

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL MARKETING STRATEGIES OF MEDAN BERKAH VERSUS MEDAN AMAN IN THE 2020 MEDAN CITY REGIONAL ELECTION

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Abstract:

General elections are the main manifestation of democratic practices, including in the implementation of regional head elections. The 2020 Medan City electios became a political contest that attracted public attention because it brought together the Bobby Nasution–Aulia Rachman pair and the Akhyar Nasution–Salman Alfarisi pair. This contest took place in a strong national political context, with Bobby Nasution being the son-in-law of President Joko Widodo, while Akhyar Nasution was the incumbent. This study aims to compare the political marketing strategies used by Medan Berkah and Medan Aman in winning the 2020 Medan City Regional Head Elections. The research method used is comparative qualitative with data collection techniques through interviews, observation, and documentation.

The results of the study show that although Medan Berkah and Medan Aman both use push, pull, and pass marketing strategies in their campaigns, they differ in their approaches. This is influenced by the fact that the two candidates have different target segments. Medan Berkah targets millennials in its marketing.

Medan Aman, on the other hand, targets segments of the population who are dissatisfied with the current regime. The candidates earned votes from the people of Medan through the use of political marketing, resulting in Medan Berkah's victory in the 2020 Medan mayoral election.

Keywords: Political Marketing, Regional Head General Election, Push Marketing, Pull Marketing, Pass Marketing.

Introduction

Democracy means sovereignty in the hands of the people. As a democratic country, Indonesia gives the people the widest possible power to participate in the governance process, especially to take part in political events and elect their own leaders. General elections are a tangible manifestation of democracy. Elections are an arena of competition to fill political positions in government based on the formal choices of eligible citizens (Pamungkas, 2009). The people can use their voting rights to contribute to political contests. In other words, elections are a means of implementing people's sovereignty.

Through elections, the legitimacy of people's power is implemented through the "transfer" of some of their power and rights to their representatives in parliament and government (Jurdi, 2018). In line with this, Henry B. Mayo explains that a democratic political system is one in which public policy is determined on the basis of majority rule by representatives who are effectively supervised by the people in periodic elections based on the principle of political equality and conducted in an atmosphere of guaranteed political freedom (Budiarjo, 2008).

Simultaneous regional head elections (Pemilukada) were held in 2020 with a total of 270 regions participating. This included the city of Medan, which held a political competition to elect a mayor and deputy mayor who will lead the city for the next five years. There were two pairs of candidates competing in the Medan City elections, namely Bobby Nasution and Aulia Rachman, who were supported by the PDI-Perjuangan party, and Akhyar Nasution – Salman Alfarisi pair, where Akhyar Nasution is the Acting Mayor of Medan after the previous Mayor of Medan, Dzulmi Eldin, was detained by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) for corruption.

In the 2015 Medan mayoral election, voter turnout declined sharply to 25.36%. The 2020 election, which features qualified candidates, is expected to increase voter turnout by 3 percentage points despite the pandemic. Several names have emerged as potential candidates for mayor of Medan, including Maruli Siahaan, Ikhwan Ritonga, Dahnil Anzar Simanjuntak, Akhyar Nasution, Bobby Afif Nasution, and others.

Based on the results of a survey conducted by Indonesia Development Monitoring (IDM) on September 9-17, 2019 (Warta Ekonomi, 2019), Maruli Siahaan, a retired police officer, has the highest electability with 12.7%. Dahnil Anzar Simanjuntak, a Muhammadiyah Youth activist, was in third place with 8.4%, followed by Ikhwan Ritonga, a member of the Medan DPRD from the Gerindra faction with 8.1%, HT Bahrumisyah, a member of the Medan DPRD from the PAN faction with 5.2%, Bobby Nasution with 5.1%, Akhyar Nasution with 3.6%, Salman Alfarizi with 2.3%,

Sutrisno Pangaribuan with 2.1%, Dedi Iskandar Batubara with 1.2%, Abyadi Siregar with 1.1%, Edy Ikhsan with 0.9%, and Datuk Saiful Azhar with 0.7%.

The names of the prospective candidates continue to narrow down as the election day approaches. The candidates have begun to register with political parties that have opened registration for prospective candidates. This includes participating in the fit and proper test process organized by the relevant political parties. In early 2020, a number of prospective candidates participated in the fit and proper test at the North Sumatra DPD Golkar Party, including Akhyar Nasution, Ikhwan Ritonga, Maruli Siahaan, Colonel Syaiful Azhar, and Bobby Nasution (Kompas, 2020).

