

Narrative Manipulation and Reality Construction: A Study of Buzzer Communication Techniques in Shaping Voter Perception in New Media During the 2024 Presidential Election

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Abstract

This study investigated the communication techniques employed by buzzers in shaping voter perception within new media during the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election (Pilpres). The research was driven by the problematic rise of structured narrative manipulation, which caused information distortion and eroded rational public discourse. Using a qualitative-interpretive approach and Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, the study synthesized findings from academic and grey literature concerning buzzer operations in Indonesia. The analysis utilized framing and priming theories, alongside the Digital Social Construction of Reality (DSCR) framework. The findings revealed that buzzers functioned as structured narrative machines, systematically applying framing to polarize candidate images and utilizing priming to divert public attention from substantive issues toward artificial gimmicks. Furthermore, the study identified a significant disruption in the traditional agenda-setting mechanism, where buzzers forced digital trends that mainstream media eventually followed. This process resulted in a biased DSCR, leading to cognitive narrowing and a "spiral of silence" among voters. The study concluded that such structured manipulation transformed voters from rational subjects into mere consumers of artificial political narratives, posing a serious threat to deliberative democracy. Enhanced digital awareness and stricter digital campaign regulations were recommended to mitigate these cognitive damages.

Article History

Received 31 March 2026

Revised 27 April 2026

Accepted 29 April 2026

Published 30 April 2026

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Keywords

New Media, Buzzer, Agenda Setting, Communication.

Introduction

The 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election (Pilpres) unfolded in a digital landscape radically different from previous electoral cycles. Social media platforms — particularly X (Twitter), TikTok, and Instagram — became the primary battlegrounds for political narratives, and with them emerged a highly organized ecosystem of political buzzers: coordinated actors who systematically produced, amplified, and directed public discourse to serve specific electoral interests. This phenomenon presents a fundamental challenge to the integrity of democratic deliberation. As Marshall McLuhan (1964) famously argued, “the medium is the message” — meaning that the technical properties of a communication medium shape the social reality it produces, independent of its content. In the context of new media, these properties — speed, interactivity, algorithmic amplification, and borderlessness — create conditions uniquely susceptible to coordinated narrative manipulation. When political buzzers exploit these properties to distort voter perception, the consequences extend beyond individual electoral outcomes; they threaten the very foundations of informed democratic participation.

The emergence of new media has fundamentally transformed the architecture of



political communication, shifting it from a one-way flow controlled by traditional media institutions to a multi-directional flow in which any actor — including coordinated buzzer networks — can inject and amplify narratives at scale (Luik, 2020). Social media platforms, with their participatory and algorithmically driven nature, have turned passive audiences into prosumers who both consume and produce content. While this development theoretically democratizes public discourse, it simultaneously opens the door to large-scale narrative manipulation by non-institutional actors who exploit platform mechanisms for political ends.

New media, with characteristics of interactivity and rapid information dissemination, ideally functions as a digital public space where citizens can rationally discuss social and political issues without state intervention or specific interests (Prasetyo, 2022). However, this idealism is starting to erode with the presence of massive narrative-building operations in digital spaces.

The Presidential Election (Pilpres) is one of the fundamental mechanisms in the democratic system that serves as a means of realizing the sovereignty of the people. The people are given the constitutional right to choose the country's leader to steer the nation for a certain period. In Indonesia, the Pilpres is conducted directly, generally, freely, confidentially, honestly, and fairly as mandated by the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. This direct election system places the people as the main actors in the political process, as well as being an important indicator of the quality of a country's democracy. Indonesia's democratic celebration, especially the 2024 Presidential Election (Pilpres), is a crucial moment marked by the high penetration of social media. Digital platforms, which ideally function as digital public spaces, have become the main battleground for narratives. The 2024 Pilpres also shows the dominant role of social media as the central arena for political contestation. Digital platforms, as new media, offer massive speed and interaction, but also open opportunities for large-scale narrative manipulation. The buzzer phenomenon has become a spotlight, because their activities directly influence how information will be received by users.

