrial Revolution as a phase of change that massively integrates physical, digital, and biological technologies, directly impacting social and political dynamics. Amid the global digitalisation trend, geographical boundaries are becoming increasingly blurred; human interactions are no longer constrained by space and time but occur through real-time, cross-continental cyber networks. This phenomenon creates a "third space," as described by Aitken & Soja (1998), which is a new social space formed by digital interactions and enables more fluid and open social-political participation.

Data from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in 2023 shows that over 5.3 billion people worldwide are connected to the internet, covering around 66% of the global population. This reinforces the thesis that digitalisation has become a significant force in transforming social structures. (Kristianti, 2024). In Indonesia alone, the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) recorded 221.5 million internet users in 2024 (78.19% of the population), indicating the significant penetration of digital technology into people's lives. (Santika, 2024). This development affects consumption patterns and lifestyles and extends into the political sphere, where democratic processes such as campaigns and voter participation are now conducted mainly in cyberspace. Therefore, digital globalisation is a technological channel and a new cultural and political arena that redefines the meaning of presence, power, and participation in contemporary society. Based on official data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), internet penetration in Indonesia at the beginning of 2024 had reached 79.5% of the total population, or around 221.6 million users. (Ikram, 2024). From a demographic perspective, the largest user groups are Generation Z (87%) and Millennials (93%), reflecting the dominance of young people in the digital space (Sari, 2024). This trend is also evident in the increasing access via mobile devices, with 74% of users using mobile data, followed by 22% via home Wi-Fi, indicating that the internet is no longer an exclusive indicator of large cities, but suburban areas are also actively participating (Admin, 2024).

Social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok are not just spaces for sharing visual content but have evolved into digital political arenas. Platforms like TikTok are intensively used to target young voters, with campaigns even resorting to "viral dances" and fan art to engage voters under 40. (Admin, 2024). Data from Analyzify also shows that Indonesia is one of the countries with 126 million TikTok users, making it a strategic base for quickly and efficiently spreading political messages. (Admin, 2024). From the perspective of political communication theory, the agenda-setting theory states that the media that can highlight specific issues more prominently will shape public perception of the importance of those issues. In the context of the 2024 Makassar Regional Elections, Instagram and TikTok function as political processors, i.e., channels that integrate attractive visuals, citizen testimonials, and hybridised campaign messages, thereby creating political narratives that are easily absorbed by the digital generation. However, the hypersegmentation approach through algorithms also poses the risk of filter bubbles and the spread of hoaxes. This calls for increasingly urgent regulation and digital literacy.

Digital campaigns have become increasingly dominant in the 2024 Makassar mayoral election, especially during the pandemic, which has limited face-to-face interactions, prompting candidates to expand their networks through social media. In response, from September 25 to November 23, 2024, the South Sulawesi Provincial Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) formed a Cyber Team to monitor campaign content on digital platforms, collaborating with the Gakkumdu Centre and police authorities to address potential violations of online campaign regulations. (Fatir, 2024). Based on PKPU Number 13 of 2024, each candidate pair must submit a list of a maximum of 20 official accounts per platform (Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, etc.), and these accounts become the main objects of monitoring by Bawaslu. (Alim, 2024). This effort is also in line with the concept of collective digital monitoring, which emphasises the importance of the involvement of state institutions and the public in maintaining a healthy, transparent, and fair digital ecosystem. However, the limited focus on official accounts leaves room for buzzer or anonymous accounts to spread without supervision, raising critical questions: To what extent are the regulations and enforcement of digital platforms effective if cyberspace remains open to information manipulation?

South Sulawesi Province, including the city of Makassar, is listed as the most vulnerable region in the conduct of the 2024 simultaneous regional elections according to the Election Vulnerability Index (IKP) released by the Indonesian Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu RI). South Sulawesi ranks first in the highest national vulnerability category during the campaign period, surpassing other provinces such as East Java and East Kalimantan, with vulnerable points including the neutrality of civil servants (ASN), the politicisation of bureaucracy, and the threat of political violence. (Alim, 2024).