The strong candidates expected to run in the 2020 Medan mayoral election are Akhyar Nasution and Bobby Nasution. The Akhyar-Salman pair has received support from a coalition of two parties, namely the PKS Party and the Democrat Party. The PKS-Democrat coalition has 11 seats in the Medan City DPRD, and has decided to nominate the Akhyar-Salman pair as candidates for Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Medan in the 2020 Medan City regional elections. Furthermore, as reported by the detikNews news portal (2020), the PKS Party stated that Akhyar has the advantage of experience because he has served as Acting Mayor of Medan since October 2019, while Salman is the Deputy Chair of the North Sumatra DPRD.

Interestingly, the PDI-P, which had supported Akhyar Nasution since he started his political career from the bottom up until he became Mayor of Medan, chose to reverse its stance and support the Bobby-Aulia pair, Akhyar's political opponents. The PDIP argued that Akhyar had indications of legal problems. As a result, the party chose not to nominate Akhyar in the Medan mayoral election (Media Indonesia, 2020).

On the other hand, the Bobby-Aulia pair received significant support because they were nominated by a large coalition of political parties consisting of PDI Perjuangan, Gerindra Party, PAN, Golkar, NasDem, PSI, Hanura, and PPP. In addition to being nominated by a large coalition, Bobby Nasution himself is known as the son-in-law of President Joko Widodo, which has made him popular among the people of Medan. Meanwhile, his running mate, Aulia Rachman, previously served as Chair of Commission II of the Medan City Council after being elected in the 2019 legislative elections.

Medan Berkah Collaboration is the slogan used by the Bobby-Aulia pair since they ran for Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Medan. Through this slogan, Bobby and Aulia show that the city of Medan has the potential to develop and benefit its people, and through this slogan, all parties can work together to bring change to the city of Medan and make it a blessing. The word *berkah* itself comes from the Arabic word "barokah," which means blessing. The narrative of "Medan Berkah" can be identified as

something close to Islam. This is because, apart from originating from Arabic, the word *berkah* can also be easily found in the Qur'an and Hadith.

Unlike the Bobby-Aulia pair, the Akhyar-Salman pair carries the slogan Medan Aman (Safe Medan). In addition to being an acronym of their names, the slogan Medan Aman is directly in line with the vision of the candidate pair number 01, which is to create a city of the future where the citizens are comfortable and happy. On the one hand, this slogan shows Akhyar-Salman's desire to make Medan a safe city, because according to the Statistics Center in the 2021 Criminal Statistics Data for North Sumatra Province - including the city of Medan - it is the province with the highest crime rate in Indonesia in 2020 (SindoNews, 2022).

Regional elections are not only a celebration of democracy for the people, but also a means for candidates to gain power through a mandate from the people. Competition as a means of vying for power is based on two things: first, it provides an opportunity for leaders in power to fulfill their promises, and second, it provides a *check and balance* on current leadership, offering a comparison not only of performance but also of new directions (Bahri, 2023).

In their struggle to win in the competitive arena, candidates need more than just confidence. Candidates need to prepare political strategy plans to win as many votes as possible on election day. Candidates need tools to win votes and win in the competitive arena.

Political contests, from presidential elections to regional elections, are closely related to political marketing. Political marketing is a series of planned, strategic, but also tactical activities used to spread political meaning to voters. According to Kotler and Neil, the concept of political marketing is a marketing activity to ensure the success of a candidate or political party with all its political activities through campaigns on development programs, the economy, or social concerns. The themes, issues, ideas, ideologies, and messages aim to make the political programs offered highly attractive and at the same time able to influence every citizen and institution/organization effectively.

Regional elections are an arena of competition between candidates for power. If regional elections are likened to a battlefield, and competing candidates are enemies in a war, then the voters' votes are the target of why the war is happening (Bahri, 2023). The competition between Bobby-Aulia and Akhyar-Salman is an interesting thing that we can see in the Medan mayoral election. The two pairs of candidates have two slogans with different meanings, the Islamic-themed Medan Berkah (Medan Blessing) narrative and the Medan Aman (Safe Medan) narrative, which is a promise to create Medan as a safe city for its citizens. This demonstrates how both pairs of

candidates are seeking ways to secure the support of Medan City residents to secure their position and reach the top seat in Medan City.

