

Political Marketing of the Darma Wijaya–Adlin Umar Yusri Tambunan Pair in the 2020 Serdang Bedagai (Sergai) Regional Election

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Direct regional head elections in Indonesia require candidate pairs to adopt effective political marketing strategies to win the support of increasingly fragmented voters. This study investigates the political marketing strategies used by the Darma Wijaya–Adlin Umar Yusri Tambunan (“Dambaan”) pair in the 2020 Serdang Bedagai (Sergai) Regent Election, which successfully defeated the two-term incumbent. Using Niffenegger’s 4P marketing mix theoretical framework (Product, Promotion, Price, Place) and Nursal’s push–pull–pass typology, this study aims to identify the target domains, media channels used, drivers and barriers to constituent support, communication strategies, and perceptions of the realization of campaign promises after the inauguration. **Method:** Using an embedded mixed-methods design, data were collected through questionnaires with 21 respondents, in-depth interviews with key informants of the campaign team, and documentation studies during the first 100 days of the administration. **Results:** The findings indicate that the pair’s victory relied heavily on a push marketing strategy through grassroots engagement (blusukan) and pass marketing mediated by youth and religious organizations (such as Pemuda Pancasila and GP Ansor), which served as the primary channel, replacing expensive digital infrastructure. Constituent support was driven by personal closeness and trust established long before the candidacy, while opposition stemmed primarily from residual loyalty to the previous incumbent. **Novelty:** Post-inauguration, the majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with the pair’s initial performance, particularly in infrastructure and irrigation improvements, indicating that marketed promises were followed up with concrete governance.

INTRODUCTION

Direct election of regional heads (pilkada) has been a defining pillar of Indonesia's post-Reformasi democracy since Law No. 32 of 2004 shifted the authority to elect a bupati and wakil bupati from the regional legislature to the people. Within this system, a candidate pair can no longer rely on party endorsement alone; it must construct a recognizable public identity, communicate a coherent vision and mission, and persuade an increasingly fragmented electorate across diverse social, religious, and occupational segments. This imperative has produced a body of practice widely labelled political marketing: an adaptation of commercial marketing logic most commonly operationalized through Niffenegger's 4P framework of product, promotion, price, and place, and Nursal's push–pull–pass typology to the arena of electoral competition [1], [2]. As a district of North Sumatra with a mixed agrarian and coastal economy, Serdang Bedagai (Sergai) offers an instructive site for examining how these marketing logics operate in a semi-urban regency rather than in the provincial capitals that dominate the literature.

Research on Indonesian political marketing has grown substantially since the country's most recent cycles of simultaneous local elections. Several strands can be identified. First, studies of legislative and party-level marketing have examined how parties and individual candidates construct branding and voter appeal, for example Paskarina's analysis of the Indonesian Solidarity Party's candidate-centred campaign in the 2019 Jakarta legislative election [3], and Setiyani et al.'s study of female legislative candidates in Bekasi [4], both of which emphasize the growing weight of digital promotion alongside conventional face-to-face canvassing. Second, a cluster of case studies has applied Nursal's push-pull-pass framework to district-level executive elections [2], including Cahyani et al.'s study of the Tamba–Ipat pair in the 2020 Jembrana election [5], Pratama and Rahmawati's analysis of the Kustini–Danang pair in the 2020 Sleman election [6], and Abidin's study of candidate marketing in East Lombok [7], all reporting that direct grassroots engagement (push marketing) and interpersonal or organizational intermediation (pass marketing) remain decisive even as digital tools expand. Third, more recent work has turned toward the marketization and professionalization of Indonesian campaigning as an institutional phenomenon Ahmad and toward the persistence of patronage [8], vote-buying, and clientelist brokerage underlying formally “marketed” campaigns [9]. Fourth, studies published toward the middle of the current decade increasingly document region-specific strategies, such as Sudarsono's study of regional head candidates in Wajo Regency, which shows that image construction, strategic placement of campaign materials, and cultural adaptation of messaging remain central even where digital campaigning is available [10].

Despite this growing literature, three gaps remain salient. First, most published case studies concentrate on provincial capitals, well-resourced legislative races, or high-profile figures with pre-existing national visibility, leaving comparatively little documented evidence on political marketing practice in a smaller, resource-modest regency such as Serdang Bedagai, where campaign structures rely more heavily on informal youth and religious-social organizations than on paid digital consultants. Second, existing push-pull-pass or 4P studies rarely combine quantitative constituent surveys with qualitative interviews of campaign insiders within the same regency-level study, which limits the ability to triangulate voters' self-reported perceptions against the strategic logic articulated by the winning team itself. Third, few studies extend beyond the campaign period to examine whether marketed promises were perceived to be realized during the initial months of incumbency, even though post-election delivery is central to assessing whether political marketing functioned merely as persuasive communication or as a genuine accountability mechanism.