Table 1. Election Vulnerability Index (IKP) by Regency/City in 2024

No.	Regency/City	Vulnerability Score	Level of Vulnerability
1	Manokwari	80,89	Level 6
2	Mamuju	78,01	Level 6
3	Makassar	74,94	Level 6
4	Lombok Tengah	73,25	Level 6
5	Kotawaringin Timur	72,48	Level 6
6	Kepulauan Sula	71,45	Level 6
7	Mamuju Tengah	71,02	Level 6
8	Sungai Penuh	70,63	Level 6
9	Minahasa Utara	70,62	Level 6
10	Pasangkayu	70,20	Level 6
11	Tomohon	66,89	Level 6
12	Ternate	66,25	Level 6
13	Serang	66,04	Level 6
14	Kendal	65,33	Level 6
15	Sambas	64,53	Level 6

Source: Bawaslu RI in Buku Indeks Kerawanan Pemilu (IKP) (2024)

The potential spread of hoaxes and hate speech is a significant threat in the digital space, prompting Bawaslu and local media to collaborate on producing educational content to counter disinformation. (Fatir, 2024). In addition, security forces are wary of possible cyber attacks and money politics that could undermine the quality of local democracy. As part of strengthening oversight, Bawaslu has also involved influencers, citizen journalists, and social media activists as participatory oversight partners to monitor digital campaign activities. This phenomenon is in line with the concept of surveillance democracy proposed by Andrejevic (2007), where the state no longer monopolises oversight but becomes an open public domain, enabling citizens to participate in monitoring the democratic process. However, cyberspace as a democratic arena also poses serious challenges, such as the fragmentation of public space and low digital literacy, which, if not addressed, could undermine the quality of political deliberation in local democracy. (Hastira, 2020).

Voter participation in the 2024 Makassar mayoral election was recorded at only 57.64%, or rounded up to 58% of the Permanent Voter List (DPT) of 1,037,164 people—a figure far below the target set by the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) and the Makassar Election Commission (KPU), which ranged between 65–70% (Mulyadi, Claudia, Ratu, & Januwati, 2024).

Table 2. Election Participation Data for the 2024 Makassar Mayoral Election

Description	Total
Permanent Voter List (DPT)	1.037.164 people
KPU/Bawaslu Participation Target	65% – 70%
Voters who exercised their right to vote	597.794 people
Number of valid votes	583.191 people
Number of invalid votes	14.603 people
Actual Voter Participation Rate	57,64% (rounded to 58%)

Sourcer: KPUD Makassar (2024)

Although there was an increase in voter participation among people with disabilities, reaching 66.8%, the overall results still reflect a significant level of apathy or difficulty in accessing the polls. In terms of election results, the Munafri Arifuddin–Aliyah Mustika pair from Golkar won with 54.72% of the vote—the number of valid votes reached 319,112 out of approximately 583,191 combined valid votes, indicating successful voter mobilisation despite low overall participation. (Admin, 2022).

Table 3. Results of the 2024 Makassar Mayoral Election Vote Count

No.	Candidate Pair	Number of Votes	Percentage of Valid Votes
1.	Munafri Arifuddin – Aliyah Mustika Ilham (MULIA)	319.112	54,72 %
2.	Andi Seto Gadhista Asapa – Rezki Mulfiati Lutfi (SETIA)	162.427	27,85 %
3.	Indira Yusuf Ismail – Ilham Ari Fauzi Uskara (INIMI)	81.405	13,96 %
4.	Muhammad Amri Arsyid – Abd Rahman Bando (AMAN)	20.247	3,47 %

Sourcer: KPUD Makassar (2024)

Based on political efficacy theory, low participation may reflect citizens' perceptions that their voices have no influence or that the system is unresponsive to their needs. Meanwhile, the success of the Munafri–Aliyah pair, despite being achieved through cyberspace and digital campaigns, confirms that political mobilisation does not always correlate directly with participation levels, but is closely related to effective campaign strategies, including using digital platforms to gain segmented support. This opens up opportunities for scientific discussion about the quality of democracy: whether campaign digitalisation can increase inclusivity and participation, or whether it widens the representation gap between digitally active and marginalised groups of citizens.

