



Political Communication Strategy Based on Neuro-Linguistic Programming: A Study of Surabaya Mayor Eri Cahyadi's Instagram Account

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Digital Political Communication, Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Instagram

Received : 5 April

Revised : 15 April

Accepted: 25 May

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)-based political communication strategy in the Instagram content of the Mayor of Surabaya, Eri Cahyadi, on April 12-19, 2025. The aim is to identify the NLP techniques used and their impact on leadership image and public perception. The method used is qualitative with visual and narrative content analysis of videos, photos, carousels, and captions. The theories used include NLP, digital political communication, framing, and imaging. The results show the use of techniques such as anchoring, embedded command, reframing, future pacing, and humor patterns in forming the image of a humanist and solution-oriented leader. In conclusion, NLP is effective in building emotional resonance, symbolic closeness, and public opinion on social media

INTRODUCTION

In rapid digitalization, the political stage is no longer confined to physical podiums or formal spaces. Social media now plays a pivotal role in shaping political dynamics in Indonesia, serving as a strategic platform for politicians to engage directly with the public and influence perceptions (Indrapuspita et al., 2023). Today, political communicators are increasingly utilizing digital media – not only for its ability to integrate text, audio, and visuals in a single platform, but also for its capacity to facilitate two-way dialogue. Communication is no longer top-down; it now allows for direct and responsive interaction with the public (Widyawati et al., 2023). Amidst this technological evolution, Instagram, in particular, has emerged as a powerful tool for disseminating information rapidly, widely, and interactively (Rafiqi et al., 2024).

Instagram has become a preferred medium in political communication due to its features that enable two-way interactions. It allows political figures to introduce themselves, convey ideological values, and explain their programs openly and directly (Maella et al., 2019). This phenomenon not only alters the pattern of political communication but also demands more structured, persuasive strategies that resonate with the psychological dimensions of the public.

In a local context, the city of Surabaya offers a compelling example of digital political communication through the figure of Mayor Eri Cahyadi. Through his official Instagram account, @ericahyadi, he actively engages with citizens by reposting stories from local events, presenting work programs, and directly addressing social issues. His communication style goes beyond simply conveying information—it demonstrates a clear intent to foster emotional and personal connections. It is here that the Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) approach becomes relevant.

Originally developed in the 1970s by Richard Bandler and John Grinder as a form of psychological therapy, NLP has since evolved into a widely applied communication strategy across various fields, including leadership and politics. NLP posits that word choice, sentence structure, tone of voice, and body language all play essential roles in shaping audience perception and responses. Interestingly, communication is not limited to interpersonal exchanges but also encompasses the internal dialogue within individuals. As Bandler and Grinder stated (Bundrant, 2024), “Communication is not only interaction with others. There is a whole world of communication within your mind and body. Your inner life—your thoughts, attitudes, and emotions—is a highly active form of communication.” This statement underscores that effective political communication involves not just external message delivery but also the alignment of those messages with a leader’s internal narrative, creating authentic resonance with the public.

As Indonesia’s second-largest metropolitan city, Surabaya presents complex socio-political dynamics. The mayor is expected not only to provide policy leadership but also to communicate in ways that fulfill citizens’ psychological needs—such as a sense of belonging, security, and trust. In this context, Eri Cahyadi positions himself not merely as a public official, but as

someone who frames his identity as part of the people. He uses everyday language, shares his activities openly, and expresses empathy toward public concerns. Such communication does not occur by accident—it reflects a conscious political strategy that recognizes the importance of linguistic and psychological approaches, as emphasized in NLP.

This study is important as it reveals how NLP-based political communication strategies are practically applied through Instagram, which demands communication that is visual, swift, and concise. Between April 12 and May 4, 2025, the Instagram account @ericahyadi exhibited patterns of communication that can be analyzed both textually and visually—through captions, video narratives, image choices, facial expressions, and body gestures. Additionally, followers' responses provide insight into the effectiveness of these communication strategies.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the growing literature on digital political communication, particularly in demonstrating how NLP holds great potential in building public trust and reinforcing leadership legitimacy. Practically, it offers concrete guidance for policymakers, political communication practitioners, and academics on how to implement more humane, persuasive, and audience-centered digital communication strategies. It also opens space for ethical discussions on the use of persuasive techniques in public communication, ensuring such methods serve not as tools of manipulation but as means to foster sustainable and healthy relationships between leaders and citizens.

