

Political Communication in Television Media: A Study of Encoding/Decoding on Voters in the 2024 Election

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Abstract. *This study analyzes the role of the media in shaping public opinion ahead of the 2024 Presidential Election, focusing on the Maghrib adhan broadcast featuring Ganjar Pranowo on MNC Group television station in September 2023. This phenomenon raises polemics regarding media independence, given that MNC Group is owned by Hary Tanoesoedibjo, chairman of the Perindo Party who supports Ganjar as a presidential candidate. The broadcast is considered an attempt at identity politics to build a politician's image. This research uses a critical paradigm with a qualitative descriptive approach, combining Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory and Roland Barthes' semiotics to analyze the political symbols in the broadcast. Data collection was done through in-depth interviews, observation, and literature study. The results show that political shows are not taken for granted by the audience, but through a decoding process that is influenced by their social and cultural background. The media, in this case RCTI, utilizes symbols and narratives to shape the image of politicians, although the meaning received by the audience varies, depending on their decoding position. This finding confirms the role of the media as a tool of domination in shaping public opinion and creating political hegemony, which risks reducing the objectivity and independence of the media in a democracy.*

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INTRODUCTION

According to Arighi et al. (2024), Political communication plays an important role in shaping public opinion, especially in the context of elections. As the dominant medium of information, television has become the main channel for political parties, candidates, and governments to convey their political messages to a wide audience (Siagian, 2012). With its wide reach and audio-visual nature, television has the ability to present political narratives directly and interestingly, thereby influencing people's perceptions, attitudes, and political choices. In the 2024 election, the dynamics of political communication in television media are increasingly complex (Ibnu et al., 2024).

The communication strategy used not only involves conveying the message explicitly, but also inserting implicit meanings that require a decoding process by voters. This is in line with the encoding/decoding theory introduced by Stuart Hall, which explains how messages encoded by the sender can be interpreted differently by the recipient, depending on the reference framework and experience of each individual (Friska, 2024).

Political communication in television media has become one of the main channels in shaping public opinion, especially ahead of elections which are often filled with various events that attract the attention of the audience. One of the events that stole attention ahead of the 2024

Presidential Election was the appearance of Presidential Candidate Ganjar Pranowo in the maghrib call to prayer on the RCTI private television station owned by MNC Group in September 2023 (Tsabita, 2024). The show is considered controversial because Ganjar Pranowo has been designated as a presidential candidate by PDIP in April 2023, although the new campaign period will start on November 28, 2023 in accordance with the provisions of the General Election Commission (KPU).

The show, which featured Ganjar Pranowo as the main figure who welcomed the adhan worshippers in the first shaf, drew criticism from the audience who considered that MNC Group had violated the principle of media independence. This criticism is reinforced by the fact that Hary Tanoesoedibjo, the owner of MNC Group, is also the Chairman of the Perindo Party who supports Ganjar Pranowo as a presidential candidate. The broadcast is considered not only to take advantage of the power of the media to build Ganjar's image, but also as part of the practice of identity politics that has the potential to influence public opinion in elections.

This issue is further highlighted because television in Indonesia, although its use is declining in big cities, remains an important source of information in remote areas, with a wider reach than digital media. Therefore, television media, especially those owned by individuals or groups with political interests, has the potential to be used as a very effective political communication tool. This phenomenon shows the importance of political communication analysis, especially in the context of encoding/decoding introduced by Stuart Hall (Duncan & Duncan, 2013).

According to, in this model of communication, the message conveyed by the media through the encoding process of reality framing can be interpreted differently by the audience through decoding, which involves a variety of interpretations depending on the individual's ideological position and experience. This is relevant in analyzing how shows such as the maghrib call to prayer with Ganjar Pranowo as a model can be received, understood, or even responded to in different ways by voters in the 2024 election.

By considering the encoding/decoding theory and Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, political communication through television media such as that carried out by MNC Group can be seen as an effort to shape an image and influence voters' political preferences. Nonetheless, the theory also reminds us that audiences are not passive recipients, but have the power to interpret media messages according to the social and political context that surrounds them (Sitanggang, 2020). This maghrib adhan show how the power of the media in politics lies not only in the delivery of messages, but also in the ability of the media to influence and shape public understanding, which in turn can influence the outcome of the election.