Cyberpolitics in the 2024 Makassar mayoral election demonstrates the potential of digital democracy to expand access to political information quickly, cheaply, and across social and geographical boundaries. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook were intensively utilised by the campaign teams of the candidate pairs to build their image, convey their vision and mission, and open up dialogue with voters, especially the younger generation. According to aKataData (2023) 72.5% of respondents aged 17–35 reported obtaining political information more quickly and transparently through social media than mainstream media. Beyond campaign cost efficiency, the digital space also enables more fluid, inclusive, and participatory political criticism—embodying what Manuel Castells calls the "networked public sphere," a digital public domain that strengthens horizontal deliberation and advocacy. However, cyberspace also poses a significant challenge to the integrity of democracy. Polarisation of opinion, smear campaigns, and the spread of hoaxes are real threats to the quality of political information. Reports from Mafindo and Kominfo show that during the 2024 campaign period, more than 300 political hoaxes were spread on social media, with the majority attacking the personal character of candidates. (Redaksi, 2024). On the other hand, regulations governing digital campaign content are still reactive and limited to registered official accounts, leaving room for anonymous buzzers and shadow accounts that Bawaslu does not monitor. Given these challenges, the research questions are: "How does cyberspace function as a digital democratic space in the 2024 Makassar regional elections?" and "To what extent can cyberpolitics increase political participation and ensure the fairness of local election processes?" These questions are important to test the effectiveness of digital space as an arena for democracy that expands access and maintains the substance and quality of the local democratic process in the information age.

II. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Political Efficacy Theory

The theory of political efficacy explains individuals' perceptions of the effectiveness of their political actions in influencing public decision-making processes. This concept is divided into two parts: internal efficacy (an individual's belief that they are capable of understanding and participating in politics) and external efficacy (the belief that the government will respond to the aspirations of its citizens). In the context of the 2024 Makassar mayoral election, the voter turnout rate of only 57.64% reflects the possibility of low political efficacy among voters. Many citizens feel that their voices do not influence the outcome, or that the political system is not accommodating public needs. A study by Porter & Whitcomb (2003) confirms that low efficacy

is directly proportional to voter apathy, especially in urban communities experiencing political fatigue due to distrust of political elites. In a recent study, Lai & Beh (2025) found that political efficacy significantly increases young voter participation in the digital space, especially when accompanied by broad and transparent access to information. However, challenges arise when the information circulating instead leads to disinformation, exacerbating the public's crisis of trust in political institutions. In the context of the Makassar regional elections, most campaigns were symbolic despite the widespread use of social media. They did not delve deeply into the substance of the policy, thus failing to spark a sense of relevance and political concern among passive voters. This shows that the effectiveness of digital space in increasing political participation depends not only on the intensity of communication but also on the quality of the message and the credibility of the actors delivering it (Galston, 2001).