Method

Research is defined as the systematic and objective collection, management, analysis, and presentation of data to solve problems or test hypotheses in order to develop general principles (Abubakar, 2021). Political Science research is a subcategory of Social Science research, in which Political Science is described as the study of government, public policy and political processes, systems, and political behavior. Political scientists generally use simple research methods to construct tentative theories (correcting the premises and propositions of previous theories), new theories, or to explain political phenomena or issues (Aminah, 2019).

This study uses a comparative qualitative research method. Qualitative research investigates meaning, interpretation, symbols, processes, and relationships, as well as their connection to political phenomena or life (Aminah, 2019). Sugiyono (2017) states that comparative research is research that compares the existence of one or more variables in two or more different samples, or at different times. Therefore, the use of the qualitative-comparative method in this study is to compare the political marketing of "Medan Berkah" with "Medan Aman" during the 2020 Medan mayoral election.

Data was collected using documentation study techniques and field study techniques. Documentary studies use secondary data from books, journals, newspapers, and the internet. Meanwhile, field studies collect primary data from the research site through observation (direct observation) and in-depth interviews. In this study, the primary data obtained came from field observations, where this activity was carried out by observing the field conditions and then recording the results of the observations that had been made. Observations were made in the areas where the regional election competition took place. In addition to field observations, primary data was also obtained from in-depth interviews. The informants interviewed by the researchers were the chairpersons/leaders of the campaign teams, the chairpersons of city-level political parties, volunteer teams, and the people of Medan.

The data was then analyzed in three stages, namely: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1984). First, the data was reduced. Data reduction is the activity of collecting data obtained through observation or interviews. The reduced data will then be presented as a set of organized information that is easier to understand. After the data reduction and presentation

processes are complete, the data will provide direction for the researcher to draw conclusions.

Results and Discussion

Firmanzah (in Kango, 2014) defines political marketing as a set of methods that can facilitate contestants (individuals or political parties) in marketing political initiatives, political ideas, political issues, political ideologies, party leader characteristics, and party work programs to the public. In political contests, competition occurs to win the votes of constituents, so political marketing is a method used by each contestant during the election period.

Newman and Perloff (2004) define political marketing as the application of marketing principles and methods in campaigns by various individuals and organizations. These methods include analysis, development, execution, and planning of campaign strategies carried out by candidates, political parties, governments, lobbyists, and interest groups who try to control public opinion, develop their ideology, win elections, and pass legislation and public votes in response to the desires and needs of certain groups and individuals in society.

The Bobby-Aulia candidate pair's inaugural campaign began with a declaration of support from a group calling themselves "Sedulur Bobby". The enthusiasm of the supporters was evident from the number of people who attended the event. The event attracted the attention of the Medan City Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) because it violated the established health protocols. After the declaration of support, the campaign continued with a visit to a traditional market. This visit was carried out to gain the support of the traders there (). In addition to market management, Bobby highlighted market management issues that he considered problematic. Bobby also listened to the traders' complaints. Another approach taken by Bobby was to offer the use of information technology to help traditional traders in today's digital era.

The Medan Berkah candidate pair carries the vision of "Realizing a Blessed, Advanced, and Conducive Medan City Community," in which there are seven missions that must be carried out to achieve this vision, namely: (1) Medan Berkah, realizing Medan City as a livable and high-quality city. (2) Medan Maju, advancing community welfare through the revitalization of education and health services. (3) Clean Medan, creating social justice through clean, professional, accountable, and transparent bureaucratic reform based on the spirit of serving the community. (4) Developing Medan, building facilities and infrastructure that support the creation of excellent, fair, and equitable public services. (5) Medan Kondusif, creating a conducive climate for all

citizens of Medan through the enhancement of the rule of law based on community participation. (6) Medan Inovatif, realizing a creative and innovative economic city. (7) Medan Beridentitas.

Unlike the Bobby-Aulia ticket, the Akhyar-Salman ticket has adopted the slogan "Medan Aman" (Safe Medan). In addition to being an acronym of their names, the slogan "Medan Aman" is directly in line with the vision of the number 01 ticket, which is to create a city of the future where residents can live comfortably and happily. On the one hand, this slogan shows Akhyar-Salman's desire to make Medan a safe city, because according to the Statistics Center in the 2021 Criminal Statistics Data for North Sumatra Province - including the city of Medan - it is the province with the highest crime rate in Indonesia as of 2020 (SindoNews, 2022).