Along with the development of social media and the increase in public political awareness, this phenomenon reminds us of the importance of considering the active role of the audience in decoding the messages conveyed by the media, as well as the ethical and political implications of the use of the media in shaping public opinion (Marti et al., 2023). This study aims to analyze how political communication in television media is encoded by message conveyors, as well as how these messages are translated by voters in the context of the 2024 election. With this approach, the research seeks to uncover the relationship between media content, the meaning of political messages, and their influence on voter decisions. This study not only provides insight into the effectiveness of political communication strategies, but also offers a deeper view of the interaction between the media, politics, and society.

METHODS

In this study, the paradigm used is a critical paradigm, which is based on the view that the media is not neutral and is often egemony or ideology (Bankov & Cobley, 2017). As explained by (Putri & Inayah, 2022) this paradigm helps in research decision-making by providing direction without having to consider complex existential and epistemological issues. The main focus of this study is to analyze how the audience constructs the meaning of the political message broadcast

by RCTI in the 2024 election, using reception theory combined with Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis (Bouzida, 2014). The approach used in this study is qualitative descriptive by combining Stuart Hall's Encoding-Decoding theory and Barthes' semiotic analysis. This research aims to explore two main aspects: first, how political messages are constructed by MNC Group (encoding), and second, how the audience interprets these messages (decoding). In this case, Stuart Hall's Encoding-Decoding theory reveals that the audience can interpret the message through three decoding positions, namely dominant-hegemonic reading, negotiated reading, and oppositional reading. Meanwhile, Barthes's semiotic approach is used to analyze symbols and signs in political content to understand deeper meanings both denotatively, connotatively, and mythically (Tohar et al., 2007). The subject of this study is the audience exposed to political content related to the Perindo Party broadcast by MNC Group-owned television channels, such as RCTI, during the 2024 election. The researcher used the purposive sampling technique to select relevant informants based on their experience watching political shows, as well as various social, cultural, and educational backgrounds that will provide a variety of views. Data collection was conducted by in-depth interviews using semi-structured guidelines, as well as observations of broadcast content to understand how political messages are constructed and received by the audience. In this data collection, the researcher also used literature studies to explore theories and literature related to media, politics, and ideology. Data analysis is carried out with two main approaches. First, interview analysis involves verbatim transcription of interviews to identify decoding patterns that emerge based on the audience's position. Second, media content analysis uses the Roland Barthes semiotics approach to explore the meaning of signs in broadcast media content. In this analysis, researchers will identify denotative and connotative elements as well as myths used in delivering political messages to illustrate how media ideologies and symbols play a role in shaping the political opinion of the audience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Sunstein (2023), Assessing that television, as part of the broadcasting media, is an efficient mass media because it is able to reach a wide audience. However, in the era of media convergence, television efficiency needs to be evaluated, especially related to changes in media consumption patterns and increasingly complex audience segmentation (Siregar, 2022). Audience preferences are now influenced by factors such as age, social class, culture, and access to technology, creating challenges for television to remain relevant and capture the attention of audiences. In the political realm, television still has an important role as a propaganda medium and the dissemination of political messages. However, its effectiveness is now determined by how audiences, as active audiences, decode messages based on their social, cultural, and background experiences (Adiansyah et al., 2023).

The audience is no longer passive, but plays an active role in interpreting the message conveyed. This research aims to understand how the audience interprets political messages conveyed through broadcast media, especially RCTI from MNC Group, which has a close relationship with the Perindo Party. The results of the research, obtained through in-depth interviews, media content observation, and semiotic analysis, will be analyzed using Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding theory and Roland Barthes' Semiotics. This approach aims to explore the process of encoding messages by the media and the decoding process by the audience. In addition, this discussion explores the relationship between the media, political forces, and audiences in the dynamics of political communication in the modern era.

Analysis of Political Content Produced by RCTI

In this study, the political content aired by RCTI is analyzed to understand how political messages are encoded by the media and communicate certain ideologies to the audience. Using the Roland Barthes Semiotics approach, the analysis was carried out to identify the meaning contained in the signs used in political shows. Barthes' approach elaborates on three levels of meaning, namely denotation refers to the literal or direct meaning of the sign that appears in the show, while connotation reflects a deeper meaning, influenced by cultural values and ideologies.

