

From Formal Transparency to Substantive Information Rights: Political Communication Practices in the 2024 Bali Regional Elections

Ni Wayan Widhiasthini^{1*}, Made Srinitha Millinia Utami²,
Nyoman Sri Subawa³, Nyoman Sridiva Dian Prabarini⁴

^{1,3}Universitas Pendidikan Nasional, Indonesia

²Edith Cowan University, Australia

³Saxion University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands

*corresponding author E-mail: widhiasthini74@undiknas.ac.id

Received: Feb 13, 2026; Revised: March 30, 2026; Approved: March 31, 2026

ABSTRACT

This study examines how political communication practices contribute to fulfilling the public's right to electoral information in the context of local democracy during the 2024 Bali Regional Elections. Using a qualitative exploratory case study design, the research analyzes political communication conducted by the General Election Commission (KPU), regional head candidates, and local media. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 28 informants, including KPU officials, campaign team representatives, journalists, traditional community leaders, and young voters, complemented by three focus group discussions (FGDs) and digital content analysis. Digital materials were purposively selected from official KPU platforms and candidates' social media accounts (Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok) during the official campaign period based on relevance, engagement level, and informational content. Guided by the analytical framework of transparency and deliberative political communication, the study explores the relationship between information disclosure, communication practices, and public participation. The findings reveal that while the Bali KPU has expanded access to electoral information through digital channels and media collaboration, communication remains largely one-way and procedural. Candidates' strategies are dominated by symbolic and image-based messaging, generating information asymmetry between political actors and voters. The study identifies a gap between formal transparency and substantive information rights, demonstrating that effective electoral transparency requires participatory, dialogic, and educational communication practices. This research contributes to debates on political communication, information politics, and democratic accountability in local electoral governance.

Keywords: Political communication; electoral politics; electoral information integrity; deliberative communication; digital civic engagement; political media culture; local democracy

INTRODUCTION

A healthy democracy is characterized by two fundamental things: public information disclosure and citizen participation in the political process. In the context of regional head elections, political communication plays a strategic role in ensuring that every citizen obtains adequate, accurate, and relevant information to make rational political choices (James & Garnett, 2025). Information disclosure is not merely an administrative aspect of election administration, but a form of fulfilling the constitutional rights of citizens as stipulated in Law Number 14 of 2008 concerning Public Information Disclosure. Through this principle, election organizers such as the General Election Commission (KPU) are obliged not only to provide information, but also to ensure that this information is accessible, understandable, and can be utilized by the public in a fair manner (James & Garnett, 2025). In practice, the gap between the ideal of information disclosure and the reality on the ground is still quite wide. Previous studies have shown that political communication in the context of elections in Indonesia is often still one-way (top-down), where organizing institutions and candidates focus more on disseminating formal information rather than building participatory interactive communication (Aasoglenang et al., 2025). As a result, election information is not fully able to reach various segments of society, especially young people and first-time voters, who now dominate the voting population in Indonesia. A study by Kortukov (2025) confirms that political communication that is informative, dialogical, and digitally based has a positive effect on increasing public trust in electoral institutions. Other studies show that the KPU's use of social media for political education and dissemination of electoral information has limited effectiveness because two-way interaction has not been optimally established (Kim et al., 2022). A similar finding was reported in a study by Boomgaarden et al. (2025) analyzing Political Communication and Transparency in Local Elections, where the

quality of public communication is a key determinant of perceptions of openness and the legitimacy of election results at the local level.

The present study focuses on the provincial-level election of the 2024 Bali Regional Elections, in which voters directly elected the governor and vice governor as executive leaders responsible for provincial policy coordination, regional development planning, and allocation of public resources across regencies and cities. Unlike regency or municipal elections that primarily address localized administrative governance, the provincial contest carries broader strategic implications, including policy harmonization, tourism governance, environmental management, and interregional economic coordination. The electoral competition was shaped by strong incumbency visibility, coalition-based candidacy formation, and highly personalized campaign strategies, where candidate recognition and symbolic representation often outweighed substantive policy debate. For voters, the stakes extended beyond leadership selection to questions of development priorities, public service performance, and the distribution of economic opportunities within Bali's evolving socio-economic landscape.

Information flows during the election were shaped by multiple interacting actors operating across institutional, media, and community domains. The Bali General Election Commission (KPU) functioned as the formal provider of electoral information through official websites, public announcements, and digital dissemination platforms. Candidates and campaign teams acted as strategic communicators, primarily utilizing social media channels such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to amplify visibility and mobilize support. Local media organizations mediated political narratives through news coverage and talk programs, while community leaders, traditional village authorities, and youth networks facilitated informal communication through offline forums and social interactions. Despite this plurality of actors, agenda-setting power was unevenly distributed, with institutional communication emphasizing procedural information, while

campaign actors dominated attention through promotional messaging supported by algorithm-driven social media distribution and sponsored content.

Within this communication ecosystem, several concrete information problems emerged. First, electoral communication largely followed a one-way messaging model, prioritizing dissemination over dialogue, thereby limiting opportunities for deliberative engagement between political actors and citizens. Second, public discussion spaces that enabled issue-based deliberation remained limited, both online and offline. Third, disparities in digital literacy and internet accessibility created uneven exposure to electoral information, particularly between urban and rural communities. Fourth, the increasing prevalence of promotional and paid political content blurred the boundary between informational communication and campaign advertising, making it difficult for voters to distinguish substantive policy information from image-building narratives. These conditions collectively produced information asymmetry, whereby political elites and organized campaign actors possessed greater control over message framing and agenda visibility than ordinary voters, resulting in unequal access to meaningful electoral knowledge.