This study addresses these gaps by providing a mixed-method, regency-level account of the political marketing conducted by the Darma Wijaya–Adlin Umar Yusri Tambunan (“Dambaan”) pair, who defeated an entrenched two-term incumbent in the 2020 Sergai election by a wide margin. Its novelty lies in linking campaign-period marketing strategy organized substantially through youth organizations such as Pemuda Pancasila and GP Ansor to post-election constituent perceptions of program realization

during the pair's first hundred days in office, an angle seldom captured in single-snapshot campaign studies. The urgency of this inquiry is heightened by Indonesia's continuing cycle of simultaneous regional elections, in which regency-level candidates increasingly compete against well-funded incumbents; understanding how a grassroots-anchored marketing approach can outperform incumbency advantage offers practically transferable lessons for future regional contests while contributing empirical texture to the still-developing Indonesian political marketing literature.

Guided by these considerations, this study aims to: (1) identify the primary domains targeted by the political marketing of Darma Wijaya and Adlin Umar Yusri Tambunan in the 2020 Sergai election; (2) map the media and channels used to market their political product; (3) explain the factors that enabled the pair to attract constituent support; (4) explain the reasons some constituents declined to support them; (5) describe the communication strategy applied during the campaign period; and (6) assess the efforts made to realize their vision and mission after assuming office. Collectively, these objectives allow the study to connect campaign-stage marketing decisions with post-election governance perceptions within a single regency-level case.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a concurrent embedded mixed-methods design in which a descriptive qualitative approach was privileged and a supplementary quantitative questionnaire was used to corroborate and quantify constituent perceptions [11], [12], [13]. This design was chosen because the object of inquiry, political marketing strategy and its perceived post-election realization, requires both the contextual depth that qualitative interviewing provides and the broader distributional evidence that a structured questionnaire can offer among the wider constituency. The population comprised residents of Serdang Bedagai Regency, North Sumatra. Because the population exceeded 100 individuals, a simple random sampling technique was used to draw respondents for the questionnaire, while the key informant for the interview was selected purposively based on direct involvement in the 2020 campaign. The research was conducted in Serdang Bedagai Regency between June and July 2021, a period corresponding to roughly the first hundred days of the Darma Wijaya–Adlin Umar Yusri Tambunan administration, which took office in early 2021 [14], [15].

Three data collection techniques were used. First, a questionnaire combining structured (closed-ended) and unstructured (open-ended) items was distributed online via Google Forms, a format necessitated by pandemic-related restrictions on in-person data collection. The instrument covered respondents' understanding of political marketing, their assessment of the candidate pair's self-introduction, their support status, their impressions of the campaign, their evaluation of the vision and mission, the channels through which these were communicated, perceived realization of campaign promises, satisfaction with performance after inauguration, priority development sectors, reasons for supporting or not supporting the pair, and expectations for future performance. Twenty-one respondents completed the questionnaire, drawn from varied

age groups, occupations, and educational backgrounds across the regency. Second, an in-depth, semi-structured interview was conducted on 5 July 2021 at the Bengkel Village Head Office with Budi Satria, Head of the Social Welfare Section of Bengkel Village and a member of the pair's campaign success team, who provided an insider perspective on strategy formulation and implementation. Third, documentary and literature data were collected from books, academic journals, institutional and news websites, and campaign documentation to contextualize and support the primary data.

Qualitative data from the interview transcript and open-ended questionnaire responses were analyzed thematically, with responses coded against the study's guiding constructs product, promotion, price, and place, and push, pull, and pass marketing to identify recurring patterns regarding targeted domains, channels, and communication strategy. Quantitative data from closed-ended questionnaire items were analyzed descriptively using frequency and percentage distributions, which are presented visually to summarize constituent perceptions of the pair's marketing quality, support base, satisfaction, and perceived program realization. Data from the interview, the questionnaire, and documentary sources were triangulated to strengthen the credibility of the findings, with convergence across sources treated as an indicator of confirmability. Given the exploratory and descriptive purpose of the study and its modest, non-probability-influenced sample, the analysis was oriented toward generating a grounded, context-rich account of the case rather than toward statistical generalization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results are organized according to the six objectives guiding this study, drawing jointly on the questionnaire, the interview with the campaign informant, and supporting documentation.