The Akhyar-Salman pair has a vision, namely: "Realizing a Beautiful City of Medan with Character Towards a Safe and Happy Future City for its Residents". In its efforts to realize this vision, Medan Aman has five missions, namely: (1) Medan Berkarakter (Medan with Character), developing community character values through a local wisdom approach, knowledge, ethics, noble character, religiosity, harmony in diversity, and love for the homeland for unity and integrity. (2) Friendly Medan, creating synergy to increase effective and efficient participation and improve city governance and comprehensive data and information digitization from stakeholders—. (3) Advanced Medan, moving towards a comfortable city of the future and innovating in regulations, bureaucratic climate transparency, and comprehensive services to increase investment in order to improve competitive and comparative capabilities. (4) Prosperous Medan, accelerating and expanding infrastructure and superstructure to support human resource development through competitive independence programs. (5) Beautiful Medan, developing modern, people-friendly, environmentally conscious, and technology-based facilities and infrastructure in the integrated sectors of transportation, education, and health.

The Medan Berkah collaboration applies a structured and tiered political consolidation pattern, starting from the sub-district, village, neighborhood, to polling stations (TPS) levels. This consolidation serves as the main foundation for running the campaign, as it allows the winning team to reach voters directly and continuously. With a region-based work pattern, the campaign team can identify the social characteristics of the community in each neighborhood, including age composition, occupational background, and local issues that are considered important by residents. These findings show that territorial consolidation is not only administrative in nature, but also a strategic instrument in mapping and managing the support base.

Consolidation carried out at the lowest level benefits Medan Berkah in maintaining the intensity of political communication with the community. The winning

team was not only present during the formal campaign period, but also built relatively sustainable relationships with voters. In practice, this consolidation facilitated the process of socializing the candidate's program and vision-mission, while strengthening control over the movement of votes at the grassroots level. These findings show that the success of regional consolidation was one of the important factors that supported the effectiveness of Bobby-Aulia's political marketing strategy.

Political marketing focuses on the process of influencing the public, shaping and uniting opinion towards an ideology that is considered best by the candidate, or at least influencing the public by selling ideas and concepts through a series of effective strategies (Anugerah, 2019). The concept of political marketing goes further by identifying what voters need, then developing political products to achieve what voters need, where in political marketing voters become the main focus of the campaign (Cwalina, 2015).

One important aspect of political marketing is determining the segmentation, target, and political position that will help determine the political campaign strategy to be carried out. Suherman (2017) explains that segmentation is an effort to identify and map the structure and characteristics of society. The voter segmentation strategy is one of the important findings in this study.

In the context of segmentation, targeting, and positioning, Medan Berkah consistently positioned itself as representing youth leadership. Voter segmentation was mainly directed at the younger generation and first-time voters, who at that time were considered to have significant numbers and great electoral potential in the city of Medan. This strategy was not only realized through campaign narratives, but also reflected in actual campaign practices in the field. Bobby-Aulia actively visited youth communities, creative groups, youth organizations, and spaces of interaction that were close to the lives of millennials.

Their positioning as young candidates was reinforced through the use of campaign attributes that represented the style and identity of the younger generation. From their dress code and the language used in political communication to their style of interaction with voters, everything was designed to convey a relaxed, open, and approachable image. The campaign is not conducted with a rigid and formal approach, but rather in a more fluid and communicative manner, creating an emotional closeness between the candidate and young voters. These findings show that Medan Berkah not only targets the younger generation as the object of the campaign, but also seeks to position the candidate as part of that group.

In addition to focusing on the younger generation, Medan Berkah also expanded its segmentation to other groups such as MSME actors, creative economy communities, educational, social, and religious groups. However, this expansion of

segmentation remained within the broad framework of positioning as an inclusive and progressive young leader. Thus, Medan Berkah's targeting strategy was multipolar, but did not lose sight of its main direction in building the candidate's image. These findings indicate a systematic effort by to win over voters through the image of young leadership that is considered capable of addressing various urban issues.

In stark contrast to Medan Berkah, Medan Aman took the opposite approach in terms of segmentation and positioning. Akhyar-Salman targeted groups of people who were disappointed with the ruling regime at the time. In the context of national politics, this strategy cannot be separated from the family relationship between Bobby Nasution and President Joko Widodo, which Medan Aman used as its main differentiator in the local political contest. The findings of the study show that Medan Aman implicitly and explicitly built a narrative of resistance against the ruling power, positioning itself as an alternative for voters who wanted change.