Research by Appiah et al. (2025) found that public information disclosure policies have a significant effect on voter response, particularly in shaping public perceptions of election integrity. Meanwhile, research by Asante et al. (2024) highlights that voter digital literacy is an important prerequisite for political communication on social media to effectively increase participation. This means that fulfilling the public's right to information cannot be separated from the social and cultural context and the community's ability to process information critically. In the context of Bali, the role of local culture, traditional leaders, and traditional social communities also influences how political information is received and interpreted. This makes the process of political communication and public information

disclosure in Bali hybrid in nature, between digital modernization and community-based local wisdom. The involvement of traditional leaders in the election socialization process has great potential to strengthen information dissemination, but it has not been optimally utilized. Therefore, the issue of fulfilling the public's right to information on the 2024 Bali regional elections is not merely a technical communication problem, but a structural and cultural problem in local democracy. Political communication that is not adaptive to the needs of the community, coupled with limitations in the provision of open data and public interaction, hinders the realization of the principles of transparency and accountability. Thus, this study has two main urgencies. First, empirically, to analyze the effectiveness of the political communication strategies of the KPU and candidates in fulfilling the public's right to electoral information in the 2024 Bali Regional Elections. Second, theoretically, to expand the study of the relationship between political communication and the right to information in the context of local democracy in Indonesia.

Political Communication in the Context of Electoral Democracy

Political communication is a fundamental element in the democratic process because it serves as a bridge between the government, political candidates, and the public. Alon-Barkat et al. (2025) define political communication as the process of conveying messages about "who says what, in which channel, to whom, and with what effect." In the context of electoral democracy, political communication is not only interpreted as the delivery of political messages, but also as a participatory mechanism that shapes public perception, legitimacy, and trust (Qin, Liu, et al., 2025). According to Wardle & Scales (2025), political communication serves to build political awareness, influence voter behavior, and ensure openness between political actors and the public. In the context of local elections such as the 2024 Bali regional elections, political communication not only plays a role in the contest between candidates, but also in ensuring that voters have access to relevant and

credible information about the electoral process. Various studies confirm that the effectiveness of political communication determines the quality of democracy. Chang & Lee (2025) emphasize that modern democracy depends on information-rich citizenship, where citizen political participation is only meaningful if it is based on adequate information. This is in line with the study by Ramasamy (2020), which shows that transparent political communication increases political trust and strengthens institutional legitimacy. In the Indonesian context, it has been noted that weak political communication between the KPU and the public is often the cause of low voter turnout and the emergence of electoral disinformation. Thus, political communication in the context of electoral democracy is not merely a tool for political persuasion, but also a means of public service that ensures citizens' right to know is fulfilled equally and meaningfully.

The Right to Public Information as a Pillar of Democracy

The right to public information (Right to Information or RTI) is a fundamental principle in good governance and substantive democracy. According to Masters-Awatere et al. (2025), public information disclosure is a key requirement for state accountability to citizens. Power et al. (2024) add that the right to information is not only a legal aspect, but also an instrument of citizen empowerment that enables the public to monitor and assess the performance of public institutions. In Indonesia, the guarantee of the right to information is regulated in Law Number 14 of 2008 concerning Public Information Disclosure. This regulation places election organizing institutions such as the KPU as public information bodies that are required to provide information quickly, accurately, and in a manner that is accessible to the public. However, as noted in the 2024 Bali Regional Election KPU report, the implementation of this principle of openness still faces obstacles in terms of distribution, relevance, and format of information delivery to the public in the regions. Research by Czuba (2024) shows that electoral information

transparency has a direct correlation with public trust and voter participation. In the same context, Baniamin (2021) emphasize that information asymmetry between public institutions and the public can hinder the democratic process because the public does not have a sufficient basis for making informed political decisions. Thus, fulfilling the public's right to information in the implementation of elections is not only a legal obligation but also a form of respect for citizens' human rights to participate consciously and critically in the political process.

General Election Commission and Public Service for Election Information

As the election organizing body, the General Election Commission (KPU) has a dual responsibility, namely to conduct free and fair elections and to guarantee citizens' rights to information about the elections. Based on the public service theory by Osborne & Plastrik (1997) cited by Virtanen et al. (2025), modern public institutions are required not only to carry out administrative functions but also to serve the public with the principles of transparency, accountability, and participation. According to Qin et al. (2025), the quality of public service can be measured through five main dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. When applied in the context of the KPU, these five dimensions cover the aspects of data transparency, reliability of electoral information, speed of response to public inquiries, clarity of procedures, and attention to the information needs of diverse voter groups. Findings in the study by Baser & Tan (2023) show that although the KPU has utilized various media (face-to-face, print, and digital), the main challenges still lie in information reach and relevance. Electoral information has not been fully conveyed in a format that is easily understood by all social groups, especially young voters and rural communities. An empirical study by Zavadskaya & Shilov (2021) reinforces this finding, that the success of public institutions in providing political information depends on the extent to which their communication strategies adapt to the information

behavior of the community. Therefore, the KPU needs to treat information disclosure not only as a legal obligation, but also as an integral part of public service excellence in a democratic system.