Myth is an ideology that is naturalized through signs, thus giving the impression that the meaning is something natural or natural.

This analysis highlights visual, narrative, and symbolic elements in political content, such as advertisements, religious shows with political figures, or other programs that contain political messages, both implicit and explicit. The research selected several contents as a representation of the political content aired by RCTI. Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis table was used to identify the construction of signs that convey political messages and representations of certain ideologies through the media.

Table 1. Ganjar Pranowo Becomes a Model for Adhan

Image Fragments		
		
Signifier		Signified
Ganjar is participating in congregational prayers		A strong Islamic identity, symbolizes piety, solidarity, and the value of togetherness in worship.
Denotative Signs/Connotative Markers		Connotative Trainer
Ganjar wore white clothes with traditional sarongs, prayed in congregation at the mosque.		A symbol of piety, and closeness to Islamic values that are part of the cultural identity of Indonesian Muslims.
Connotative Signs		
The portrayal of Ganjar in a religious context can give the impression of a leader who is close to religion, local culture, and Muslim society, which is relevant in the context of identity politics		
Meaning of Denotation	Connotation Meaning	Myth Meaning
Congregational prayer activities carried out by Ganjar at a mosque	A symbol of piety, closeness to the community, and representation of Indonesian Muslim traditions	In Indonesian culture, this visual reinforces the narrative that a religious and simple leader is an ideal figure, as well as reflecting the use of religious symbols.

Classification of Meaning

This analysis shows that the image not only functions as a literal (denotative) representation of worship activities, but also carries a deep connotative meaning, namely portraying Ganjar as a leader who is religious, simple, and close to the community. Furthermore, this image reproduces the myth of piety as the legitimacy of leadership in Indonesia, which is relevant in the context of identity politics and the socio-political dynamics of the country. This visual message contains an ideological layer that can affect the public's perception of Ganjar as a leader.

Table 2. Ganjar Pranowo at MasterChef Indonesia

Image Fragments		
		
Signifier		Signified
Ganjar wore a MasterChef Indonesia apron, standing with a smile in front of the camera.		The identity of a humble leader. easy to get along with and close to various levels of society.
Denotative Signs/Connotative Markers		Connotative Trainer
Ganjar is described as a friendly, humble, and inclusive figure, reflecting closeness to society through participation in popular culture.		Ganjar's presence shows the image of a leader who is close to various levels of society, including the entertainment world and the younger generation.
Connotative Signs		
Ganjar's presence at this popular event gives the impression of a modern, relaxed, and able to connect with audiences from the wider community.		
Meaning of Denotation	Connotation Meaning	Myth Meaning
Ganjar was present at the MasterChef Indonesia event as a guest.	Ganjar portrays himself as a leader who is friendly, relevant to popular culture, and close to people from all walks of life	In Indonesian culture, leaders who look relaxed and close to the entertainment world are considered modern and popular figures.

Ganjar as the main object in the picture presents himself in the MasterChef Indonesia show, a very popular television program on RCTI. His presence at this event shows Ganjar as a figure who can embrace the entertainment world, which is often associated with the younger generation. This also shows efforts to strengthen the image as a national figure who is not only present in the formal political realm, but also close to the world of entertainment and people's daily lives. Ganjar wore the MasterChef Indonesia apron, which symbolically showed direct involvement in the program's activities. Her smile and relaxed style give the impression of closeness and popular attitude. His presence with the judges and participants also illustrates inclusivity, that he can connect with various levels of society. The context of the event, which was relaxed, but still formal, further emphasized the message that Ganjar is a modern, flexible, and able leader who is able to connect with various aspects of Indonesian people's lives, including the younger generation. It can also be seen as part of a political strategy to build wider appeal outside of the formal political arena.

