

# Cultural Lag and Digital Campaigns in 2020 Simultaneous Regional Elections: A Theoretical Review

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**Abstract.** Simultaneous regional elections in 2020 were held during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the election campaign stage, campaigning through digital media is one of the most possible alternatives during the pandemic. Although digital media is increasingly dominating social life, the 2020 simultaneous regional election campaigns show the opposite phenomenon: digital campaigns are quiet and not optimal. This article aims to analyze the phenomenon of digital campaigns during the pandemic in terms of cultural lag theory. The results of the analysis show that digital campaigns are carried out by candidates as a forced-choice due to the covid-19 pandemic. The candidates and the public are not ready with the digital campaign culture despite the popularity of internet technology in the community. Unpreparedness to enter digital culture in electoral politics raises the phenomenon of cultural lag in simultaneous regional election campaigns, because candidates and voters face “stuttering” in utilizing digital space for the campaign process. This cultural gap causes digital media technology to be ineffective in the campaign process.

**Keywords:** Cultural Lag, Digital Campaign, Pandemic, Simultaneous Regional Election

## 1 Introduction

In electoral politics, campaigning is one of the important stages for candidates to gain public sympathy and collect votes [1]. The campaign is needed as a persuasive effort so that people choose a candidate on the ballot. The campaign is the media for candidates conducting political communication to convey programs, ideas, and persuasion to vote so that the existence of the political campaign process cannot be separated from the democratic process called the General Election (*Pemilu*), both at the national level and at the local or regional level.

In Indonesia, direct regional head elections (Pilkada) began to be held in 2005 after the enactment of Law Number 32 of 2004 concerning Regional Government. In 2015, local elections were held simultaneously in various districts, cities, and provinces by Government Regulation instead of Law Number 1 of 2014 concerning the Election of Governors, Regents, and Mayors which was later ratified into Law Number 1 of 2015 [2]. After that, simultaneous regional elections were held in 2017, 2018, and 2020.

The Simultaneous Regional Elections in 2020 have different dynamics because they coincide with the global health disaster of the Covid-19 pandemic. The first case of Covid-19 was detected in Indonesia on March 2, 2020, rapidly escalating so that until the beginning of the simultaneous election campaign, the Covid-19 Task Force noted that on September 20, 2020,

the number of positive cases of Covid in Indonesia had touched 244,676 people, with the death toll reaching 9,553 people ([www.covid19.go.id](http://www.covid19.go.id)).

In the context of the 2020 simultaneous regional elections, the health emergency has resulted in the issuance of regulations that change and adapt the process of implementing the regional elections during the pandemic. The 2020 simultaneous regional elections which were originally scheduled for September 23, 2020, had to be postponed to December 9, 2020, based on the amended regulations in KPU Regulation Number 5 of 2020 article 8B. This shows that the dynamics of 2020 Simultaneous Regional Elections are greatly influenced by the national health emergency due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

One of the discourses initiated in the simultaneous regional elections during the pandemic is the use of internet technology in the implementation stages, including in the candidate campaign process. Following PKPU Number 5 of 2020, the 2020 simultaneous regional election campaign stages are implemented for 71 days from 26 September to 5 December 2020. The campaign process in the 2020 simultaneous elections is carried out with the obligation to continue to pay attention to health protocols to prevent the spread of Covid-19. With this regulation, campaigns with the involvement and gathering of large crowds, such as rallies, meetings, visits, or entertainment performances will certainly not be able to be carried out as freely as before the pandemic because several health protocols must be adhered to.

In a pandemic situation that limits physical meetings, candidate campaigns in the digital space are a rational choice, especially now that the advancement of information technology and higher internet penetration rate among the people of Indonesia. Data from a survey by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in 2018 showed that the number of internet users in Indonesia reached 171.17 million people or equivalent to 64.8% of Indonesia's population of 264.16 million people. When compared to the 2017 survey, which was at a penetration rate of 54.68%, the increase in internet user penetration in Indonesia increased by more than 10% in one year, so it is predicted that in the following year this figure will increase. If viewed based on regional distribution, the penetration of Indonesian internet users in 2018 was 55.7% concentrated in the Java Island area. In Central Java Province, internet penetration is at 71.4% of the total population, which is above the national average [3].