Unlike sporadic hoax manipulation, buzzer operations in the 2024 Presidential Election are characterized by structured coordination and the use of persuasive communication techniques to achieve electoral goals. They deliberately dominate discussion spaces, create artificial trending topics, and attack opposing narratives in a planned manner. This creates a fundamental problem, namely information distortion and erosion of public discourse, where the authenticity of interactions and the political reality perceived by the public becomes biased.

Research Gap

Several previous studies have examined the buzzer phenomenon in the context of the 2024 Pilpres. The study titled “The Buzzer and Hoax Phenomenon on Social Media in Determining Political Choices for Gen-Z in the 2024 Pilpres from the Perspective of Agenda Setting” highlights the vulnerability of Generation Z to exposure to digital political content. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of digital literacy as a solution, but have not yet thoroughly examined how buzzer communication techniques, such as framing and priming, are used to manipulate the perceptions of these vulnerable audiences.

Another study by Salsabila et al. (2024) titled “The Role of Buzzers on Social Media in Shaping Public Policy Opinion During the 2024 Election” shows how social media algorithms reinforce information bias and drive public polarization. While it reveals the algorithmic impact on public opinion, this study has not elaborated in detail the buzzer communication tactics in leveraging the algorithms to shape a specific narrative.

Meanwhile, the study by Wulandari et al. (2023) on the buzzer phenomenon on the

eve of the 2024 elections emphasizes the role of messages that have been “regimented” in spreading issues and hoaxes on social media. However, this study has not explicitly and theoretically analyzed how persuasive communication techniques, especially framing and priming theory, are applied by buzzers in composing and distributing those messages.

Based on these descriptions, it can be concluded that previous research more focuses more on the impact of buzzers, audience vulnerability, and algorithmic bias, while studies on the mechanisms of communication and manipulation techniques used by buzzers to construct the political reality of voters are still relatively limited. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by examining in depth the buzzer communication techniques in shaping voters’ perceptions in new media during the 2024 presidential election.

Research Questions

This study is guided by three main research questions. First, it examines how persuasive communication techniques, particularly framing and priming, are systematically applied by buzzers to amplify narratives related to the 2024 presidential election. Second, it investigates how buzzers act as actors who transform agenda setting and disrupt traditional communication processes on the eve of the 2024 presidential election. Third, it analyzes the extent to which buzzer narrative manipulation contributes to the Biased Digital Social Construction of Reality (DSCR) regarding presidential candidates or political issues, as well as its cognitive implications for voters.

Research Purpose

The aim of this study is to analyze the application of persuasive communication techniques by buzzers, identify their roles in transforming agenda setting, and interpret the impact of the resulting Digital Social Construction of Reality (DSCR) on voters’ perceptions in the 2024 presidential election.

The novelty of this study lies in its structured analysis of persuasive communication techniques used by buzzers during the 2024 presidential election. This study examines how issue framing and issue repetition through priming are applied systematically to shape voters’ interpretations of political events and candidates. Rather than viewing buzzers only as actors who spread political messages, this study positions them as narrative-design machines that attempt to reshape the criteria used by voters in evaluating presidential candidates.

This study also offers novelty by using the Digital Social Construction of Reality (DSCR) framework to interpret how manipulated narratives produced by buzzers can become objectified as perceived facts and later internalized by voters. This approach moves beyond common discussions of algorithmic bias and political polarization by focusing on the collective cognitive consequences created through repeated and coordinated digital narratives.

In addition, this study contributes to the literature on agenda setting by showing how buzzers act as agents of agenda-setting transformation. Through speed, coordination, and issue amplification, buzzers can disrupt the agenda-setting role traditionally held by mainstream media. In this context, buzzers do not merely follow public discourse but actively force certain issues into political attention and influence how voters understand the electoral reality.

Literature Review

Definition of New Media

New media is a form of development in communication technology that brings

significant changes to how people interact, communicate, and participate in the digital public space. Its presence is not merely about replacing old media but also expanding the dimensions of communication through the integration of technology, culture, and user behavior. According to (Luik, 2020), the idea of new media is “contested and debated,” as it can be understood both as a continuation of old media (continuity) and as an entirely new form. He explains:

“If new media is like a blade of grass, then new media is interconnected with the ‘old’ media. There is a historical and technological link between old (analog) media and new (digital) media. The digital does not simply appear on its own, but there is a contribution from the analog.”