Frequency of Political Information Consumption Based on Media

The frequency of political information consumption by media shows the extent to which individuals use various platforms such as television, social media, and interpersonal discussions to obtain political information (Judijanto et al., 2023). Social media is the main channel for the younger generation with a percentage of 50%, thanks to the ease of access and diversity of content that can be delivered quickly and interactively. Television, with a consumption frequency of 20%, remains important for older age groups who are more accustomed to traditional media

and seek more formal and credible coverage. Interpersonal discussions, with a percentage of 15%, play an important role in shaping political views through direct communication and exchange of views. Online news portals also have the same frequency, 15%, as a more specific and trusted alternative source of information. This data shows that social media dominates the consumption of political information, but television, online news portals, and interpersonal discussions still have a role in conveying credible and meaningful information. This pattern reflects the diversification of people's preferences in accessing political information which is influenced by age, lifestyle, and individual information needs.

The Process of Decoding the Audience to Political Content at RCTI

The process of decoding the audience to the political content aired by RCTI shows that there is a significant variation in understanding and interpreting the message conveyed. Emmanuelle Rendi, a 24-year-old auditor, and Fakhridho Susilo, a 36-year-old executive director of Katadata, revealed that they were able to recognize the political bias in the show. Both criticized the appearance of Ganjar Pranowo at the time of the azan and the MasterChef program as a form of political agenda that was subtly packaged. This shows that educational background and political insight also affect the way individuals interpret the messages conveyed by the mass media.

The decoding approach carried out by audiences with a high level of political literacy tends to be critical of the content of the message (Faqihuddin & Sufyanto, 2024). Emmanuelle Rendi assessed that the use of religious symbols in the moment of azan is not part of ordinary broadcasting, but as a potentially manipulative political marketing strategy. Fakhridho Susilo added that combining entertainment events with political interests can cause rejection from some audiences who are able to identify the hidden intentions. This critical attitude suggests that individuals with wider exposure to information tend to be better able to distinguish between neutral information and politically charged messages.

In contrast, audiences with lower educational backgrounds tend to interpret political messages directly and less critically. Iroh, a 49-year-old domestic worker, assessed Ganjar Pranowo's appearance in the azan broadcast as part of an ordinary broadcast without suspecting any hidden political intentions. The lack of access to formal political education and the limited sources of information make some audiences accept the message as it is. This shows that limited media literacy can reduce a person's ability to interpret political messages more deeply.

The frequency of exposure to alternative media also affects the process of decoding the audience to political messages (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). Individuals who have access to various media platforms, such as social media and digital news portals, tend to compare the information they receive. Fakhridho Susilo, for example, relies on platforms such as YouTube and online print media to obtain more objective information than conventional television. This pattern shows that audiences who are actively seeking information from various sources tend to have better analytical skills in interpreting political content. The social environment and personal experience also shape the way audiences perceive the message being delivered (Moser, 2010).

Emmanuelle Rendi and Fakhridho Susilo, who are accustomed to interacting in a professional environment with wide access to critical discussions, tend to assess political content in more depth. On the other hand, Iroh, who is more exposed to informal discussions in his neighborhood, tends to receive messages more simply. These environmental factors show that social dynamics and interaction patterns affect the level of acceptance and meaning of political messages. This process of audience decoding emphasizes that the success of delivering political messages through mass media is highly dependent on the characteristics of the targeted audience and the way the message is packaged. Media must balance between visual elements, educational values, and delivery in accordance with the diversity of audiences.

Analysis of the Political Content Encoding Process at RCTI with Roland Barthes' Semiotics Approach

In Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, the encoding process refers to how the medium constructs a message through symbols and signs that contain a certain (O'Neill, 2024). RCTI, as a broadcasting media, uses encoding techniques strategically in airing political content, one of which is by choosing the azan time to display Ganjar Pranowo. This timing is not only technical, but serves to associate Ganjar with religious values, which can strengthen his positive image in the eyes of the public.

In this context, the azan time serves as a symbol that connects Ganjar with religious characters, which is expected to increase his political legitimacy among viewers who adhere to certain religions. According to Barthes, every sign in the media has a denotative meaning (literal meaning) and a connotative meaning (implied meaning) (Rachmawati, 2024). Ganjar's broadcast at the time of the azan can be seen as an effort to convey a connotative meaning, namely associating his political image with religiosity. However, this connotative meaning can also be seen as a form of manipulation of the viewer's perception, who may expect a more authentic and less consciously structured representation. Therefore, the timing of the azan is not just a technical decision, but also a political communication strategy that is loaded with ideological content.