Akhyar-Salman's positioning was built through a strong emphasis on Akhyar Nasution's personal image as a clean incumbent who had never been involved in corruption cases. This narrative became the core of Medan Aman's campaign message and was consistently conveyed to the public. Door-to-door campaigning was used as the main means of instilling this image, as direct interaction allowed the candidates and their campaign team to convey their message in a personal and convincing manner. These findings show that Medan Aman emphasized morality and integrity as the main selling points in its political marketing.

Furthermore, one of the segments targeted by Akhyar-Salman was communities that opposed the regime, which did not want a political dynasty. This was because the issue that was developing in the community at that time was the fact that Bobby Nasution was the son-in-law of President Joko Widodo. This also became a point of agreement because Akhyar-Salman's position as opposition candidates who opposed the regime and were the only candidates who dared to face Bobby-Aulia, who had a large coalition of political parties. This was an interesting dynamic in the context of the election.

The differences in segmentation and positioning between the two pairs of candidates were also reflected in the way they composed and delivered their political messages. Medan Berkah used the tagline "Medan Berkah" as the umbrella narrative for their campaign, which summarized various strategic issues in the city of Medan. This tagline is used to raise concrete issues that are directly felt by the community, such as flooding, traffic congestion, crime, and religious life. These messages are conveyed as promises of change that will be realized through the leadership of Bobby-Aulia.

Analysis shows that the framing of the Medan Berkah message tends to be problem-oriented and solution-focused. Structural issues in the city are translated into simple and easy-to-understand language, especially for the younger generation. With this approach, the campaign message not only functions as a political promotional tool, but also as a means to build the perception that the candidates understand the community's problems and have relevant solutions. These findings show how political messages are used to strengthen the candidates' positioning as young leaders who are responsive and close to the people.

Meanwhile, the political messages developed by Medan Aman emphasize integrity, simplicity, and leadership experience. Akhyar-Salman are positioned as figures who have been tested and have a good track record, especially in terms of being free from corruption. This message is conveyed repeatedly in the campaign, both through direct interaction and through the media. The findings of the study show that this approach aims to build public trust by emphasizing the moral values and personal credibility of the candidates.

This is in line with the main principle of political marketing (Bahri, 2022), which is that understanding the needs of constituents is the main focus. Thus, candidates need to adopt appropriate methods and strategies, including the development of comprehensive political products, the formulation of communication strategies tailored to various voter groups, and the effective distribution of messages to win the political competition. With this approach, candidates who successfully combine a deep understanding of social issues with the appropriate application of political marketing have a greater chance of success in political competition.

In the process, political marketing is not limited to political campaign activities ahead of elections, but also includes broader and more sustainable political events in order to offer or sell political products and develop symbols, images, platforms, and programs related to the public and political policies.

The Covid-19 pandemic situation became an important context that influenced the implementation of the two pairs of candidates' campaigns. Restrictions on social activities and community mobility forced the winning teams to adjust their political marketing strategies. In these conditions, Medan Berkah utilized social media as the main channel for their campaign, especially to reach the younger generation. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter were actively used to convey campaign messages, build the candidates' image, and maintain the intensity of communication with voters.

Research findings show that Medan Berkah's use of social media is not only informative but also interactive. The content presented is designed to suit the characteristics of young voters, both in terms of visuals and narrative. Social media is

used as a space to build closeness, showcase campaign activities, and create the impression that the candidate is present and interacts directly with the community. This strategy further strengthens Medan Berkah's positioning as a candidate who is close to young people and adaptive to developments in communication technology.

On the other hand, Medan Aman also utilized social media as part of its campaign strategy, albeit with a different focus. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp groups were used to disseminate information and documentation of the candidates' activities. However, Medan Aman faced obstacles in the form of mobility restrictions and strict supervision during the pandemic. The perception of unfairness in campaign supervision also affected the movement and effectiveness of the political marketing strategy implemented by this team.

An analysis of the push, pull, and pass marketing strategies shows a clear difference in approach between the two pairs of candidates. Adman Nursal (2004) categorizes three strategies for seeking and developing support during the political campaign process, namely: (1) push marketing is the direct delivery of political products to voters. This is usually done face to face so that this approach can touch voters more personally, thereby providing a different effect compared to advertisements. The contact made becomes two-way communication, humanizing the candidate so that it can increase enthusiasm among the masses and attract the attention of the mass media. (2) Pass marketing is using individuals or groups that can influence voter opinion. Influencers determine the success of mass mobilization (). The more appropriate the influencer chosen, the greater the effect on voter opinion. Nursal further explains that there are several stages in pass marketing, namely: influencer analysis, setting pass marketing objectives for each influencer, pass marketing implementation, evaluation of results, and changes in tactics if necessary. (3) Pull marketing focuses on creating a positive political image. In the effort to shape a candidate's image, the use of media is important in conveying political products. There are two ways to use media, namely by paying for media (paid media) or without paying for media (free media).