The existence of digital space as a campaign arena is not new because before the Covid-19 pandemic digital space both on social media and online media had become a strategic space for candidates in fighting for public sympathy both in Indonesia [4][5][6][7][8], as well as in various other countries around the world [9][10][11][12]. The role of the internet in political campaigns has become a widely discussed study after Barack Obama's success in the 2008 and 2012 United States Presidential Elections. Obama's campaign, which is fully supported by the role of the internet, is widely cited as an example of the transformative power of the internet in today's political world [13]. The digital space is more important in political campaigns when the digital native generation, who is familiar with the internet since birth, is now starting to enter the electoral arena as novice voters whose existence cannot be underestimated as a determinant of victory [14]. Therefore, digital campaign activism is an effective tool to reach the digital generation.

However, the phenomenon of the simultaneous regional elections in 2020 brought a different situation in the context of digital campaigns. Digital campaigns are considered as an alternative method in the 2020 simultaneous regional election campaigns that are in a pandemic situation. The existence of a pandemic and the threat of transmission of the Covid-19 virus causes physical gatherings between people to be avoided. As regulated in Article 88C of PKPU Number 13 of 2020, it is explained that candidates are prohibited from conducting campaign

activities such as public meetings, art performances, harvest festivals, music concerts, mass sports activities, bicycle rallies, competitions, social activities such as bazaars, blood donations, and celebrations. political party anniversary. Therefore, campaigning in the digital space is the most recommended alternative during the 2020 simultaneous local elections. This article further analyzes how the digital era which has now become a new civilization accompanied by the fast-emerging COVID-19 pandemic has driven changes in social values and values. the basic foundations of civilization and culture, including in the electoral political arena of the 2020 simultaneous regional elections.

## **2 Method**

This article is a theoretical analysis of the phenomenon of the 2020 simultaneous regional election campaign that uses digital platforms, especially on the candidates' social media, both Instagram and Facebook. Instagram and Facebook are the most popular platforms and are widely used by the general public and candidates during the 2020 simultaneous regional election campaign. This is relevant to the data released by wearesocial.com that in 2021 the top three most accessed social media in Indonesia are: Youtube, Whatsapp, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter [15]. The data were observed especially in Semarang Regency, Semarang City, and Kendal Regency during the Simultaneous Regional Election campaign in 2020. The data was obtained from mass media coverage of the 2020 simultaneous regional election campaign in Central Java, as well as data from the regional election supervisory body (Bawaslu) which records and monitors digital campaign activities. The analysis was carried out with the perspective of the theory of social change, "Cultural Lag" from William Ogburn [16].

## **3 Discussion**

### **3.1 Pandemic and Accelerated Penetration of the Digital Age**

The Covid-19 pandemic is a global disease outbreak that has shaken modern human civilization today. There is almost no country that has not been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Historically, the COVID-19 pandemic is the largest global pandemic in more than 100 years of human history, after the world's largest plague ever occurred, namely the black death in the 14th century in Europe and the Mediterranean and killed more than 200 million people worldwide, or one-third of the world's population [17], and the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1918 which infected one-third of the world's population and killed an estimated 50–100 million people [18].

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is not only in the health aspect, but also in non-health impacts, both social, political, economic, educational, religious, tourism, and various aspects of human life. The Covid-19 pandemic has hit the most fundamental side of human social life, social interaction between humans because the spread of Covid-19 occurs through close contact with sufferers. Restricting physical distance as the most effective way to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak in the end also has an impact on social distancing restrictions. Covid-19 has shaken the life of many countries in the world. People have to adapt quickly to new situations, especially safer and healthier ways of interacting. One of the radical changes that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic was the use of digital media or internet-

based media as a medium of interaction and communication, both in the fields of education, bureaucracy, economics, religion, politics, and various other fields. The internet and digital media have quickly become the dominant communication media in human interaction, even massively used to maintain physical and social distancing during a pandemic. This phenomenon is illustrated by a survey by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), which recorded an increase in internet users in Indonesia during the second quarter of 2020 as many as 25.5 million users, so that of the 266.9 million Indonesian population, 196.7 million or 73, 7% of them have become internet users [19]. The data illustrates that during the current pandemic, Indonesian people are encouraged to enter changes faster into the digital era.