2.2. Networked Public Sphere

Manuel Castells, in his work *Communication Power* (2009), developed the concept of the networked public sphere to explain changes in the structure of political communication in digital society. (Grindstaff, 2011). He argues that the public sphere is no longer shaped solely by mainstream media, but also by digital networks that enable horizontal, participatory, and real-time interaction among citizens. Within this framework, social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook are not only channels of information but also arenas for articulating political interests. The 2024 Makassar mayoral election exemplifies this trend, with candidates and their campaign teams leveraging digital platforms to build narratives, cultivate images, and mobilise public support, particularly among younger generations. This concept emphasises that power in networked societies is not only held by the state or elites but is dispersed within the dynamic and unpredictable flow of digital communication (Bessant, 2014). However, the networked public sphere is not without its issues. Information fragmentation, polarisation, and algorithmic dominance can create echo chambers and the spread of disinformation, hindering rational deliberation. This is evident in the increasing number of cyberattacks and hoaxes during the 2024 regional elections, which undermined the quality of public debate. In a study by Yuan (2012) It was found that while the digital space can open new channels for political participation, the quality of democracy remains highly dependent on users' digital literacy and critical thinking skills. Therefore, even though social media has expanded the space for digital democracy, regulation, education, and content moderation are needed to keep the digital public sphere healthy and deliberative. In the context of Makassar, this challenge is important to ensure that cyberspace truly functions as an inclusive medium, not merely a stage for polarisation or political propaganda.

III. Research Method

His study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method to analyse the phenomenon of cyberpolitics as a space for digital democracy in the context of the 2024 Makassar mayoral election. Literature review was chosen because it allows researchers to critically examine secondary data through scientific articles, official reports from election organising bodies (KPU, Bawaslu), online media news, and survey data from credible research institutions. This approach aims to understand the patterns of digital political communication through social media such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook used by candidate pairs and their influence on voter participation, especially among the younger generation. As Machi, Mcevoy, & Abdullah (2016) explained, a literature review is not merely about collecting sources but also analysing and synthesising existing knowledge to build arguments and strengthen the theoretical foundation. In data collection, the researchers used desk review techniques on various relevant documents from the Makassar Regional Election campaign period (September–November 2024), including social media content from the official accounts of candidate pairs registered with the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), election vulnerability index reports, and media coverage such as ANTARA News, Detik, and IDN Times. In addition, data from survey institutions such as Katadata Insight Centre and the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) were used to examine trends in social media usage and digital penetration in Indonesia.

The analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques on campaign narratives and patterns of political information dissemination in the digital space. It was examined using digital political communication theories such as political efficacy and the networked public sphere. By the guidelines outlined by Snyder (2019), this literature analysis was conducted thematically, mapping the relationship between digital communication dynamics, political participation structures, and the quality of local democracy formed through cyberspace.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1. Political Visual Strategies and Candidate Representation on Instagram

In the digital age, political campaigns have transformed from conventional face-to-face meetings and billboard advertising to more visual and interactive online media. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this transition by limiting physical interaction, making social media, especially Instagram, the primary tool for conveying political messages. In the Indonesian context, a report by NapoleonCat (2024) Notes that Instagram users have reached 91 million, dominated by the 18–34 age group. This number is projected to rise to 126 million by 2024, making Indonesia one of the largest Instagram user markets in the world. This situation has become an important backdrop for the candidate pairs in the 2024 Makassar Regional Elections to shift their campaign focus to digital platforms. Hjarvard (2008) This phenomenon is part of the mediatization of politics, where media logic begins to shape how politics is practised and communicated. In the 2024 Makassar mayoral election, Instagram became the primary platform for candidates to build their brand and communicate their political agenda. The accounts @sehatimediacyenter (Andi Seto Gadhistha Asapa – Rezki Mulfiati Lutfi), @inimi.official (Indira Yusuf Ismail – Ilham Ari Fauzi Uskara), @muliamakassar (Munafri Arifuddin – Aliyah Mustika Ilham), and @makassarcariaman (Muhammad Amri Arsyid – Abd Rahman Bando (AMAN) pair) were analysed using a visual content approach. The content featured digital pamphlets, campaign videos, testimonials from community leaders, and daily activities of the candidates presented in a visually communicative style. The content presented policy narratives, showed the candidates' familiarity with the citizens, and built rapport through popular language and local symbols. This reinforced the candidates' image as "close to the people" and tech-savvy figures—two important characteristics in today's digital politics.