Medan Berkah combines these three strategies in a relatively balanced manner. In implementing pass marketing, Bobby-Aulia certainly also received support from various influential figures. One of them was Alim Nur Nasution, who served as Secretary of Al-Washliyah SUMUT, and with his influence, he succeeded in mobilizing volunteers from the AlWashliyah Kota Medan family to support Bobby-Aulia in the 2020 Medan mayoral election. In addition, there is Sanggam Bakara, a Christian leader and businessman, who is also the Chairman of Gapensi North Sumatra. Sanggam Bakara also played an important role in rallying support from his network to win the Bobby-Aulia candidacy. Apart from local support, Bobby-Aulia also received support

from several prominent national figures, such as Sandiada Uno, Fahri Hamzah, Fadli Zon, and even Ganjar Pranowo. The support from these national figures, which was openly declared in the public sphere, provided a major boost to Bobby-Aulia's political marketing efforts.

The use of pull marketing was also evident in the campaigns carried out by the Medan Berkah and Medan Aman teams. In the campaign carried out by Medan Berkah, online and social media were used intensively to gain the attention of the people of Medan. Bobby-Aulia's voter segmentation, which focused on the younger generation, required a campaign that used media that was familiar to that generation. To enter and embrace this segment, Bobby-Aulia used social media as a media access point. Social media is a very effective tool for reaching the younger generation. Most of the younger generation are active on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. By focusing on social media, Bobby-Aulia can ensure that their campaign messages reach young voters where they interact online.

The segmentation focused on the younger generation and the use of social media in Bobby-Aulia's campaign is naturally a form of pull marketing strategy. Campaigns using pull marketing, namely the use of social media, enable the formation of a candidate's image and allow for active interaction with young voters. It can also help in spreading campaign messages or political products from candidates. In this way, Bobby-Aulia can maximize the impact of their campaign among young voters and utilize social media as a powerful marketing tool in their efforts to win the election.

Akhyar-Salman, on the other hand, emphasizes a push marketing strategy through direct and personal campaigns. Akhyar-Salman consistently conducts door-to-door campaigns, which are a classic example of a push marketing strategy. In their campaign, Akhyar-Salman visits people from house to house, interacting directly with voters. Akhyar-Salman can convince voters that they are the best candidates to address existing community issues. The main aspect of the Medan Aman campaign is to build trust and reputation by convincing the community that Akhyar-Salman is a trustworthy leader with no record of corruption throughout his past leadership. This is an example of how push marketing focuses on building reputation and trust directly with voters.

Akhyar-Salman's political marketing campaign is not only carried out independently but is also assisted by a network team in the field consisting of an internal party team based in sub-districts, villages, and neighborhoods. They also receive assistance from communities and volunteers who support Akhyar-Salman because they share the same vision and aspiration to advance the city of Medan. These field network teams then help to approach community leaders, including indigenous communities, organizations, and local figures. In this case, the push marketing strategy

carried out by enables Akhyar-Salman to gain support from leaders and decision makers in different communities.

The Akhyar-Salman candidate pair also succeeded in gaining strong support from various influential figures in their campaign, ranging from community leaders to religious leaders. Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono (AHY), who is the Chairman of the Democratic Party's Central Executive Board, was present in Medan to campaign for the Akhyar-Salman candidate pair and provide political encouragement to the candidates. Then, Rocky Gerung, a nationally known figure, also appeared at a discussion held with Akhyar-Salman. His participation showed his support for the Akhyar-Salman candidates who are currently in a political battle. In addition, Ustad Abdul Somad (UAS), a nationally renowned religious figure, also gave his strong support to Akhyar-Salman. This support was documented in a video containing an appeal to the people of Medan to support the Akhyar-Salman candidates, cementing their influence in the community and among voters.

Akhyar-Salman's pull marketing is also different from Bobby-Aulia's team. Akhyar-Salman focuses on social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp groups, and Instagram. Akhyar-Salman consistently uploads video content to his social media accounts. Video content is a very effective tool in pull marketing, especially on social media. Videos can be a powerful way to attract voters' attention and convey campaign messages in an interesting way. By sharing videos of campaign activities, Akhyar-Salman can create content that voters can access voluntarily. In addition to implementing pull marketing, Akhyar-Salman also involves volunteers to distribute his video content. Volunteers who help expand the reach of this content by sharing it on various social platforms, groups, and communities can create a viral effect that can significantly increase the visibility of the campaign.