However, a different view emerged from the, who argue that symbols like these can actually be perceived as clearly visible manipulative efforts. They state that viewers with higher political literacy will be able to identify these strategies as part of a covert political campaign, which leverages religious beliefs for political gain. Instead of creating a positive image, this strategy risks creating suspicion and resistance from some viewers who are more critical of these kinds of messages (Brooks, 2011). Viewers with higher political literacy tend to be more critical in interpreting media messages. They not only accept denotative meaning, but also criticize the structure of the message and the purpose behind it. In this case, the phenomenon of choosing the time of the azan to display Ganjar Pranowo can be considered too blatant political representation. As a result, religious symbols used to associate political figures with religious values may not be as acceptable as the sender of the message intended.

This encoding process in political communication shows that symbols do not always have a fixed meaning (Yodiansyah, 2017). Barthes explained that the meaning of the symbol can vary depending on the social, cultural, and audience that receives the message. Although RCTI tries to build a positive association between Ganjar and religiosity, the results can be reversed, especially among viewers who are more critical of political phenomena. They may see the symbol as a manipulation tactic that exploits the sanctity of religion for political gain. Although the purpose of RCTI encoding is to form a positive image, the process of interpreting these messages does not always go as planned. Viewers who have higher political literacy are able to read the symbol as part of a hidden political agenda.

Analysis of the Voter Decoding Process on Political Content in RCTI Using Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding Theory

An analysis of the process of voter decoding of political content in RCTI using Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding theory reveals how the audience interprets the message conveyed by the media, such as RCTI, in three main patterns: dominant reading, negotiated reading, and oppositional reading. In the dominant reading pattern, the viewer receives the media message passively, without many critical questions about the message conveyed (Hall, 2019). For example, Iroh received a positive message about Ganjar Pranowo with a religious image without questioning more deeply the political intentions behind it. Iroh tends not to analyze the message further and take it for granted.

On the contrary, in the negotiated reading pattern, as shown by (Rachmawati, 2024), the viewer does not fully accept the message, but is aware of a specific purpose behind the message. They acknowledged that there were efforts to build a positive image of Ganjar, but still questioned the ethics and effectiveness of the message in politics. They do not completely reject the message, but still criticize the underlying political intentions, such as the lack of clarity of campaign strategies or manipulations used by the media. The oppositional reading pattern, which is

embraced by J.K., shows a rejection of the message conveyed. J.K. sees RCTI's message about Ganjar as insubstantial propaganda and more as a manipulation of public opinion using religious symbols. He considered the message a detrimental political tactic and did not make a meaningful contribution to the broader political discourse.

These differences in decoding patterns illustrate how social background, education, and political experience affect the way individuals perceive media messages. Those who are more critical of the media or have more in-depth political knowledge tend to be more skeptical and able to question the message conveyed. Meanwhile, those who are more passive in consuming media may receive messages without much critical analysis. These patterns suggest that audiences are not homogeneous, and the media should consider these differences in conveying messages in order to be more ethical and influence audiences in a better way. The media must understand diverse audiences and the message conveyed must accommodate various perspectives, so that the message conveyed is not only accepted, but also understood in the right way.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that the audience's acceptance of political content in RCTI in the 2024 election is influenced by several important factors, including the level of media literacy, access to alternative information, message delivery strategies, audience segmentation, and message repetition. Audiences with a high level of education and good media literacy are able to critically analyze political messages and not just accept them for granted, as seen in the views of Fakhridho Susilo and Emmanuelle Rendi about the appearance of Ganjar Pranowo at the time of the azan as a form of manipulation of religious symbols. In contrast, audiences with low education are more likely to receive messages without further analysis. Access to alternative information also affects how audiences interpret political messages, where individuals with wider access can compare information from different sources and develop a more critical understanding, while those who rely solely on television tend to receive the message in its entirety. In addition, delivery strategies that are too explicit, such as the broadcast that associates Ganjar Pranowo with the time of the azan, risks causing resistance from critical audiences, because it is considered manipulative propaganda. Television media, which is the main channel for political campaigns, is also less relevant to young audiences who prefer social media as a faster and more interactive information platform.

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