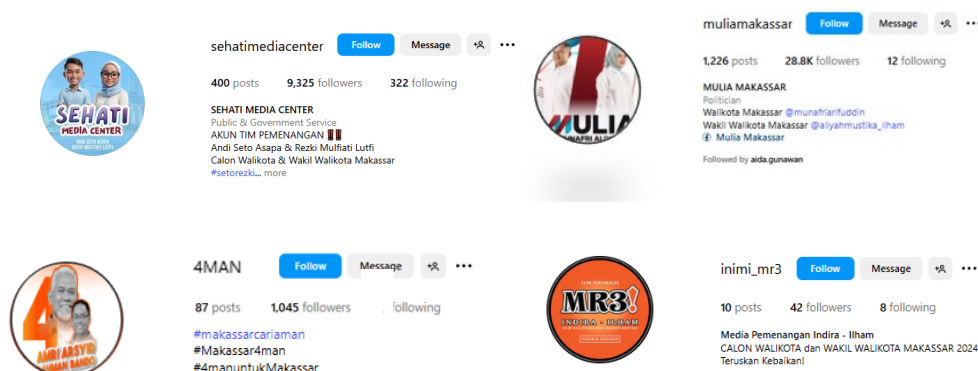


Figure 1. Instagram Accounts of the 2024 Makassar Mayoral Election Candidate Pairs

Source: compiled by the author from the Instagram app

Visual campaigns through Instagram also reflect the agenda-setting strategy proposed by McCombs & Shaw (1972), which states that the media have the power to determine which issues are important in the eyes of the public. Candidate pairs can influence the public's focus on their political agenda by repeatedly displaying specific issues with strong visuals (e.g., economic recovery, infrastructure, and MSMEs). This visualisation presents information and constructs how the public understands the urgency of the issues raised. This strategy is evident in the use of hashtags such as #mudasehati, #wattunnamimulia,

#4manuntukmakassar, and #inimidia, which have spread widely among young voters and have been able to create a positive framing in the digital space.

More deeply, the function of visuals in this campaign is a tool for shaping perceptions. The candidate pair builds a visual narrative that reflects their values and character by visualizing candidates' faces, clothing styles, interactions with residents, and content aesthetics. Grabe & Bucy (2010) In their theory of visual framing, they state that campaign images and designs can influence the audience's interpretation of candidates. In this case, candidates who present positive, emotional, and attractive visuals are more easily accepted by voters, especially the digital generation, who tend to absorb visual impressions more quickly than lengthy texts. Therefore, it is unsurprising that candidates produce visual content structured and scheduled to maintain engagement during the campaign period.

One of the key factors in the effectiveness of visual campaigns on Instagram is their interactivity. Features like "stories," "live streaming," "polling," and "Q&A" not only convey one-way messages but also allow voters to participate in two-way communication. This aligns with Grindstaff's concept of the networked public sphere, which states that digital spaces are not only broadcasting media but also participatory and horizontal arenas for social-political dialogue. In the Makassar mayoral election campaign, several candidates used live sessions to answer residents' questions directly or create behind-the-scenes content that showed their side. This strategy strengthened the symbolic and psychological closeness between candidates and voters, especially among young people. However, the effectiveness of visual campaigns does not necessarily correlate directly with voters' political choices. Some informants said they liked the appearance and content of the candidate pairs' accounts, but still voted based on their "track record" or previous performance history. Although visual strategies are important in shaping awareness and engagement, rational elements remain the principal determinant of political decision-making. From a political efficacy perspective, visual campaigns will only be effective if they can foster a sense of political influence and involvement among voters. (Norris, 2001).