Digital Public Communication and Political Participation of the Younger Generation

Digital transformation has changed the way people interact with politics. Young people now get more political information from social media than from conventional media (Power et al., 2024). According to the Uses and Gratifications theory, audiences are not passive but actively choose media according to their needs and interests (James & Garnett, 2025). In the context of elections, this means that election organizers and candidates must adjust their communication strategies to the digital media preferences of young people. Research by Baniamin (2021) shows that social media is effective for voter education and increasing political awareness, but its effectiveness is highly dependent on the consistency of two-way interaction and the credibility of the message. Meanwhile, the study *Understanding and Political Participation of the Younger Generation* (Zavadskaya & Shilov, 2021) confirms that although the younger generation is interested in political issues, they are often skeptical of official information because it is considered monotonous, formal, and irrelevant to their digital communication style. This condition calls for a new approach to political communication that is more participatory and based on digital collaboration. Fulfilling the public's right to information for the younger generation must be accompanied by an increase in political digital literacy so that the public is able to distinguish between official information and disinformation. Without this, digital political communication can actually widen the information divide among citizens.

Political Branding and Campaign Message Transparency

In modern electoral contests, political branding strategies are key instruments for building a candidate's image and shaping public perception. According to Alon-Barkat et al. (2025), political marketing encompasses the processes of public research, message design, and communication oriented toward voter needs. However, in practice, political branding often creates a dilemma between electoral persuasion and information transparency. In the context of the 2024 Bali regional elections, the KPU report noted that candidates' campaign messages were more symbolic and emotional than informative. This is in line with the findings of Qin et al. (2025), which states that image politics often obscures the substance of programs. As a result, the public is more familiar with the candidates' personalities than they are with the policy visions they promote. From an ethical communication perspective, this situation can undermine the public's right to substantive political information. Boomgaarden et al. (2025) emphasize that transparency in campaign communication is part of democratic accountability, which ensures that the public can assess candidates based on competence, not just popularity. Thus, ethical political branding must be accompanied by data transparency, rational arguments, and messages that educate the public, not just rhetoric that strengthens electability.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study was designed to analyze political communication practices and public information disclosure in the implementation of the 2024 Bali Regional Elections as a form of fulfilling the public's right to electoral information. The research focuses on how the political communication strategies employed by the General Election Commission (KPU) and political actors influence public perception, access to information, and political participation among the people of Bali. Therefore, the methodological approach used is designed to be in-depth, flexible, and contextual in order to

understand the complex socio-political dynamics behind the local democratic process. This research uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because the purpose of the research was not to measure phenomena quantitatively, but rather to understand the meanings, perceptions, and practices of political communication involving many actors and interests. Braun & Clarke (2006) and Johnson et al. (2006) explain that a qualitative approach is effective for exploring social phenomena that cannot be explained through numbers, but rather through interpretations of behavior, symbols, and social interactions. A case study design was chosen because this research focuses on a specific context, namely the 2024 Bali regional elections, which have distinctive social, cultural, and political characteristics. Boundioa & Thiombiano (2025) emphasize that case studies allow researchers to understand contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts in a deep and holistic manner.

The location of this research is in Bali Province, with an emphasis on four regencies/cities, namely Denpasar City, Buleleng Regency, Tabanan Regency, and Gianyar Regency. The location was selected purposively based on variations in voter participation rates, access to public information, and socio-cultural diversity. Denpasar and Buleleng were chosen because they represent areas with declining voter participation and challenges in disseminating election information. Conversely, Tabanan and Gianyar represent areas with high participation, which can provide lessons on relatively effective political communication practices. The research object covers two main aspects. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and digital media content analysis conducted between February and May 2025. A total of 28 informants participated in the study, consisting of 18 individual interview participants and 10 participants involved in two FGDs. Informants were recruited using purposive sampling supported by snowball techniques to ensure representation from key actors shaping electoral information circulation,

including local election commission officials (KPU), campaign team members, journalists, community leaders, youth activists, and active voters. Recruitment criteria required participants to have direct involvement in election-related communication activities or demonstrated engagement with electoral information through digital or community channels during the election period. Prior to participation, all informants received detailed research explanations and signed informed consent forms. Ethical standards were maintained through voluntary participation, anonymization of identities, and secure data handling procedures in accordance with institutional research ethics guidelines. First, the political communication strategies implemented by the KPU and regional head candidates in conveying electoral information to the public. Second, the community's perceptions and experiences in accessing, assessing, and utilizing electoral information as a basis for political decision-making. This focus is in line with the research objective, which is to understand the relationship between political communication and the fulfillment of the public's right to information in the context of local electoral democracy.

The types of data used consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with a number of key informants, including officials and staff of the Provincial KPU and Regency/City KPU in Bali, representatives of candidate pairs' campaign teams, local media journalists, traditional leaders, and young voters. Young voters (millennials and Gen Z) were chosen as informants because they constitute the largest voter group, yet previous studies have shown that they have relatively high levels of political apathy. In addition to interviews, the researchers also conducted participatory observations of KPU socialization activities and political campaign activities, both in person and through digital channels. To strengthen the data, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were also held with several youth communities and civil society groups to test the consistency of perceptions between actors, as suggested by Kotzé (2023). Meanwhile, secondary data was collected through official KPU documents (socialization

guidelines, voter participation reports, recapitulation data), legislation (Law No. 14 of 2008 on Public Information Disclosure, Election Law), as well as academic publications and local media reports related to the 2024 Bali regional elections. The data collection process was carried out using four main techniques: semi-structured interviews, field observations, document analysis, and digital media analysis. The semi-structured interview technique was used so that researchers had the flexibility to explore in-depth information while remaining within the scope of the research topic (Braun et al., 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Political Context Of The 2024 Bali Regional Elections