By targeting first-time voters in their segmentation, Bobby-Aulia takes a very targeted approach to the younger generation. Bobby-Aulia strives to build an image as a millennial candidate with young leadership who can understand the problems and concerns of the younger generation. Of course, they are also active on social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter, which are popular among the younger generation. On the other hand, Akhyar-Salman has a very different segmentation, namely the segment of society that wants to fight the existing regime. Akhyar-Salman is trying *to brand* himself as an opposition candidate who is fighting the regime, as well as a leader who is committed to bringing progress and development to the people of Medan. One of the points they emphasize is Akhyar Nasution's positive track record during his previous leadership, which was free from corruption.

In addition, what made the 2020 Medan mayoral election even more challenging was the situation and conditions of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic

that lasted throughout the election period. The pandemic situation required both candidates to be able to adapt to the conditions, including adjusting their campaign styles to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Based on PKPU pilkada no.6 of 2020 concerning the implementation of simultaneous elections for governors and deputy governors, regents and deputy regents, and mayors and deputy mayors in the context of the non-natural disaster of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19), it was determined that some stages of the simultaneous elections could not be carried out normally.

Several measures were taken in the Medan City election campaign during the pandemic. First, the campaign was conducted online using technology and digital platforms to minimize the spread of the virus. Second, physical gatherings were restricted to avoid crowds and the spread of the virus, with door-to-door campaigns and public meetings involving large crowds being limited. Third, strict health protocols were implemented. Fourth, health protocol education campaigns were conducted by delivering messages about Covid-19. Fifth, local governments and regional head candidates could rely on local media and online platforms to convey campaign messages.

Campaigns continue amid the pandemic storm that has hit the city of Medan. This is a challenging obstacle, because the unprecedented new situation requires both candidates to adapt to the existing conditions and circumstances. Holding elections amid the Covid-19 pandemic is certainly risky. If there is a stage that is delayed and slowed down due to a lack of discipline in implementing Covid-19 protocol standards (wearing masks, using hand sanitizer, maintaining physical distance), then the KPU, which is organizing the regional elections, has the potential to become a new cluster for the spread of Covid-19.

The safety of the organizers remains a priority and must be prioritized. Therefore, understanding and instilling the values of the new normal must be strictly practiced by the organizers in carrying out the election stages. Successful and Healthy Regional Elections are a shared commitment that must be realized. The 2020 Medan City Regional Election, which took place amid the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, was successfully held with a voter turnout of 45.80%. This was a completely unexpected turnout. There was an increase of 20.42% from the 2015 Regional Election. This increase ranks among the top five in Indonesia, according to the Indonesian General Elections Commission (KPU RI). Although it did not reach the national target of 77.5%, the voter turnout in the 2020 Medan regional elections was a remarkable success, considering that the elections were held amid the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

These obstacles were also experienced by both pairs of candidates for mayor and deputy mayor of Medan when campaigning to the public. The obstacles experienced by the Bobby Nasution and Aulia Rachman pair when campaigning were

that their mobility in the field to seek support from the community was very limited, given that the campaign was carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic. As a substitute, the Medan Berkah collaboration campaign team conducted a door-to-door campaign by visiting every community member's home to gain support. Meanwhile, the obstacles faced by the candidate pair Akhyar Nasution and Salman Alfarisi were the same as those faced by the candidate pair Bobby Nasution and Aulia Rachman. All campaign activities carried out by the Medan Aman winning team were very limited, starting from temperature checks and the requirement for the community to wear masks. However, the Medan Aman campaign team felt discrimination and injustice regarding campaign supervision, as they felt that strict supervision of COVID-19 protocols only applied to them, while the Medan Berkah team did not receive the same level of supervision.

Based on the overall analysis, this study found that the differences in political marketing strategies between Medan Berkah and Medan Aman had a direct implication on how each candidate pair built relationships with voters. Medan Berkah positioned itself as part of the youth, targeting young voters by visiting them, engaging in dialogue, and attributing itself as youth so that it would feel relevant to young voters. Meanwhile, Medan Aman's position themselves as clean incumbents with an image far from corruption, where Medan Aman also targets community groups and is critical of the regime.