Criticism of visual campaign strategies also needs to be raised. Political visualizations can often be overly symbolic and aesthetic, without conveying the program's substance in depth. This creates the risk of political aestheticisation, where appearance is prioritised over content. This phenomenon can result in pseudo-participation, where voters are digitally active (liking, sharing, following) but lack critical understanding of public policy. Norris (2001) This condition is called symbolic democracy, a situation where democracy is carried out through symbolic rituals and superficial political performances rather than substantial deliberation. Additionally, visual campaigns heavily rely on social media algorithms that display content aligned with users' preferences, rather than informative or neutral content. This creates an echo chamber that can reinforce polarisation and narrow the space for healthy discussion. Candidates with strong content production capabilities and buzzer networks will find it easier to dominate cyberspace. In contrast, other candidates who may be more substantial but less popular digitally will be drowned out. Therefore, strengthening media literacy and regulating digital campaign content is important to ensure fairness and integrity in the digital democratic space. The political visual strategy on Instagram in the 2024 Makassar mayoral election shows how candidates can use cyberspace effectively to shape their image, convey political messages, and interact with voters. Visual campaigns have become an integral part of contemporary digital democracy practices. However, its effectiveness still depends on the quality of the substance conveyed and the public's capacity to analyse information critically. Therefore, although Instagram can be an important instrument for expanding participation, without digital literacy and ethical control, visual campaigns risk becoming a shallow display of democracy.

4.2. Instagram as a Digital Democracy Space for Millennials

The development of digital communication technology has drastically changed the landscape of political participation, especially among the younger generation. Whereas previously citizen involvement in politics depended on physical presence at public meetings or discussion forums, political interaction and

participation can now be carried out virtually through social media platforms. In the context of the 2024 Makassar Mayoral Election, this transformation is evident with the use of Instagram as the primary campaign medium by the candidate pairs and a participatory space for young voters. According to a report by APJII (2024), the number of internet users in Indonesia has reached 221.6 million people, or approximately 79.5% of the population, with the most significant proportion coming from the millennial (93%) and Gen Z (87%) demographics. (Sari, 2024). This fact shows that digital space has become a new arena in local democracy, especially in reaching voters of a productive age. Millennials and Gen Z tend to use social media as their primary source of information, including for political issues. Unlike previous generations who relied more on mainstream media such as television or newspapers, younger generations trust the information they access directly in the digital space. A survey by Katadata Insight Centre (2023) shows that 72.5% of respondents aged 17–35 claim to obtain political information more quickly and transparently through social media than conventional media. (Center, 2023). This confirms that social media, including Instagram, has become the primary channel for shaping political knowledge, forming opinions, and determining choices. Within the Uses and Gratifications Theory framework, young voters use social media not only for entertainment but also to fulfil their informational needs, personal identity, and social-political participation. The Instagram platform technically and aesthetically supports participatory political interaction. Features such as Instagram Stories, Live, Polls, and Comments allow voters to receive information, respond, and express their opinions directly. In the 2024 Makassar regional elections, candidates used these features to conduct real-time Q&A sessions, greet supporters, and demonstrate emotional closeness. Based on findings, young voters actively follow candidate accounts, follow campaign agendas through story posts, and even share content through the repost feature. This interaction reflects the expansion of democratic space, where voters are no longer passive objects but active subjects in the flow of political information.