The 2024 Bali Regional Elections took place in a relatively stable political situation, but faced new challenges related to declining voter participation and the transformation of the political communication landscape in the digital era. Data from the Bali KPU shows that voter turnout declined from 77.22% in the 2018 elections to 71.92% in the 2024 elections, a significant decline that can be used as an indicator of a gap in the dissemination of political information and low public involvement in the electoral process. Socio-demographically, the voter structure in Bali is heavily influenced by the younger generation, with Millennials and Generation Z estimated to account for more than half of the permanent voter list. However, the KPU report notes that this age group actually has lower participation than older age groups. This phenomenon is not unique to Bali. Several previous studies have confirmed that young voters in Indonesia tend to show political apathy towards formal politics, especially if political communication from political institutions and actors is not designed with their digital characteristics in mind. A study by Ward & Monaghan (2025) found that although Generation Z has relatively high digital competence, their political participation remains low if public communication is not responsive to their communication style needs (digital knowledge, digital ability, digital behavior). Another study on Political

Branding and the Gen Z Vote also shows that strong candidate branding is important to Gen Z, but if political messages are not conveyed visually and interactively, young voters' interest remains limited (Aasoglenang et al., 2025).

Beyond generational and digital factors, Bali's socio-political context is marked by strong cultural structures such as traditional leaders, village institutions, and Hindu religious organizations that play a significant role in community life. These traditional structures often serve as channels for informal political communication in local communities. However, as noted in the Bali regional election research report, the KPU and candidates have not optimally utilized these socio-cultural networks as channels for participatory political communication. Empirical support from Kotzé (2023) research shows that traditional local leaders (both formal and informal) have a major influence on the formation of political opinion and decision-making in the community, especially in coastal and rural areas, because they are trusted as mediators of information who are closer to the people and are often used as informal references by residents.

The above phenomena reveal two types of political communication inequality: digital inequality and cultural inequality. Digital inequality arises because, even though internet access and digital literacy are becoming more widespread, not all young voters feel that election messages are delivered in a format that suits their digital preferences, whether in terms of visuals, interactivity, or content relevance. Baniamin (2021) research found that even though Gen Z's digital competence is quite high, it does not automatically guarantee that their participation in elections will increase significantly if public communication does not respond to these aspects. On the other hand, cultural inequality shows that local values and traditional social networks still greatly influence how political information is absorbed and believed (Rajasekhar et al., 2025). In rural areas such as Buleleng and Karangasem, many residents still rely on secondary or informal information from neighbors, traditional leaders, and community discussions rather than official sources

such as the General Elections Commission (KPU). This phenomenon occurs because local sources are considered closer, more trustworthy, or more in line with local cultural communication norms. This overall complexity shows that the decline in voter participation in the 2024 Bali regional elections is not only a matter of individual motivation or political awareness, but also a matter of how political communication and the provision of public information are managed and formatted. In order for the public's right to electoral information to be adequately fulfilled, not only legal formalities and digital channels are needed, but also communication strategies that integrate aspects of the digital generation, local cultural characteristics, homologous communication mediums in the community, and relevant, interactive, and credible information content.

Political Communication Strategies By The Kpu In Fulfilling The Right To Public Information

The implementation of political communication strategies by the Election Commission (KPU) in Bali is closely linked to institutional efforts to fulfill citizens' constitutional right to public information during local elections. One commonly used indicator to evaluate outreach effectiveness is voter turnout; however, turnout data must be treated as administrative evidence rather than a direct measure of informational equality. According to the official report published by the Bali Provincial Election Commission (KPU Provinsi Bali), voter participation in the most recent local election reached percent of registered voters based on the finalized voter list (DPT) for the election year (KPU Provinsi Bali, 2024). This statistic demonstrates the extent of electoral attendance and indicates that voter mobilization mechanisms functioned institutionally. Nevertheless, participation rates alone cannot be interpreted as proof that voters received sufficient, balanced, or deliberative electoral information. To maintain analytical rigor, this study distinguishes empirical evidence from interpretative claims. The turnout figure represents

measurable participation outcomes, whereas the analysis presented here focuses on the communicative processes through which electoral information is distributed, accessed, and understood by citizens. High participation does not automatically eliminate informational disparities, as voters may participate for reasons unrelated to informational quality, including social mobilization, community pressure, or habitual voting practices. Therefore, the evaluation of KPU communication strategies requires examination of information accessibility and interaction patterns rather than relying solely on participation statistics. Within this analytical framework, digital and cultural inequality are operationalized using observable indicators. Digital inequality refers to measurable differences in access to internet infrastructure, frequency of digital platform use for election-related information, levels of digital literacy, and the availability of official electoral content across communication channels such as websites and social media platforms. Cultural inequality, meanwhile, refers to variations in communication mediation shaped by local social structures, including reliance on community leaders or informal networks as primary information sources, differing trust toward institutional messaging, and unequal opportunities to engage in dialogic forums such as public outreach events or community discussions organized by electoral bodies. These indicators were identified through interview findings and media observations rather than inferred from aggregate electoral outcomes.

From the perspective of public service quality theory as developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1988) in Kotzé (2023), the KPU Bali's efforts can be said to be quite strong in the dimensions of tangibility (availability of digital facilities, delivery of material through official platforms, publication of visual material) and assurance (confidence that the information conveyed by the KPU is credible and reliable). However, the dimensions of responsiveness and empathy still appear weak, with limited interactive dialogue spaces, public responses to complaints or questions from the community, and adaptation of content to suit public aspirations (especially those of the younger generation).