Definition of Buzzer

The term buzzer can be defined as an actor who deliberately produces and/or continuously amplifies certain messages in the digital space so that the message appears wide, popular, or “organic.” This aims to attract public attention while giving their focus to the topic being presented. The term “Buzzer” itself comes from the word buzz meaning hum or murmur, in line with its function in the public space as a hum for the topic to be brought (Salsabila et al., 2024).

Buzzers are generally used as tools to introduce a product or services to the public, with the goal of gaining public attention. In the digital era, becoming a buzzer is a promising prospect, as it does not require a lot of capital to earn a promising income. Its highly flexible system certainly makes buzzer work grow everywhere (Juditha, 2019).

Definition of Framing and Priming

Framing, in simple terms, is the shaping of issues to influence the interpretation of the audience. Meanwhile, priming is the repeated use of certain issues to influence the criteria voters use when evaluating candidates. Buzzers combine these two techniques to create the desired image of a candidate.

Robert N. Entman (1993) explains that framing is a process of selecting and highlighting certain aspects of perceived reality, which are then included in the communication text with the aim of constructing a certain meaning for wide audience. Framing functions as a way for the media and communicators to highlight a specific issue so that it appears more important than other aspects. In Entman's view, media not only convey facts, but also actively construct social reality through word choices, emphasis, and the narrative structure presented. Robert Framing theory emphasizes two main aspects: problem selection and emphasis on aspects of reality (Aisyah, 2024).

Entman explains that the framing process involves four main functions. First, framing defines problems by determining how an issue is understood and what is considered the main problem. Second, framing diagnoses causes by identifying who or what is viewed as the source of the problem. Third, framing makes moral judgments by giving moral evaluations of certain actors, actions, or situations. Fourth, framing suggests remedies by offering solutions or possible ways to address the issues being raised.

Therefore, the framing analysis according to Entman views the media as social construction agents with great power in shaping how the public understands events, determine the direction of opinion, and guide interpretations of social, political, and cultural issues. social construction that has great power in shaping how the public understands events, determining the direction of opinion, and guiding interpretations of social, political, and cultural issues. This process not only determines what the public should think (agenda

setting), but also how to think about the issue (second-level agenda setting). This will affect how society evaluates a person, in this case politicians, which is referred to as priming.

Priming itself is the process by which mass media or political actors highlight certain issues repeatedly to change the standards or criteria used by society in assessing the government, politicians, or candidates. In short, priming is not about telling society what to choose, but about telling what 'things the public should consider' when making choices.

Distorted Public Space

The presence of buzzers means the public space is now filled with messages that do not have 'soul', where amplification is driven by coordination, not consensus. For Habermas, these spaces have begun to be colonized by capitalism. Social media, which initially was an open space for everyone, has turned into a stage for forming opinions through massive, coordinated messages, no longer shaped by rational argument exchange. This distortion affects the quality of deliberative democracy. Instead of promoting discourse based on facts and rationality, buzzer practices tend to create the illusion of consensus through repetition and algorithmic dominance. This is not aligned with one of Habermas's thoughts in effective communication, namely the legitimacy claim, i.e., truth, correctness, sincerity, and comprehensibility (Nagara, 2025).

In addition, the public space also experiences what is called colonization, namely a condition where digital platforms dominate and control the flow of information, facilitate the visibility of buzzer content, but minority voices or comments will be sidelined, blurring the boundary between organic opinion and propaganda. This condition demands critical reflection on the governance of digital space as well as collective efforts to reclaim public space as a medium for healthy and democratic discourse.

Social Construction of Reality (DSCR)

The Digital Social Construction of Reality (DSCR) theory is used to analyze the cognitive impact of narrative manipulation carried out by buzzers. In this process, externalization occurs when buzzers massively produce framed presidential election narratives, such as narratives that portray political opponents as incompetent. These narratives then enter the objectivation stage when they are amplified into trending topics and perceived by the public as "reality" or "evidence" of mass sentiment. After repeated exposure, voters may internalize this biased digital reality and use it as a basis for political judgment and decision-making. This process produces an artificial digital reality, namely a political perception formed through structured and manipulated communication rather than through verified facts or authentic public discussion.