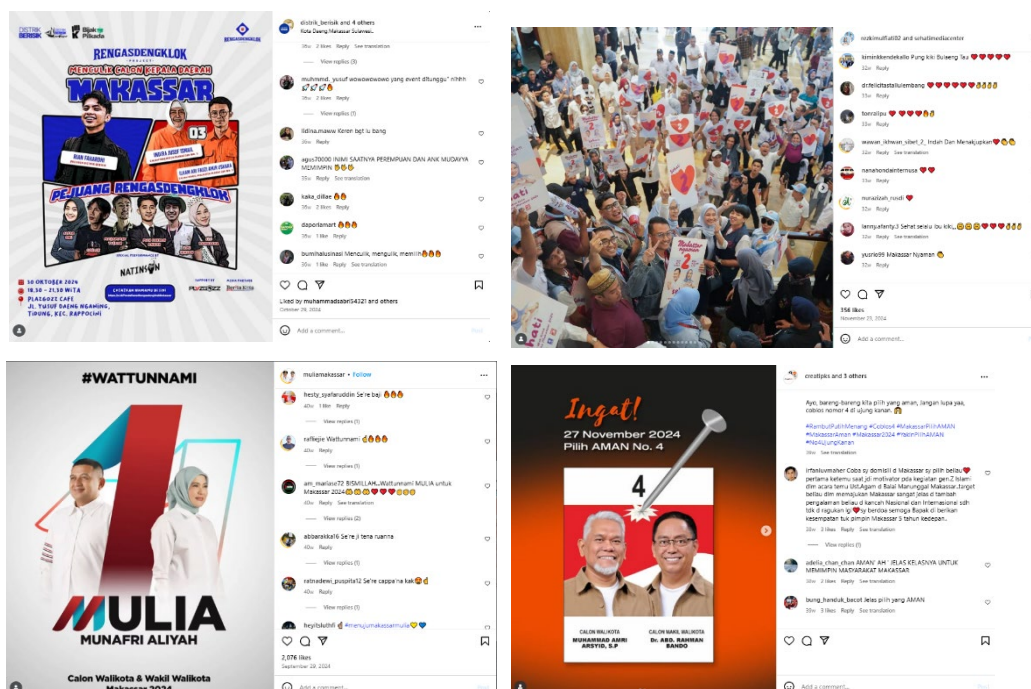


Figure 2. Public interaction in posts from the 2024 Makassar mayoral election candidate

Source: compiled by the author from the Instagram app

The effectiveness of Instagram as a digital democracy space can also be seen from its contribution to shaping political efficacy, which is the belief that individuals can understand politics and influence the decision-making process. Based on (Norris, 2001), the theory of political efficacy suggests that social media plays a role in shaping political trust (internal efficacy) and the belief that their voices are considered (external efficacy). In the Makassar mayoral election context, interviews with young voters showed that Instagram helped them get to know the candidates and their visions and missions better. However, they still needed

other sources to ensure the integrity of the candidates. This shows that Instagram can strengthen political awareness if supported by accurate and transparent information. However, not all digital participation leads to rational decisions. Some respondents in the study stated that their preference for a particular candidate was not based on their vision and mission or track record, but rather on the visual appeal of the campaign and popularity on social media. This phenomenon indicates a symptom of pseudo-participation, where voters appear active on social media but lack political substance. This aligns with the criticism Yuan (2012) raised that digital participation risks becoming a superficial form of symbolic engagement without understanding and critical reflection on the discussed political issues.

Digital spaces such as Instagram also have great potential to become networked public spheres, as argued by (Hjarvard, 2008). In this theory, public spaces are no longer shaped solely by mainstream media but by digital communication networks that enable horizontal and decentralised participation. This is where Instagram's strength lies—users can share views, debate policies, and organise issue-based movements spontaneously. However, this potential will only be realised if there is a healthy and open communication climate, not one filled with polarisation, buzzers, and hoaxes.