Therefore, the main focus of this study is to analyze Eri Cahyadi's Instagram content during April 12–19, 2025, to identify and understand the political communication strategies used, as well as how NLP elements are integrated into the construction of political messages. This research adopts a qualitative approach, using content analysis as the primary method, with special attention to verbal (captions), visual (photos and videos), and interactive elements between the account and its followers. This study seeks to uncover how political communication in the digital era goes beyond mere information dissemination, requiring skillful application of interpersonal, psychological, and linguistic strategies, as offered by NLP. Ultimately, behind each seemingly simple post lies a strategic effort to capture hearts and minds, not only to win votes but to build lasting legitimacy and public trust.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Neuro-Linguistic Programming in Political Communication

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) has become a significant tool in political communication, offering techniques to influence public perception and enhance the effectiveness of political messaging. Research explores how NLP is used by political leaders and public relations teams to shape opinion, manage crises, and improve communication efficiency.

A. Mechanisms of NLP in Political Communication

Verbal Repetition and Language Patterns: Political leaders employ NLP techniques such as lexical repetition to reinforce messages and influence audiences. Lexical repetition is commonly used – Egyptian leaders, for example, reportedly use it more frequently than their American counterparts to amplify the impact of speeches (2019, خليفة). NLP also incorporates specific linguistic models (e.g., meta and Milton models) to establish persuasive patterns, including both direct and indirect suggestions (Ковалевська, 2020).

B. Manipulation and Influence

NLP is closely associated with psychological manipulation aimed at enhancing communication effectiveness and swaying public opinion. Leaders such as Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, and Donald Trump have utilized NLP strategies in public relations to boost their persuasive power (Yeltsin et al., 2018).

C. Application in Political Discourse and Public Relations

Spin Doctoring and Crisis Management: NLP techniques are integrated with spin doctoring practices in political discourse, such as delaying the release of negative information, offering vague or ambiguous messages, and strategically leaking information. These methods are used to manage public perception during crises or controversial events by guiding audience interpretation through language (Ковалевська, 2020).

D. Public Relations and Image Building

NLP is also applied in political PR to create mechanisms that enhance communication efficiency and help politicians manage their public image. Although some consider these methods manipulative, others see them as a means of fostering trust and gaining support among constituents (Yeltsin et al., 2018).

E. Benefits and Limitations

Effectiveness: NLP can increase the persuasive strength of political communication, improve engagement with audiences, and help leaders achieve desired outcomes (Yeltsin et al., 2018). However, its effectiveness in political and organizational settings is sometimes overstated, and more rigorous research is needed to validate its impact (Kotera et al., 2019).

Ethical Concerns: Despite its potential as a communication tool, NLP raises ethical questions regarding the use of psychological techniques to influence public opinion (Cuza, 2016). NLP is widely used in political communication to influence, persuade, and shape public perception through language and psychological strategies. While it can enhance message effectiveness and political goals, it also raises important ethical considerations and calls for further empirical validation.

NLP in Political and Digital Communication

In political public relations, NLP is utilized to improve message delivery strategies and public engagement (Mainwaring & Skinner, 2009). Politicians have adopted NLP techniques to connect with audiences, manage perceptions, and strengthen persuasive messaging (Bieliński, 2019), as seen in figures like Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, and Donald Trump. In digital contexts, NLP helps tailor messages to different audience segments, improving engagement and retention (Yeltsin et al., 2018).

Pillars of NLP

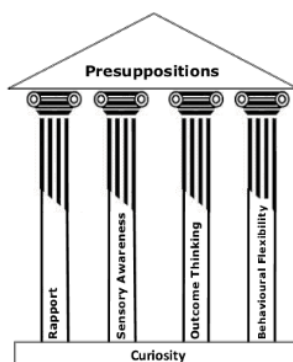


Figure 1 Pilars of Neuro Linguistic Programming

Overall, NLP rests on four key pillars: rapport, sensory awareness, outcome thinking, and behavioral flexibility. These principles form the foundation of all NLP techniques and, when applied to public communication—including digital political communication—can enhance credibility and foster closeness between leaders and the public. On social media platforms like Instagram, these pillars are manifested through visual choices, caption diction, facial expressions, and interactions in the comment section.