These findings confirm that political marketing in regional head elections is not only about delivering messages, but also about the ability to read the context of power, social dynamics, and voter expectations. The differences in segmentation, targeting, and positioning carried out by the two candidate pairs show that effective campaign strategies are largely determined by the suitability between the candidate's image, political message, and the characteristics of the targeted voters. Thus, this discussion provides an empirical picture of political marketing practices at the local level and enriches the study of campaign dynamics in the 2020 Medan City Regional Election.

Conclusion

The 2020 Medan City Regional Head Election (Pemilukada) became a stage for fierce competition between two pairs of candidates, namely Bobby Nasution - Aulia Rachman and Akhyar Nasution - Salman Alfarisi, in an effort to win the top position in the Medan City administration. In their efforts to win this political contest, the candidates needed effective tools and strategies to attract and gain support from the community.

Political marketing is a set of methods that can help contestants disseminate political initiatives, political ideas, political issues, political ideologies, party leader characteristics, and party work programs to the public. Political marketing is a concept that stems from efforts to disseminate political meaning to voters through a series of planned, strategic, and tactical activities. This covers various aspects, such as the appearance of the candidate (who) and the issues they will bring up (what) certainly require packaging that can attract voters. Political marketing is an inherent part of the political process that aims to influence voters' views and choices.

The findings show that both pairs of candidates applied the principles of political marketing as described by Firmanzah and Newman & Perloff, namely marketing ideas, images, and political programs through structured campaign strategy planning and execution. However, there were stark differences in the way Medan Berkah and Medan Aman managed political segmentation, targeting, and positioning. Medan Berkah consistently positions itself as representing youth leadership by targeting the younger generation and first-time voters as its main support base. This strategy is realized not only through campaign narratives, but also through direct practices in the field, the use of campaign attributes that represent youth culture, and the use of social media as the main communication channel. In contrast, Medan Aman positions itself as a clean and honest incumbent candidate, targeting groups who are disappointed with the current regime and voters who want stability and moral leadership.

These findings are in line with literature that emphasizes that the success of political marketing is largely determined by a candidate's ability to understand the needs and characteristics of voters, and then package political products that are tailored to the target segment. In this context, Medan Berkah's strategy reflects a problem-oriented and solution-focused approach, where concrete city issues are framed in language that is simple and relatable to the lives of the younger generation. This reinforces Cwalina's view that voters are at the center of political marketing strategies, so effective campaigns must be able to speak the language of the targeted voters. Meanwhile, the Medan Aman approach, which emphasizes integrity and a clean track record, demonstrates the application of political marketing based on moral values and personal credibility, which is also known in the literature as a form of candidate differentiation in political contests.

However, this study also found dynamics that are relatively different from some of the findings in the literature, particularly regarding the effectiveness of the incumbent's image. In many studies, incumbent status is often considered a strong electoral asset. However, in the case of the 2020 Medan City Pilkada, the incumbent's clean and experienced image did not automatically result in a dominant electoral

advantage. One possible reason for this is the strong narrative of change and renewal brought by Medan Berkah, particularly through the symbolization of young leadership, which is considered more relevant to the needs and aspirations of voters, especially the younger generation. In addition, the national political context and power relations also influence voters' perceptions of candidates, so that the incumbent status does not stand alone but is interpreted within the framework of broader political dynamics.

Another factor influencing the findings of this study is the Covid-19 pandemic, which has limited the scope of conventional campaigning. In these circumstances, the ability to adapt to digital media has become a crucial factor in the implementation of political marketing. Medan Berkah has been relatively more adaptive in utilizing social media interactively and intensively, enabling it to maintain communication with young voters amid mobility restrictions. Conversely, although Medan Aman also utilized digital media, its push marketing strategy through direct campaigns faced greater obstacles due to social restrictions and perceptions of unfairness in campaign monitoring. This condition shows that structural and situational contexts, such as a pandemic, can affect the effectiveness of political marketing strategies implemented by candidates.

Overall, this study interprets that the differences in political marketing strategies between Medan Berkah and Medan Aman not only reflect tactical campaign choices, but also demonstrate how each candidate reads the social, political, and psychological context of voters. Medan Berkah successfully built symbolic and emotional closeness with the younger generation by positioning itself as an inclusive and adaptive young leader, while Medan Aman placed integrity and morality as key values in building public trust. These findings confirm that political marketing in regional elections is not merely a matter of campaign intensity, but rather about the compatibility between the candidate's image, political message, media used, and the characteristics of the targeted voters.

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