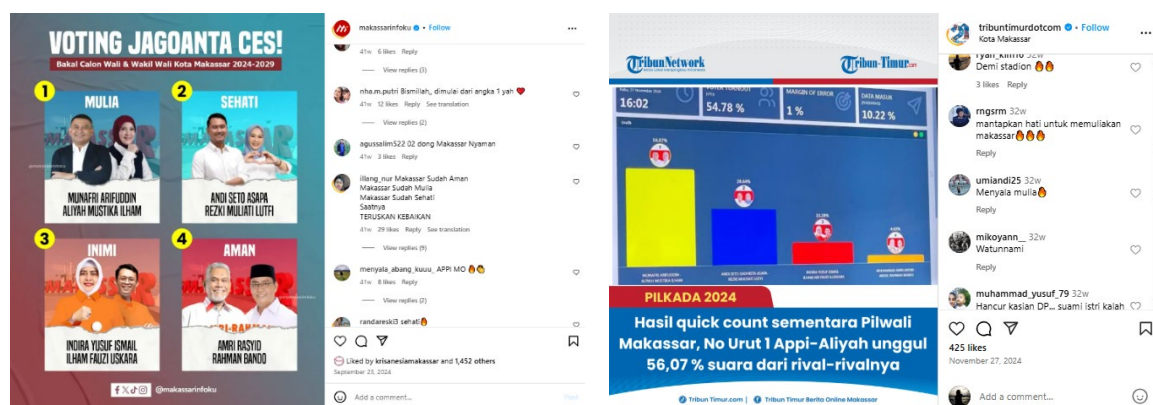


Figure 3. Online Discussion Space in news accounts about Makassar

Source: compiled by the author from the Instagram app

Unfortunately, not all citizens have equal access to this cyberspace. The digital divide remains a significant challenge, especially among the elderly, low-income communities, and those living in areas with limited internet infrastructure. As a result, while digital campaigns effectively reach millennials, other groups remain outside the reach of digital political narratives. This risks creating representation gaps in local democracy. In an ideal digital democracy, all segments of society should have equal access and opportunities to engage meaningfully. In addition, social media algorithms also play an important role in directing voters' attention. Content that is liked or shared by users tends to be reinforced by algorithms, creating an echo chamber that reinforces existing beliefs and hinders openness to alternative information. In a political context, this can potentially reinforce polarisation and hinder the formation of healthy public opinion. In the Makassar mayoral election, accounts supporting specific candidates spread highly partisan content, which, although it increased engagement, narrowed the space for inclusive deliberation. In response to these challenges, it is necessary to strengthen digital literacy among voters, especially the younger generation. Digital literacy is not just about technical skills in using social media, but also includes critical skills in evaluating information, recognising disinformation, and understanding the algorithmic dynamics of media. The government, the Election Commission (KPU), the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), and civil society play a crucial role in building citizens' capacity to become active, aware, and responsible digital citizens, as outlined in Sudulich (2008).

Thus, Instagram does offer significant opportunities as an inclusive and interactive digital democratic space. However, the success of this function depends on several prerequisites: equitable digital access, the

quality of available information, and users' critical awareness. Without these, the digital space will only become a stage for politically powerful actors with strong technological and visual capabilities, rather than an arena for equal and deliberative participation. Therefore, evaluations of the role of social media in elections must consider not only technological aspects but also ethical, educational, and social aspects. In conclusion, the experience of the 2024 Makassar mayoral election shows that cyberspace, through Instagram, has opened up new possibilities for political engagement among the younger generation. Digital campaigns conducted through social media provide space for more open and flexible political expression. However, to ensure that digital democracy does not remain merely symbolic, serious efforts are needed to ensure that the use of social media in campaigns not only reaches a quantitative audience but also strengthens the quality of democracy substantially, both from the perspective of voters and the political actors involved.

V. Conclusion

The 2024 Makassar mayoral election marks an important turning point toward digital democracy. Social media, particularly Instagram, serves as a campaign tool and a space for public participation. Candidates leverage the power of visual politics to build their image and program narratives, while voters—especially millennials and Gen Z—use the platform to access information, interact, and assess candidate profiles. Visual strategies have proven effective in shaping public perception and expanding the reach of political communication, though they do not fully guarantee an increase in the substantive quality of participation. Furthermore, Instagram demonstrates potential as a networked public sphere that can strengthen deliberative democracy, yet it still poses serious challenges such as digital exclusion, misinformation, and superficial symbolic participation. The effectiveness of digital campaigns depends heavily on the quality of information, voters' digital literacy, and the ability of democratic institutions to regulate and oversee cyberspace fairly. Therefore, cyberpolitics through social media cannot be separated from the broader agenda of strengthening substantive democracy. For digital democratic spaces to develop inclusively, synergy is needed between technology, political education, and regulations that are responsive to the digital dynamics of society.

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