These findings are in line with the research by Appiah et al. (2025) which shows that in several regions in Indonesia, election organizing institutions have limited capacity to manage dialogic digital communication, both in terms of human resources who understand digital media, budgets that support interactive content, and the level of public engagement. The study by Virtanen et al. (2025) shows that the KPU uses social media for public education and mobilization, but finds that the use of social media as a place for two-way interaction is not yet optimal, especially in terms of comments, public responses, and feedback. In addition, the study "Performance Evaluation in Public Information Services" found that although the overall performance of the KPU's public information service supports the implementation of democratic elections, weaknesses in empathy and accessibility for people in remote areas remain a problem (Power et al., 2024). Theoretically, a formal-bureaucratic approach is indeed important to ensure legitimacy, regulatory clarity, and data reliability, but the literature on modern political communication and digital democracy emphasizes that formal transparency alone is not enough. Many researchers mention that political communication must go beyond the delivery of information, towards public dialogue, citizen participation, and adaptation of content to suit the cultural and demographic context (James & Garnett, 2025).

Empirical findings show that KPU communication strategies relied heavily on digital dissemination through official platforms alongside conventional outreach activities. While these efforts expanded formal information availability, differences in platform accessibility and communicative mediation produced varied levels of informational exposure among voter groups. Importantly, this study avoids generalized claims regarding voter knowledge distribution without supporting data. Statements concerning participation or voter proportions are therefore grounded exclusively in year-specific voter-list records and officially documented statistics. By explicitly separating institutional evidence (turnout and official

reports) from analytical interpretation (information access and communicative inequality), the discussion clarifies how KPU political communication strategies contribute to the fulfillment of public information rights while simultaneously revealing structural limitations in achieving fully equitable electoral information environments.

Candidates' Political Communication Patterns And Their Implications For Public Information Access

The analysis of candidates' political communication patterns reveals a noticeable contrast between incumbent-oriented branding strategies and challenger narratives emphasizing identity and change; however, this distinction is grounded in systematic empirical examination rather than normative assessment. The study analyzed a total of 36 campaign communication materials consisting of social media posts, official campaign videos, and public speech excerpts disseminated through Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and official campaign websites. The materials were collected during the formal campaign period between November 2024 and February 2025 to ensure temporal consistency and comparability across candidates. Content selection followed predefined inclusion criteria, namely materials containing electoral messaging directed at voters, including program explanations, candidate profiling, campaign promises, and public outreach communication. As important actors in the local political communication ecosystem, regional head candidates play a strategic role in shaping public perceptions of leadership quality through their campaign messages. Based on the results of the study, there are striking differences in the communication strategies of the two pairs of candidates. The incumbent pair focuses on political branding that emphasizes performance and program continuity, while the challengers emphasize identity politics and narratives of change. In practice, the communication patterns of these two pairs of candidates are still heavily influenced by the logic of political marketing as described by Czuba (2024),

where image building is emphasized more than the delivery of substantive information. Campaign messages, which are often sloganistic, prioritize symbols and emotions over concrete descriptions of vision, policy, or measurable program data. As a result of this approach, the public receives information that tends to be emotional and superficial, rather than based on data and an objective understanding of policy. This phenomenon is in line with the concept of symbolic politics, where the image of the candidate replaces political substance. Qin et al. (2025) have used this term in the context of Indonesian regional elections to describe how campaigns are often filled with symbolism and image rhetoric rather than policy arguments. The theoretical framework of information asymmetry is also relevant here, as Rajasekhar et al. (2025) argue that when access to substantive information is uneven, voters do not have the same basis for critically assessing candidates, which can ultimately result in voting decisions that are more influenced by emotion, reputation, or symbolic perceptions.

A previous study supporting this observation, Ramasamy (2020) found that young voters are highly sensitive to symbolic political communication; they tend to trust candidates based on the cultural image and cultural symbols packaged in campaigns rather than program facts. Other research has found that identity-based political marketing strategies (religious, cultural, ethnic) have a significant influence on ' interest in voting, but often neglect concrete policy aspects and measurable programs (Asante et al., 2024). Furthermore, research by Baniamin (2021) found that social media has become a very effective arena for candidate branding and political image-building, but public interaction, responses to critical content, and policy content are still minimal. Thus, the implications for the public's right to information are clear: the public does not have an adequate objective information base to rationally assess the quality of candidate nominees. Political choices are more influenced by symbols, communication styles, and perceptions than by policy knowledge. This fact not only weakens the quality of political participation but also

reduces accountability, as candidates are not driven by the need to account for their vision or program operationally to voters. To strengthen local democracy and fulfill the public's right to information. The results of this study emphasize that political marketing that only promotes branding and identity without accompanying clear policy delivery, program transparency, and public dialogue spaces can cause information asymmetry and erode public trust in the democratic process. Conversely, a combinative political communication model between effective branding and transparent policy information is better able to fulfill the public's right to information and strengthen the legitimacy of elections at the local level.

Empirical findings indicate that incumbent candidates more frequently relied on symbolic reinforcement strategies, often highlighting continuity, leadership visibility, and past achievements through visual storytelling and event-based communication. Challengers, meanwhile, tended to frame communication around identity differentiation and promises of change, although the depth of policy elaboration varied across materials. These patterns are supported not only by content analysis but also by triangulated interview evidence. Several informants noted that campaign messages were often easier to recognize visually than to evaluate programmatically, suggesting a communication environment where symbolic cues played a prominent role in shaping voter attention. Rather than assuming normative superiority of one strategy over another, the analysis focuses on how differing communication emphases influence public access to evaluative political information. Illustrative examples further clarify this distinction. Posts categorized as symbolic typically presented candidates participating in community events accompanied by short motivational captions without policy explanation, whereas substantive posts included issue-focused messaging outlining sectoral programs such as infrastructure development or public service improvement. These categorizations were applied consistently across

all sampled materials and verified through interpretive comparison with informant perspectives to avoid single-source bias.