Methodology

This research uses a qualitative-interpretive approach with Systematic Literature Study (SLS) as the main method. SLS was chosen because it allows the researcher to comprehensively map, analyze, and synthesize key findings from academic literature and grey literature, including reports from credible NGOs and local think tanks, that discuss buzzer operations and their impact in Indonesia.

The SLS procedure begins with the formulation of research questions based on the problem statement presented in Chapter I. After that, source identification is conducted through searches in academic databases and grey literature using several keyword combinations, such as "buzzer" and "Pilpres 2024," "manipulasi narasi" and "Pemilu 2024," "framing" or "priming" and "buzzer," as well as "konstruksi realitas" and "Pilpres." These keywords are used to ensure that the selected sources are relevant to the study's focus on

buzzer activity, persuasive communication, and digital reality construction during the 2024 Indonesian presidential election.

The next stage is selection and screening. The primary inclusion criteria cover publications that explicitly discuss buzzer practices or structured narrative manipulation in Indonesia between 2023 and 2024, which represents the crucial period of the presidential election. The secondary inclusion criteria include theoretical literature on Digital Social Construction of Reality (DSCR), framing, and priming from a global context, which is used to strengthen the analytical framework. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria apply to articles that only focus on funding aspects, such as EPM, or studies that discuss buzzers outside the Indonesian context.

Focused data extraction is then carried out by selecting information that directly relates to empirical evidence from the 2024 presidential election. The extracted data include framing strategies used to shape candidate images, key narrative priming tactics, and analysis of trending topic content suspected of involving astroturfing practices. Through this process, the study aims to build a structured understanding of how buzzers influence political narratives and voter perceptions in the Indonesian digital public sphere.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data extracted from literature focusing on the Indonesian case will be analyzed using Critical Content Analysis. This analysis will be interpreted through two main lenses. First, communication technique analysis will be used to examine how buzzers select, shape, and apply narrative framing, such as framing economic success as the result of one party's hard work, and how issue priming is repeatedly carried out to strengthen certain political perceptions. Second, reality construction analysis will be used to interpret how engineered trending topics become objectified in digital spaces and influence Indonesian voters' perceptions through internalization. This approach highlights the gap between the reality directly experienced by voters and the digital reality constructed and presented by buzzers.

Result and Discussion

Application of Framing and Priming in the 2024 Presidential Election Narrative

Findings from the literature review show that buzzer operations during the 2024 Presidential Election are a sophisticated application of persuasive communication theory. **Candidate Image Narrative Framing:** Buzzers in a coordinated manner apply highly polarized framing. For client candidates, the framing always emphasizes strength, past achievements (legacy), or closeness to young voters. Meanwhile, for opponents, the framing is always directed at weaknesses, ethical failures, or lack of visionary ability. This narrative framework does not occur sporadically, but is maintained and massively repeated by thousands of accounts.

Key Issue Priming: Priming tactics have proven dominant. Buzzers consistently raise certain issues (for example, sensitive personal issues or campaign gimmicks) to divert voters' attention from substantive issues (such as economic programs or environmental issues). The repetition of these amplified issues aims for voters to use this priming (easily remembered issues) as criteria when evaluating candidates.

This synthesis shows that buzzers function as cognitive machines that are programmed. They deliberately disrupt voters' rational information processing (central processing) and encourage fast processing based on heuristics or priming (peripheral processing). The cognitive implications are serious: voting decisions may be based on

artificially constructed images rather than rational analysis of the candidate's work programs.

Buzzers as Actors of Agenda Setting Transformation and Communication Disruption Traditional

In the conventional political communication model, agenda setting is carried out by mass media through editorial and gatekeeping mechanisms. The media plays a role in selecting issues considered important before being delivered to the public. However, the emergence of political buzzers shows the occurrence of a significant shift in that pattern, especially in the context of social media.

Buzzers do not operate randomly, but through patterns work that is relatively structured. They produce and amplify certain messages repeatedly so that the issues they promote gain high visibility without going through traditional media editorial selection. This strategy relies on posting intensity, narrative framing consistency, and coordination between accounts. As a result, certain issues can be forced into the main agenda in the digital public space, regardless of relevance level or depth of substance in political debate. In this situation, public attention is more directed by communication strategy buzzers compared to the need for rational public discourse.