### **3.2 Cultural Lag and Technological Determinism in the Perspective of Socio-Cultural Change Theory**

In terms of the theory of social change, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused tremendous social transformations for humans and their lives, which in terms of speed and scale, the COVID-19 pandemic is a driver of rapid and radical change. Humans as subjects in the process of social transformation will respond to all these changes, both for resistance and adaptation to the changes that occur. The presence of internet technology and social media has become one of the radical human responses in dealing with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The existence of technology and media in changing human culture, including during the current global pandemic, is something that cannot be denied because media and technology can be seen as part of a historical socio-cultural process [20]. Currently, the media is an important subject matter in analyzing the process of cultural transition and transformation, both in the context of media as a means of transmitting culture, as a means of dissemination, and as a vehicle for transmitting culture [20].

In the context of today's modern political communication, the determination of technology in shaping the new communication landscape has a big role. The development of communication technology starting from the introduction of print media, radio, television, to the internet today has contributed greatly to the communication culture of society. The internet today provides the ability for politicians to communicate their ideas 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and directly enter freely into the homes of voters [21]. The role of technology in revolutionizing new practices and behaviors is of course also closely related to the introduction and adaptation of society to technological and cultural changes that occur.

Regarding how society responds to socio-cultural changes, there is a theoretical concept that is well known in the study of socio-cultural change, especially when these changes also involve aspects of material technology, The Theory of Cultural Lag popularized by the American Sociologist, William Fielding Ogburn [16]. Ogburn's perspective on socio-cultural change is influenced by technological determinism when technology as material culture becomes a driving mechanism for social and cultural change in society. In summary, Ogburn's idea about the process of socio-cultural change occurs through several stages, namely: 1) invention, or discoveries; 2) accumulation when the new invention complements the previous invention; 3) diffusion or the process of spreading the new culture amid society, and 4) adjustment, the adjustment of the community to changes that occur, both in knowledge, attitudes, behavior as well as values and norms. In the process of adjustment, it is very possible that there will be a condition of maladjustment or failure in the adjustment of society to the socio-cultural changes that occur, and Ogburn calls this mal-adjustment condition as cultural lag. The phenomenon of cultural lag is often found in people in developing countries or those who are moving towards modernization when innovation and technological diffusion are developing rapidly.

The basic concept of cultural lag theory sees that every major socio-cultural change will involve both material and non-material aspects. The material or technological aspect has become one of the important factors in many processes of socio-cultural change in various societies and civilizations, such as in the industrial revolution in Europe in the 18th century which changed the foundations of European social life and civilization. Social change will take place well if material and non-material aspects are compatible with each other, otherwise, if there is a gap between the two, social problems will emerge. This problem related to adjustment between changing cultural elements is the main concern of cultural lag theory [16]. The cultural lag theory assumes that various parts of the socio-cultural aspects experience changes with various variations, some change more quickly than other cultural elements. The inequality of these changes will be a problem because in social activities the various cultural elements are correlated and interdependent. In general, cultural lag occurs when there is a rapid change in a society so some people experience stuttering in responding to rapid changes.

Furthermore, according to Ogburn [16], elements of culture that develop faster are usually related to aspects of material culture or technology because of the innovation process of human knowledge that drives innovation. Meanwhile, non-material aspects such as values, norms, ways of life, habits are relatively slowest because they involve a deeper internalization process in their formation. This non-material culture is what Ogburn calls adaptive culture, which is the aspect of culture that adapts to changes or developments in material culture. Therefore, two important aspects of the cultural lag theory are material culture and adaptive culture. Material culture always undergoes a process of innovation or development and is accumulative, while non-material culture will become an adaptive culture that will adapt to changes in material culture that are taking place. Cultural lag arises when adaptive culture lags in its development with innovations that occur in material culture.

Ogburn [16] explains several reasons for the occurrence of cultural lag. First, there is a scarcity of inventions in the adaptive culture of a society, where people are unable to catch up with the progress of material culture that is taking place so that the process of adaptation and adjustment is hampered. Second, cultural lag occurs because of mechanical barriers in the process of adaptive change, thus hampering the speed of cultural adaptation. It is possible that inventions in adaptive culture have been known, but have encountered obstacles to adoption, application, and diffusion due to the rejection of people who still maintain old habits, a strong love for the past, and the assumption that many aspects of the old culture are still useful.