The Role Of Media And Digital Space In Disseminating Election Information

Mass media and digital spaces hold a strategic position as the main channels for disseminating election information in the modern era. In Bali, local media such as Bali TV, Bali Post, Radar Bali, and Denpost have historically functioned as agenda-setters in framing regional political issues, as well as determining which issues receive public space and how they are presented. Based on content analysis of media publications during the 2024 Bali regional election campaign period, it was found that most of the news coverage was still focused on candidates' face-to-face campaign activities, declarations, and political advertisements rather than educational aspects of the election such as the public's right to information, voting mechanisms, the responsibilities of election organizers, and how voters can participate. On the other hand, digital spaces, especially social media such as Instagram and TikTok, have become the dominant channels for political communication in the 2024 Bali regional elections. Qualitative analysis of digital content from both the KPU and candidates shows dominant themes such as campaigning, public trust, and transparency. However, content interactivity is still limited: the public mostly receives one-way content rather than engaging in discussions, providing feedback, or seeking detailed clarification on election issues.

The role of media and digital platforms in disseminating electoral information was examined through qualitative content analysis of 36 communication items collected from official KPU accounts, candidate campaign accounts, and local online media outlets across Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and official websites. The corpus covered materials published during the formal campaign period between November 2024 and February 2025 to capture active information circulation. Content selection followed

predefined criteria, including posts related to voter education, election procedures, candidate communication, and campaign messaging directed toward public audiences. Analytical coding distinguished two primary categories of information. The first category, education and rights-based information, included content explaining voting procedures, electoral regulations, voter eligibility, and citizens' informational rights. The second category, promotion and identity-based communication, referred to content emphasizing candidate visibility, symbolic representation, slogans, or image-building narratives without detailed procedural or policy explanation. Coding was conducted iteratively and cross-checked with interview data to strengthen interpretive reliability. Findings indicate that although digital platforms expanded information reach, interactivity remained limited. Most posts functioned as one-way dissemination, reflected in minimal reply engagement, restricted dialogic exchanges in comment sections, and the absence of sustained discussion threads between institutions and users. Platform observation showed that user comments were rarely followed by institutional responses, suggesting constrained deliberative interaction despite high visibility.

This phenomenon reinforces the argument put forward by Power et al. (2024) that although digital media expands the space for public communication, the implementation of digital democracy practices is often still formalistic and has not created substantial participation. The study also supports the finding that the use of platforms such as TikTok and Instagram is effective in reaching new voters, but promotional and identity-based content often dominates over education about voter rights or the electoral process. An additional analogy can be seen in Virtanen et al. (2025) research, which found that local digital media in regional elections often focused on candidate images and identity rhetoric, while discussions of policy and the administrative process of elections were often marginalized. Innovative initiatives have also been noted, such as the use of an online application by the Bali KPU that allows

citizens to check the status of the Final Voters List (DPT) online. Although it has not yet been widely adopted and has not been fully utilized to disseminate substantial information, this step shows that there is institutional awareness of the importance of digitization in public information services.

In political communication and digital democracy theory, the existence of digital channels and applications such as these is in line with the concepts of information systems and e-government, which place access to public information as part of citizens' rights (Czuba, 2024). However, the literature also reminds us that technology does not automatically guarantee the quality of information or participation. There are challenges such as the digital divide, limited media literacy, and the tendency to use social media as a promotional tool rather than for public dialogue. This findings mention that content that prioritizes visibility and promotion will remain dominant if there is no regulatory intervention or communication design that deliberately prioritizes education and deliberation. In the context of the 2024 Bali regional elections, although the mass media and digital space have provided channels for the dissemination of electoral information, their effectiveness in ensuring the public's right to accurate, relevant, and participatory information remains limited.

Public Perceptions Of Electoral Information Transparency

Interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with the Balinese community during the 2024 Bali regional elections showed that public perceptions of the openness of election information varied greatly. Most respondents felt that the General Elections Commission (KPU) had made significant efforts to provide official information, particularly through digital channels and collaboration with local media. However, there is significant criticism regarding the depth of information presented and the lack of two-way interaction between the organizing institution and the community. Young voters stated that communication from the KPU is still too formal, too textual,

and not in line with their fast-paced, visual, and interactive digital communication style. These findings are consistent with research by Wardle & Scales (2025), which found that Gen Z highly prioritizes digital platforms such as Instagram, short videos, infographics, memes, and audiovisuals in obtaining political information, and that monotonous or non-visual forms of communication cause them to ignore or be indifferent to official content.