In addition to content amplification, buzzers also utilize the mechanism of trending topics on platforms like X (Twitter) and TikTok. With massive coordination between accounts, certain hashtags can rapidly become trends. When a topic occupies a popular position, the public tends to interpret it as an important issue worth attention. This condition often pushes mainstream media to follow the chatter, not based on independent investigative results, but due to popularity pressure on social media. This practice directly changes the order of issue priorities in public discourse.

In the context of the 2024 presidential election, this dynamic is evident in several campaign narratives that dominate the digital timeline are not due to the strength of arguments or programmatic content, but due to amplification strategy buzzers carried out intensely and repeatedly.

Interaction of Buzzers with the Public and Media

When buzzers successfully dominate the digital public space with narratives they have constructed, the role of mainstream media has shifted. Media is no longer fully functioning as a gatekeeper that determines the agenda, but rather tends to become a gatewatcher who monitors and responds to trends developing on social media. In this position, media report more on issues that have been raised and amplified by buzzers, rather than critically determining which issues deserve coverage. This condition shows that the power of communication is no longer monopolistic in the hands of large media, but is shared with buzzers as non-institutional actors who have significant influence.

Several studies also highlight the use of buzzers as an instrument for shaping political branding. Through provocative and consistent narratives, buzzers attempt to build collective perceptions about certain candidates or issues. The aim of this practice is not only to influence individual opinions, but also to strengthen the collective political image in the digital public sphere. The narratives produced are often polarizing, thus creating an impression of broad public legitimacy, even though they are not always supported by strong empirical facts.

The Impact of Agenda Setting Disruption

Disruption caused by buzzers has an impact on changes in the broader structure of political communication. The communication pattern, which was previously top-down with

traditional media as the main determinant of information flow, has shifted to a multi-directional pattern. In this configuration, buzzers act as actors with large amplification capacity, while the public receives information through trends formed from the interaction between buzzers and digital platform algorithms, not merely through professional media selection.

The dominance of buzzers in setting the agenda also contributes to the fragmentation of public discourse. Excessive focus on certain issues that generally benefit specific parties causes other more substantive issues to be marginalized. The impact is not only on the distribution of public attention, but also on the quality of democracy, as the space for discourse that should be deliberative and balanced is increasingly filled by coordinated and interest-oriented communication strategies.

Digital Social Construction of Reality (DSCR) and Cognitive Implications for Voters

The synthesis of literature shows that narrative manipulation by buzzers during the 2024 Presidential Election significantly contributed to shaping a biased Digital Social Construction of Reality (DSCR). In this context, buzzers do not merely spread political messages, but actively act as architects of digital reality who produce, normalize, and enforce certain narratives to be accepted as social truth.

Referring to the stages of reality construction by Berger and Luckmann externalization, objectivation, and internalization, buzzer activities can be mapped systematically. At the externalization stage, buzzers produce political narratives that have been strategically designed, either in the form of excessive praise for certain candidates or delegitimization of political opponents. These narratives are massively disseminated through posts, comments, hashtags, and repetitive visual content.

The next stage, objectivation, occurs when the narratives produced by buzzers manage to penetrate social media algorithms and appear as trending topics or dominant discourses. At this point, the narratives lose their production context and appear as social facts that seem objective, popular, and represent the voice of the wider public. The phenomenon of astroturfing reinforces this illusion by creating the impression of massive grassroots support, even though it is coordinated and paid.

Next, at the internalization stage, voters unconsciously absorb the digital reality that has been objectified. Information that is continuously repeated and appears dominant tends to be accepted as the main reference in assessing candidates and political issues. As a result, the political reality understood by voters is no longer the result of critical reflection, but rather a construction artificially mediated and manipulated by buzzers.

Cognitive Implications for Voters

Manipulation of DSCR by buzzers brings cognitive implications that are serious for voters. First, there is a narrowing of the cognitive framework (cognitive narrowing), where voters only use issues that are intensively primed as the basis for political evaluation (Nasionalita, 2015; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Substantive issues such as long-term policy vision, structural track record, and leadership capacity tend to be marginalized by sensational and personal narratives.