Third, cultural lag is caused by the heterogeneity in the society, both in various social classes and social groups. With this diversity, the need for a change may only be desired by a group of social classes, even though change will occur and be experienced by society as a whole. This factor, according to Ogburn, is the cause of cultural lag in modern society or industrial society. Fourth, is the level of closeness of contact between adaptive culture and material culture, where the farther the level of closeness, the greater the cultural gap that occurs. This level of close contact theoretically explains the variation in cultural gaps that occur in every society or in every aspect of the changes that take place. A wide gap will certainly require a longer adjustment than a smaller or closer gap.

Fifth, there is a link between adaptive culture and other cultural elements, when part of the adaptive culture is correlated with other non-adaptive parts of non-material culture, causing delays in cultural adjustment. Ogburn [16] makes an analogy with X as adaptive culture, Y as material culture, and Z as a non-adaptive non-material culture where the three are correlated with each other. If Y changes and Z does not change, X will be slower to adjust. The adjustment delay would not have occurred if X did not correlate with Z. Thus, the connection between X as an adaptive culture and Z as an element of other non-material cultures became a factor

influencing whether or not cultural lag occurred. Sixth, the cause of cultural lag is Group Valuation, when aspects of values, norms, customs, and social rules are also important factors that influence the occurrence of cultural lag. Group values and norms become determinants and measures of right or wrong actions in social life, as well as being a pressing force for community members. These values, norms, customs, and social rules can be the cause of institutional cultural lag because old values and norms are considered still relevant and changes are considered incompatible with existing values and norms. This condition by Ogburn is called institutionalism resists change [16].

### **3.3 The Cultural Lag Phenomenon in 2020 Simultaneous Regional Election Digital Campaign**

During the 2020 simultaneous regional election campaign in a pandemic situation, the KPU has determined that physical campaigns with large mass gatherings are not allowed. This is regulated by the KPU through PKPU Number 13 of 2020 article 58 paragraph 1 which emphasizes the use of social media and online media as a means of campaigning.

In response to the KPU regulation, during the pre-campaign period the candidates in Semarang City, Semarang Regency, and Kendal Regency stated their readiness to campaign in digital media. The statement of readiness was recorded in the news in many mass media. In Semarang Regency, the Ngesti-Basari candidate pair stated their readiness to maximize online campaigns [22]. Similarly, its competitor, Bintang Narsasi-Gunawan Wibisono, demonstrated his readiness with a digital campaign through a virtual declaration of candidacy [23]. Meanwhile in Semarang City, the single candidate pair Hendrar Prihadi-Hevearita has prepared a virtual campaign with various interactive device innovations such as Instagram, zoom meetings, and virtual boxes to communicate with voters [24][25]. The same thing was conveyed by the Kendal Regency election candidates, both Dico Ganinduto-Basuki, Ali Nurudin-Yekti Handayani, and Tino Indra Wardono-M Mustamsikin who expressed readiness to use digital media in their campaigns [26] (Tribun Jateng, 27/10/2020). Even the TIM couple stated that they would choose online campaigns as a priority tool because their main target is the millennial generation in Kendal Regency [27].

However, in reality, the campaign in the digital space during the 2020 simultaneous regional elections did not run optimally. Changing the paradigm of campaigning through digital methods has many dynamics, moreover, these changes are made because of the pressure and coercion of the changing social situation due to the pandemic. An ideal electoral political campaign is impossible without preparation and planning because the planning stage in the "campaign preliminary" is the starting point that will contribute greatly in determining victory (Borton and Shea, 2010). Therefore, the readiness of candidates and voters in participating in the campaign process through digital media is one of the important things to look at, both from the aspect of infrastructure readiness, literacy, and habitus in consuming digital media. This is illustrated by the release of Bawaslu data on the results of monitoring campaign implementation in the first 30 days, namely September 26–October 25, 2020, which shows a downward trend in online campaign implementation (Bawaslu, 2020b). In terms of the number of activities, the online campaign method is the least expensive compared to other methods, namely 247 activities (0.57%), compared to the limited face-to-face campaign of 39,303 activities (91.27%), the installation of campaign props for 1,698 activities (3.94%), and distribution of campaign materials for 1,815 activities (4.21%).