More than just a set of techniques, NLP holds that every individual possesses an active inner world that shapes their external interactions. As Bandler and Grinder once stated, “Communication is not just interaction between people. There’s a whole world of communication within your mind and body. Your inner life—your thoughts, attitudes, and feelings—is a highly active form of communication.” (Bundrant, 2024). This insight reframes political communication not merely as message delivery but as a process in which a leader’s internal communication—thoughts, intentions, and attitudes—aligns with external messaging, creating authentic resonance with the public.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach with a content analysis method. A qualitative approach is chosen as this research seeks to understand the meaning behind the political communication strategies employed by the Mayor of Surabaya, Eri Cahyadi, in constructing his political image through social media posts, particularly on Instagram. This approach allows the researcher to explore the nuanced meanings, symbols, and language strategies used, including communication patterns that align with the principles of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). Content analysis is used to identify, categorize, and interpret both verbal and visual elements in Instagram posts that reflect the application of NLP strategies in political communication. This research is descriptive-analytical, aiming to describe and analyze the data to uncover communication patterns and political messages conveyed through social media.

Research Site and Object

The object of this study is the official Instagram account of the Mayor of Surabaya, Eri Cahyadi (@ericahyadi), which serves as a medium for political communication and image-building. This research is not conducted in a physical location, as all data is collected online through public access to the aforementioned Instagram account.

Research Period

The research was conducted from April 12 to April 19, 2025, focusing on the political communication activities carried out by Eri Cahyadi during this time frame. This period was chosen due to the consistent and relevant frequency of posts related to public policy, governance services, and personal communication, suitable for analysis through the NLP framework.

Data Collection Techniques

Data was collected using digital documentation by observing, recording, and archiving posts such as photos, videos, captions, infographics, and comment interactions on the Instagram account @ericahyadi during the specified research period. The data was then classified based on NLP principles, including:

1. Rapport
2. Sensory acuity
3. Outcome thinking
4. Behavioral flexibility
5. Milton model (ambiguous language)
6. Linguistic predicates (visual, auditory, kinesthetic)

In addition, user interaction data, such as comments and reactions to the posts, were also considered as indicators of the communicative impact of these strategies.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, following the qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman. The researcher developed a coding sheet to categorize each Instagram post element into indicators of NLP strategies. Each post was analyzed based on:

1. Narrative or caption: to identify linguistic predicates, affirmations, or Milton patterns
2. Visual and audio: including facial expressions, eye gaze direction, background music, or visual atmosphere
3. Interaction: evaluated through user responses to assess the effectiveness of communication



Thematic analysis was used to identify dominant themes in Eri Cahyadi's communication strategies and to match them with key NLP concepts.

RESEARCH RESULT

research findings data

After conducting a data collection and analysis process on the Instagram account of Eri Cahyadi, the Mayor of Surabaya, during the period from April 12 to May 4, 2025, the researcher identified several political communication strategies that contain elements of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). This section presents the research findings in detail, based on Eri Cahyadi's Instagram posts within the specified timeframe, including the identification of communication patterns, forms of symbolic representation, and relevant visual strategies.

Table 1. Content Post on Instagram @ericahyadi

Date of Post	Type of Content	Main Caption/Narrative	Detected NLP Indicators	Findings Description	Qualitative Conclusion
April 12, 2025	 Image (Cartoon design supporting Persebaya football club)	"Kita datang untuk menang. Kerahkan segala kemampuanmu untuk membawa tiga poin, JOL! 🍀🔥 #persebaya"	Embedded Command, Anchoring, Representational System	Cartoon-style visual shows Eri in Persebaya gear. Motivational sentence supported by emotional symbols (fire and crocodile) enhances local pride and enthusiasm.	Builds an image of a leader closely tied to local culture and competitive spirit, reinforcing Surabaya's emotional collective identity.
April 13, 2025	 Video (Sports) Reels	"HABIS HARI RAYA MULAI LAGI OLAHRAGA.. sing penting kerjo awak bugar dan terus menyala... #Namanyajugausaha 😊"	Everyday Language (Milton Model), Self-Disclosure, Embedded Command	Shows Eri playing tennis. The caption reflects a determination to restart healthy routines after holidays,	Portrays Eri as a relatable, hardworking, and human figure. Strengthens connection with citizens through authentic personal content.