Second, this manipulation triggers confirmation bias, namely the tendency of voters to only accept information that aligns with the digital reality that has been previously internalized (Sunstein, 2017). Social media algorithms that are personalized further reinforce this condition by repeatedly presenting similar content, thus deepening polarization and hindering rational dialogue in the digital public sphere (Ain et al., 2021; Rahim et al., 2024).

Third, the dominance of buzzer narratives creates a spiral of silence effect (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). Voters who hold views different from the dominant digital narrative tend to remain silent because they perceive their opinions as minority or unpopular positions. This dynamic is significantly amplified in social media environments where algorithmic visibility and coordinated buzzer activity create an artificial impression of consensus (Dayuni, 2025; Husein, 2024). The resulting silence among dissenting voters weakens genuine public discourse and erodes the deliberative function that social media ideally serves in a healthy democracy.

Thus, these findings show that manipulation of buzzer narratives not only affects short-term political preferences, but also damages the collective cognitive process of voters. Biased DSCR transforms voters from rational subjects into consumers of political narratives, and simultaneously marking the shift of political communication from an arena of idea exchange to an arena of attention and perception transactions.

Conclusion

After analyzing the dynamics of the 2024 presidential election, this study concludes that the presence of buzzers should not be understood merely as social media noise. Instead, buzzers operate as part of a structured communication design that shapes political narratives, redirects public attention, and influences how voters interpret candidates and issues.

One of the main findings of this study is the shift in voter thinking caused by the systematic use of framing and priming techniques. Buzzers can divert public attention from substantial issues, such as work programs, policy commitments, and candidate track records, toward gimmick narratives, symbolic impressions, or personal attacks. As a result, voters may rely more on emotion, short-term impressions, and heuristic judgment rather than careful and rational evaluation.

This study also finds that the dominance of traditional media in shaping public agendas has weakened. Information control no longer rests fully in the hands of mass media editors. Buzzers can create a counter-information flow that pushes certain issues into public attention and forces mainstream media to follow social media trends. Consequently, public agendas are often shaped by what becomes viral, not necessarily by what is most important for the public interest or national political life.

Another important finding concerns the construction of political reality in digital spaces. Through astroturfing practices, buzzers can create the impression that a certain narrative receives broad public support, even when that support comes from coordinated proxy accounts. When this illusion repeatedly appears on voters' timelines, they may gradually perceive it as factual reality. This process blurs the distinction between empirical facts and digitally manipulated perceptions.

The dominance of buzzers also creates a real threat to democratic life. The rise of the spiral of silence, where people hesitate to express different opinions, and the strengthening of confirmation bias make healthy public discussion more difficult. In this condition, democracy risks shifting from an arena of rational debate into an arena of perception manipulation.

Based on these findings, this study suggests several important steps for different stakeholders. For the government, digital campaign regulations need to become more comprehensive. Oversight should not only focus on official candidate accounts, but also cover paid and coordinated account activities that operate in less visible digital spaces. Transparency regarding the actors behind large-scale political narratives on social media is essential to protect electoral integrity.

For the press and media, this study emphasizes the need to return to their core role as information gatekeepers. Mass media should not amplify biased narratives simply to chase traffic or clicks. Instead, the press needs to redirect public attention toward issues that directly affect citizens' lives and democratic decision-making.

For the general public, digital awareness remains an important defense against manipulation. Voters need to become more critical when encountering trending topics, viral claims, or repetitive political narratives. By understanding that social media content can be designed and amplified by certain actors, voters can become more empowered, independent, and careful in forming political judgments.

For future academics, further studies should address the methodological limitations of this research by using empirical approaches such as social network analysis, computational content analysis, and experimental methods. These approaches can help measure the causal effects of buzzer activity on voter cognition more accurately. Longitudinal studies are also needed to examine how digitally constructed realities shift voter preferences across different electoral cycles. Interdisciplinary collaboration among communication scholars, political scientists, and data scientists is strongly recommended to develop stronger analytical frameworks for studying coordinated inauthentic behavior in digital democracies.

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