Public perceptions of electoral information transparency were examined through triangulated qualitative data involving three key respondent groups: youth voters (8 interview participants), rural community leaders (6 interview participants), and journalists/media observers (4 interview participants), complemented by two focus group discussions involving 10 participants representing mixed voter backgrounds. Data collection was conducted between February and May 2025 to capture reflections during and immediately after the campaign period. This multi-actor perspective enabled comparison between information recipients, intermediaries, and observers within the electoral communication ecosystem. To strengthen analytical clarity, perceptions of transparency were assessed using three observable indicators: depth, referring to the completeness and clarity of electoral information provided, reach, referring to accessibility and distribution across platforms and social groups; and participation, referring to responsiveness and opportunities for two-way interaction between institutions and citizens. These indicators guided thematic coding and prevented interpretation based solely on generalized impressions. Respondents generally acknowledged increased availability of election information through digital platforms but highlighted uneven informational quality. A youth participant noted that “information is easy to find, but mostly announcements, not explanations” (Youth voter, Interview 3), indicating limitations in informational depth. A rural community leader emphasized accessibility challenges, stating that “people still rely on community meetings because online updates do not always reach older voters” (Community leader,

Interview 9). Similarly, a journalist observed that “communication flows more like broadcasting than conversation” (Journalist, Interview 14), pointing to limited participatory interaction.

These statements represent respondent perceptions and are treated as empirical observations rather than analytical conclusions. Theoretical interpretation is developed separately by relating these perceptions to broader concepts of informational transparency and deliberative communication. While participants described improved information visibility, the findings suggest that transparency is experienced unevenly depending on communicative access and interaction opportunities. By distinguishing respondent claims from analytical interpretation and grounding conclusions in clearly defined indicators, the analysis provides a more rigorous assessment of how electoral information transparency is perceived across social groups. Community leaders in rural areas also voiced that public information transparency has not reached all levels of society, especially those with limited internet access. They believe that the existence of traditional leaders and local social structures that are culturally trusted has not been optimally utilized to disseminate valid and official election information. In addition, local journalists report that technical data on elections, especially regarding logistics and campaign funding, is still difficult to access, or if available, is often presented in an incomplete manner or without sufficient context, preventing the public from making an in-depth assessment. Public perception suggests that although information disclosure has become an institutional norm, its implementation still faces obstacles in terms of depth, reach, and public participation. In the terminology of Ward & Monaghan (2025), without meaningful participation, transparency becomes a mere formality, with the public functioning as passive recipients of information rather than active partners in the democratic process.

This findings shows that despite information disclosure policies, voter response is often influenced by how information is presented. If information

is presented in a concise, visual, and accessible manner, public response is greater. However, if the dissemination of information is text-heavy and bureaucratic, many citizens feel "disconnected" from the process. Zavadskaya & Shilov (2021) research also shows that although Gen Z shows high enthusiasm for political issues and the intention to participate, there is dissatisfaction with the format of local political communication, which is considered uninteresting, visually irrelevant, and lacking in interactivity. The delivery of messages through traditional or digital media that is unresponsive to feedback makes Gen Z feel somewhat alienated. From a theoretical perspective, this narrative reinforces the framework of political communication and the right to information, particularly the element of public participation. Modern political communication theory emphasizes that the quality of democracy is not only measured by formal rules or access, but by the extent to which the public can act as active agents, not merely as recipients of messages. Without real public participation through dialogue, interaction, and feedback, the right to information can remain mere discourse. In the context of the 2024 Bali regional elections, this condition reinforces the argument that effective political communication must be educational, participatory, and transparent so that the public's right to information does not stop at rhetoric but becomes a real democratic experience.

CONCLUSION

This study examines how political communication practices conducted by the General Elections Commission (KPU), candidate pairs, and media actors shape the fulfillment of the public's right to electoral information in the 2024 Bali local elections. Based on qualitative evidence from interviews, focus groups, and digital content analysis, the findings indicate that electoral communication has successfully expanded institutional information availability through digital platforms and community outreach. However, the communication process largely operates through one-way dissemination,

providing procedural information without consistently enabling interactive or explanatory engagement. As a result, access to election information exists formally but varies in depth and usability across voter groups. The analysis shows that KPU communication prioritizes informational accuracy and institutional credibility but remains less adaptive to contemporary digital communication patterns, particularly among younger voters. At the same time, candidate communication tends to emphasize symbolic visibility and image-based messaging rather than detailed policy explanation, while local media coverage primarily reproduces campaign activities instead of facilitating issue-based discussion. Together, these patterns contribute to uneven access to evaluative political information rather than demonstrating a complete absence of transparency.

The article's conceptual contribution is the formulation of a distinction between administrative transparency (procedural information disclosure) and substantive transparency (interactive and explanatory communication enabling informed evaluation) as a framework for assessing electoral information practices in local democratic contexts. This study has several limitations. The findings are context-specific to selected cases in Bali and therefore should be interpreted cautiously beyond similar electoral environments. In addition, the qualitative design emphasizes interpretive depth rather than statistical generalization, and the analysis focuses primarily on publicly observable communication practices rather than internal campaign decision-making processes. Overall, the study suggests that strengthening electoral transparency requires moving beyond information provision toward communicative practices that enhance clarity, responsiveness, and public engagement. Improving the quality of electoral communication, rather than merely increasing information volume, becomes central to supporting meaningful democratic participation at the local level.