				delivered with a casual and humorous tone.	
April 14, 2025	 <p>Video Reel (raid footage + mayor's clarification)</p>	"Pemkot Surabaya memastikan untuk mendampingi proses hukum dalam kasus dugaan penahanan ijazah... Siapa yang salah, harus bertanggung jawab."	Anchoring, Cause-Effect, Reframing, Embedded Commands, Presupposition	Shows raid led by the Deputy Mayor followed by Mayor Eri's statement. Empathetic yet authoritative tone supports an image of responsive leadership.	Shapes public perception that the government is just, responsive, and protective of its citizens. NLP strategies build trust and empathy.
April 14, 2025	 <p>Photo Carousel (6 slides: news articles + conference photos)</p>	"PENDAMPINGAN KARYAWAN YANG IJAZAHNYA DITAHAN MELAPOR KE POLISI... Kita dampingi pelaporan ke polisi; sekaligus menjadi pembelajaran bagi semua agar kejadian serupa tidak terulang lagi."	Presupposition, Future Pacing, Modal Operator of Necessity, Cause-Effect	Mayor Eri reinforces legal protection and worker rights. Caption stresses real action and prevention.	Projects a proactive and compassionate leader protecting workers' rights while deterring corporate misconduct.
April 15, 2025	 <p>Video Reel (official police report)</p>	"Sejak siang kemarin... Kepala Disperinaker Surabaya mendampingi langsung karyawan melapor ke kepolisian... Semua masalah harus diselesaikan dengan"	Cause-Effect, Presupposition, Anchoring, Future Pacing, Milton Model	Visuals show ongoing legal process with messages of harmony and humanity, reinforcing the mayor's	Enhances perception of an active problem-solver who upholds humanitarian values, law, and social stability.

		pendekatan hukum dan kemanusiaan. Surabaya guyub."		image as a people's defender.	
April 16, 2025	 <p>Video Reel (on-air radio interaction)</p>	<p>"Saat on air bersama Radio Suara Surabaya... Pak Soleh disabilitas netra ingin menikah... Dispendukcapil langsung turun membantu... Semua harus cepat, tidak boleh berbelit-belit apalagi membuat masyarakat sulit."</p>	<p>Embedded Command, Metaphor, Pacing & Leading, Positive Framing, Future Pacing</p>	<p>Highlights the government's rapid response, especially to vulnerable groups. Promotes an efficient, people-first image.</p>	<p>Reinforces the narrative of a responsive and inclusive leader, portraying the city government as citizen-centric and empathetic.</p>
April 19, 2025	 <p>Instagram reels video</p>	<p>"Wali Kota Difotoin ❌ Wali Kota Ngefotoin ✅"</p> <p>Caption: "Jadi fotografer anyaran gak mundur, Rek. Yang bikin grogi karena harus motret di depan Gus Iqdam"</p>	<p>Humor Pattern, Pacing, Personalization, Conversational Language</p>	<p>Menampilkan Wali Kota Eri Cahyadi dalam peran tidak formal sebagai fotografer. Gaya bahasa santai, bercanda, dan membumi digunakan untuk membangun kedekatan.</p>	<p>Menegaskan citra pemimpin yang merakyat, sederhana, dan memiliki kepekaan sosial. Penggunaan humor memperkuat pendekatan NLP berbasis emotional connection.</p>

The series of posts from April 12 to 19, 2025, demonstrates a consistent and systematic political communication strategy based on Neuro-Linguistic Programming. Mayor Eri Cahyadi integrates NLP techniques such as anchoring, embedded commands, reframing, future pacing, and humor patterns across various content formats to build an image of a firm, humane, approachable leader who is close to the people. This approach has proven effective in creating emotional resonance, strengthening symbolic closeness, and shaping a positive public perception of the Surabaya city government.

DISCUSSION

Table 2. Neuro-Linguistic Programming Indicator Details and Their Relevance to Digital Political Communication Strategy

Indicator Name	Description
Embedded Command	Used to subtly insert suggestions or instructions into sentences that influence the audience’s subconscious, such as “give it your all” or “this must be resolved through legal means.” This strengthens directive leadership. This approach is seen as a way to overcome challenges in maintaining attention and managing groups remotely (Fahri et al., 2024).
Anchoring	Establishes positive emotional associations with symbols or actions. For instance, using a crocodile symbol to evoke pride in Persebaya or depicting rapid crisis response to build trust. Emotional representation of climate change in media can increase public engagement but may also distract from its abstract and long-term nature (Höijer, 2010).
Reframing	Transforms negative meanings into positive ones. For example, in cases of corporate raids, the narrative is focused on justice and siding with the marginalized. Positive reframing is a semantically rich and challenging task, requiring the neutralization of negative perspectives and the construction of more positive interpretations without contradicting the original meaning (Ziems et al., 2022).
Presupposition	Assumes certain truths to direct the audience’s thinking, such as “whoever is at fault must be held accountable” or “every issue must be resolved”, which imply a firm stance without explicitly blaming. This strategy often incorporates other persuasive techniques in the same message, making it highly effective for layered communication (Anisa & Armstrong, 2024).