The data shows that the candidates have not used digital campaigns well during the campaign period. Physical campaigns with limited mass gathering and door-to-door visits are considered more effective than campaigning through digital platforms. The reluctance of the

candidates to use digital space as a campaign tool rather than physical meetings is caused by several things. First, information and communication technology infrastructure has not reached all areas equally. Second, the digital literacy of candidates, supporters, and the public is still low. Third, there is still a strong public perception that campaigning is synonymous with meeting activities with large numbers of people [28].

The dynamics of the campaign behavior of candidates and the public in the digital space in the 2020 simultaneous regional elections amid a pandemic, as illustrated above, is something that deserves attention. Campaign behavior in the digital space cannot be separated from the practice of political culture that surrounds the candidates who show that digital political culture has not been internalized in the political practices and behavior of the candidates. Even though digital media has increasingly dominated people's lives, it shows the opposite phenomenon in the practice of the 2020 simultaneous regional election campaign. The 2020 simultaneous regional elections show that the digital space has not become the main campaign media for the candidates, but rather as a supporting factor for conventional campaigns. The existence of a law issued by the KPU to encourage online campaigns during the pandemic was not fully effective in its implementation. This phenomenon shows that there is a gap between the advancement of digital technology which has penetrated all levels of society and the ability of candidates and voters to utilize digital technology in the political communication process of the 2020 simultaneous regional election campaign. In the analysis of cultural studies as described in the previous section, this phenomenon can be categorized as cultural lag [16]. The irony of the cultural lag can be analyzed from various facts and data that show that currently, the majority of the voting community has access to good internet, especially through smartphones.

However, not all people use their information technology infrastructure to access political information, especially the campaigns of candidates on social media. This happens because of digital literacy factors, uneven internet access, and the factors of candidates who still underestimate the power of digital campaigns. In the perspective of cultural lag theory, internet technology that is growing rapidly and is being accelerated due to pandemic conditions is material culture. Meanwhile, the behavior of the community and candidates in adapting to the development of internet technology is an adaptive culture that is a response to technological changes [16]. The lack of candidates using digital media, as well as the public's reluctance to respond to campaigns on social media shows that adaptive culture has not responded well to the rapid development of material culture. This condition creates a gap between the rapid advancement of digital technology and the practice of using it as a campaign tool. As a result, there is a gap between these two things in the use of digital campaign technology. Unpreparedness to enter the digital campaign culture has given rise to the Cultural Lag phenomenon because candidates and voters experience "stuttering" in the use of digital space for the campaign process. Technologically or materially, social transformation towards the era of digital public space as an arena of political communication and marketing takes place massively, but the speed of technological transformation has not been optimally adapted by the community in terms of values, attitudes, behavior, actions. This leads to the effectiveness of campaigns in the digital world.

## **4 Conclusion**

Based on the theoretical discussion as stated in the previous section, several conclusions can be drawn. First, the digital campaign carried out by the candidates is a choice in terms of

limitations and "compulsion" due to the covid-19 pandemic. The compulsion of choice is reinforced by KPU regulations that limit campaign activities in physical meetings and lead to limited or virtual campaigns. The candidates and the public are not ready for internet-based digital campaigns even though internet technology is widely known by the public. The use of technology and internet mediation as an electoral political communication tool has not yet become a familiar practice in Indonesian political culture. Second, unpreparedness to face digital culture in electoral politics has led to the phenomenon of Cultural Lag in electoral political behavior and practice, because candidates and voters experience "stuttering and lagging" in the use of digital space for the campaign process. Technologically or materially, social transformation towards the era of digital public space as an arena of communication and political marketing is taking place massively, but the speed of technological transformation has not been optimally adapted by the community in terms of values, attitudes, behavior, actions. This has resulted in the ineffectiveness of campaigns in the digital space, which has encountered various problems. Such stuttering and cultural lagging make the use of digital communication technology ineffective in the campaign process.

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