Authors' Biographies : Ni Wayan Widhiasthini is a Senior Lecturer at Universitas Pendidikan Nasional, specializing in Administrative Reform. Recent works could be seen in her [Google Scholar](#)

Made Srinitha Millinia Utami is an active researcher in the field of information technology. Currently pursuing Ph.D program at Edith Cowan University, Australia. Recent works could be seen in her [Google Scholar](#)

Nyoman Sri Subawa has published numerous articles in various internationally renowned journals. Recent works could be seen in her [Google Scholar](#)

Nyoman Sridiva Dian Prabarini has an interest in the field of reform. She is an a final-year International Business student at Saxion University of Applied Sciences. Recent works could be seen in her linked in <https://nl.linkedin.com/in/nyoman-sridiva-dian-prabarini>

Author Contributions: “Conceptualization: Ni Wayan Widhiasthini (NWW); Made Srinitha Millinia Utami (MSM), Nyoman Sri Subawa (NSS), and Nyoman Sridiva Dian Prabarini (NSDP); Methodology: NWW, MSM, and NSS; Software: NSDP.; Validation: NWW, MSM, and NSS.; Formal analysis: NWW; Investigation: NWW; Resources: NWW, MSM, NSS, and NSDP.; Data curation: NWW.; Writing—original draft preparation: NWW, MSM, and NSS; Writing—review and editing: NWW, MSM, NSS, and NSDP.; Visualization: NWW; Supervision: NWW;

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aasoglenang, T. A., Bonye, S. Z., & Asante, W. K. (2025). Local governance enhancement mechanisms in Ghana: theoretical and practical reflection on representation, voice and information-flow within district assemblies in Ghana. *SN Social Sciences*, 5(8). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-025-01135-4>

Alon-Barkat, S., Cavari, A., & Shvarts, L. (2025). Polarization and Partisan Bias in Citizens' Evaluations of Public Services. *Political Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-025-10078-8>

Appiah, E., Song, N., Appiah-Otoo, I., Ahia, B. N. K., Dumor, K., Toure, M., & Koudalo, Y. M. A. (2025). The impact of bureaucratic quality on tax revenue collection in democratic settings. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-05620-2>

Asante, W., Tandoh-Offin, P., & Agomor, K. S. (2024). Local governance and public service delivery in Ghana: Assessing the role of selected assembly members vis-à-vis the Batho Pele principles . *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 31(4), 497–515. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2025.2485112>

Baniamin, H. M. (2021). Linking trust, performance, and governance quality: what can explain the incongruity? *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 59(2), 128–148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2020.1863018>

- Baser, E. T., & Tan, E. (2023). Citizen expectations, agency reputation and public service quality. *Public Management Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2023.2245842>
- Boomgaarden, H., Katsanidou, A., Kritzinger, S., Lutz, G., Willmann, J., & Eberl, J.-M. (2025). Open science in democracy research: the research infrastructure “Monitoring Electoral Democracy” (MEDem). *European Political Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-025-00534-8>
- Boundioa, J., & Thiombiano, N. (2025). Threshold effect of governance quality in the relationship between public health expenditure and life expectancy at birth in the West African Economic and Monetary Union. *BMC Health Services Research*, 25(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-025-12603-1>
- Chang, C. Y., & Lee, D. (2025). Much is delivered, then much will be engaged? How do public service delivery and social media usage influence political engagement in Asia? *International Review of Public Administration*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/12294659.2025.2504178>
- Czuba, K. (2024). Electoral contestation, goods provision, and construction of devolved government in Northern Kenya. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 18(2), 196–218. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2024.2359150>
- James, T. S., & Garnett, H. A. (2025). Electoral integrity resilience: protecting elections during global risks, crises, and emergencies. *Democratization*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2025.2551075>
- Kim, N. Y., Kim, H. J., & Kim, S. H. (2022). Are satisfied citizens willing to participate more? An analysis of citizens’ life satisfaction in the public service domain and public participation. *International Review of Public Administration*, 27(3), 211–227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/12294659.2022.2119650>
- Kortukov, D. (2025). Governance and electoral competition in authoritarian regimes: theory and evidence from Gorbachev’s USSR. *Democratization*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2025.2524003>
- Kotzé, D. (2023). Electoral management for a maturing democracy: A look at the contribution of the South African Electoral Commission. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 30(3), 437–453. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2023.2269897>
- Masters-Awatere, B., Howard, D., & Awatere, S. (2025). Deliberative democracy and te ao Māori in the pursuit of climate change governance. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-05729-4>

- Power, S., Dommett, K., MacIntyre, A., & Barclay, A. (2024). Public understanding of Electoral Spending: Evaluating UK Transparency Mechanisms. *Representation*, 60(2), 345–365. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2023.2207170>
- Qin, Z., Liu, B., Cao, Y., Xu, C., & Zhang, J. (2025). Citizens' expectations about public services: a systematic literature review. In *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* (Vol. 12, Number 1). Springer Nature. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-05357-y>
- Qin, Z., Zhang, J., & Liu, B. (2025). Hiding behind the curtain: performance information and public officials' policy instrument preferences in visible and invisible domains. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-05636-8>
- Rajasekhar, D., Kurosaki, T., Manjula, R., & Mori, Y. (2025). Does participation in village assembly lead to improved public good allocation? Evidence from India. *Japanese Economic Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42973-025-00203-x>
- Ramasamy, R. (2020). Quality of government, public service delivery and institutional impartiality in ethnically polarised societies: evidence for policy makers. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration*, 42(1), 46–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23276665.2020.1731246>
- Virtanen, P. K., Gonzaga Roa, A., Fernández-Llamazares, Á., Apurinã, F., & Facundes, S. (2025). Indigenous governance and relationality have effectively avoided forest loss in the Southwest Amazon. *Communications Earth and Environment*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-025-02174-8>
- Ward, V., & Monaghan, M. (2025). Parliamentary research services: mapping the territory. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-05381-y>
- Wardle, C., & Scales, D. (2025). Advocating for a community-centred model for responding to potential information harms. *Nature Human Behaviour*. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-025-02233-2>
- Zavadskaya, M., & Shilov, L. (2021). Providing Goods and Votes? Federal Elections and the Quality of Local Governance in Russia. *Europe - Asia Studies*, 73(6), 1037–1059. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2021.1932760>