Milton Model	A vague and suggestive language style used to create closeness, with phrases like “it’s all part of the process” or “what matters is we keep working and stay healthy,” which feel familiar and grounded. Discourse analysis of the Milton model reveals dominant strategies and mechanisms that enhance the effectiveness of political communication (Kovalevska, 2020).
Future Pacing	Guides the audience to imagine positive outcomes or situations in the future, such as “so that this doesn’t happen again” or “things must be fast, no more red tape.” Pragmatic future outlooks help direct actions toward desired outcomes by considering barriers and integrating meaning, emotion, and social structure (Baumeister et al., 2016).
Humor Pattern	Uses humor to build rapport and reduce the social distance between leaders and the public, such as in the April 19 post that conveys a relaxed and humanized image. Humor in leadership positively impacts commitment and reduces follower burnout, especially among those with a lower need for structure and no emotional exhaustion (Pundt & Venz, 2017).
Self-Disclosure	Displays the personal side of public figures to build emotional connection and credibility, such as videos of sports or informal activities. Self-disclosure by public figures, influencers, or educators can enhance credibility perceptions, especially when done positively and without being overly intimate (Leite et al., 2024).

Pacing & Leading	Aligns with the audience’s experiences before guiding them toward ideas or solutions—for example, expressing social closeness before calling to action. Pacing and leading are highly effective for establishing and reinforcing rapport, which is key in business communication, negotiation, and persuasion (Bronson, 1996).
Modal Operators (of Necessity/Possibility)	Phrases like “must,” “must not,” or “we will support” are used to assert commitment and moral leadership. Modal logic can be combined with argumentation frameworks to build arguments involving moral operators, such as obligations and values. This approach enriches how systems assess and counter ethical arguments and address moral dilemmas more intuitively (Leturc & Bonnet, 2024).

Table 3. Overall Political Communication Strategy Based on Neuro-Linguistic Programming

NLP Technique	Function	Political Impact
Humor Pattern	Builds emotional closeness	Projects a pleasant, approachable, and down-to-earth image of leadership
Pacing	Aligns thought patterns or speaking style with the audience	Builds rapport and creates a sense of being understood and trusted by the public
Leading	Guides the audience toward specific ideas or solutions after pacing	Exerts positive influence without appearing to impose a narrative
Personalization	Use of local and informal language	Strengthens cultural and psychological connection with the people of Surabaya
Conversational Language	Utilizes relaxed and communicative expressions	Breaks down barriers between leaders and citizens, fostering informal interaction
Empathy Framing	Constructs narratives based on public emotions	Enhances trust and reinforces the image of a humane and responsive leader
Embedded Commands	Embeds suggestions or instructions within ordinary sentences	Shapes public opinion subtly without appearing propagandistic
Positive Framing	Highlights solutions and hope in the midst of conflict	Calms the audience and maintains public optimism amid local socio-political dynamics

Overall, the digital political communication strategy implemented by Eri Cahyadi through Instagram demonstrates the structured and contextually adaptive use of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) techniques. The combination of embedded commands, anchoring, humor patterns, and future pacing not only shapes a strong and responsive leadership image but also creates a deep emotional bond with the public. These posts reveal that political communication in the digital age is no longer one-directional and formal; rather, it is personal, dialogic, and leverages the psychological power of communication to influence public perception. This approach effectively positions social media not merely as a tool for publication but as a medium for

representing a leader's identity in an inclusive, authentic, and aspirational manner.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study indicate that political communication strategies based on Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) are highly relevant and effective in the digital era, especially on visual platforms like Instagram. By utilizing NLP techniques, political leaders can convey political messages subtly yet impactfully, build credibility, and strengthen emotional ties with constituents. This opens opportunities for other political actors to engage not only visually but also psychologically and communicatively, through content that is linguistically and symbolically tailored. Political communication practitioners, government public relations officers, and campaign teams are encouraged to adopt this approach to enhance public appeal and trust, particularly among digital-native generations.

The NLP-based communication strategy applied by Eri Cahyadi on Instagram from April 12 to 19, 2025, illustrates the integration of political messaging, visual representation, and psychological approaches to influence public perception. Techniques such as anchoring, reframing, embedded commands, and humor patterns effectively shape the image of a humanistic, solution-oriented, and people-centered leader. Beyond demonstrating the effectiveness of NLP in the realm of digital politics, this study also emphasizes the importance of an authentic, empathetic, and adaptive approach to social dynamics in building strong political communication in the age of social media.

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