Domains Targeted by Political Marketing

During the campaign period, the pair's political marketing centered on sustained active engagement with the community rather than on a narrowly defined policy sector. Darma Wijaya, in particular, was reported to mix frequently with residents especially youth and local musicians visiting cafés in Perbaungan District, and his standing as a member of the Pemuda Pancasila youth organization facilitated easy rapport with the public. After assuming office, this community-oriented positioning translated into a broader governance agenda spanning nine priority sectors identified by respondents: infrastructure, community empowerment (particularly micro, small, and medium enterprises), sports, education, agriculture, religious affairs, the economy, tourism, and the maritime sector, indicating that the pair sought to extend their campaign-period community orientation into a comprehensive development program.

Media and Channels Used

Respondents and the campaign informant both identified a combination of online and offline channels. Online promotion relied on WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook, while offline promotion included banners (spanduk and baleho), electronic media

coverage, direct attendance at community events, public oration, and most prominently engagement mediated through local organizations and youth networks. This pattern indicates that, while digital media supplemented the campaign, organizational and interpersonal channels functioned as the primary vehicle for introducing the pair's political product to constituents.

Factors Attracting Constituent Support

Ninety and a half percent of the 21 questionnaire respondents agreed that the pair had introduced themselves to the public effectively, and 75% of 20 respondents identified themselves as supporters during the 2020 campaign. According to the campaign informant, the pair's success stemmed from grassroots presence established years before their candidacy: both Darma Wijaya and Adlin Umar Yusri Tambunan engaged in door-to-door and informal community visits (*blusukan*) well in advance of the election, actively supported community activities, and provided particular support to youth sports, especially football, through sparring events. Respondents' impressions of the campaign period were correspondingly positive, describing it as friendly, courteous, and grounded in direct engagement with the public, consistent with the campaign slogan “Maju Terus” (Keep Moving Forward), and respondents further indicated that the campaign complied with procedures set by the General Elections Commission (KPU).

Reasons for Non-Support

A minority of respondents reported not supporting the pair, citing dislike of the coalition of parties and organizations that nominated them, and in some cases abstention from choosing any candidate pair. The campaign informant offered a complementary explanation, attributing most opposition to residual loyalty toward the previous two-term incumbent bupati rather than substantive disagreement with the challengers' platform, suggesting that affective attachment to the outgoing leadership, rather than policy dissatisfaction, was the principal source of resistance.

Communication Strategy During the Campaign

The pair's communication strategy relied heavily on intermediation through local youth and community organizations, which allowed the campaign team to hear constituents' concerns directly. A concrete example reported by the informant was the use of sports “sparring partner” events, which simultaneously strengthened rapport with young people and served as an informal campaign platform. Respondents characterized the overall communication approach as visionary, courteous, and marked by a strong work ethic, and noted that *visi-misi* messaging was reinforced through repeated public appearances, banners, and social media, delivered in a manner they perceived as respectful and grounded rather than confrontational.

Realization of Vision and Mission After Taking Office

Within approximately the first hundred days in office, respondents and the informant both reported visible, if incremental, progress toward the pair's campaign promises. These included road infrastructure repair, revitalization of irrigation channels supporting the regency's predominantly agricultural (rice-farming) economy, the establishment of dedicated sports development structures at the district level, and the

organization of religious programs such as Quran-recitation competitions (MTQ) staffed by licensed judges. Eighty-one percent of 21 respondents expressed satisfaction with the pair's performance to date, and the informant reported no constituent complaints during the observed period, attributing this to tangible early results in sectors most relevant to residents' livelihoods. Overall, these findings directly satisfy the study's six objectives: they identify community engagement and, subsequently, a nine-sector development agenda as the primary marketing domains; document organization-mediated and digital channels as the marketing media; attribute constituent support to early, sustained grassroots trust-building; attribute non-support chiefly to incumbent loyalty rather than platform rejection; characterize the communication strategy as organization-intermediated and grassroots-oriented; and provide evidence, from constituents' own perspective, that the marketed vision and mission were being substantively pursued after the pair assumed office.

Discussion

The finding that direct grassroots engagement, mediated through youth organizations, outweighed purely digital promotion echoes Abidin's conclusion in East Lombok that blusukan-based push marketing remains the most decisive strategy in regency-level elections [7], and Cahyani et al.'s finding that pass marketing through religious and communal networks anchored the Tamba–Ipat victory in Jembrana [5]. It also parallels Sudarsono's observation in Wajo Regency that cultural adaptation of campaign messaging outperforms generic imagery [10]. At the same time, the present findings depart somewhat from studies of higher-visibility, urban races such as Paskarina's account of the Indonesian Solidarity Party in Jakarta [3], where digital promotion carried comparatively greater weight; in Sergai, social media functioned as a supplementary rather than a primary channel. The reported motive for opposition residual loyalty to the defeated incumbent rather than policy disagreement corroborates patronage- and personalism-based voting patterns documented by Aspinall and Sukmajati in other Indonesian regencies [9], suggesting that affective attachment to incumbents persists as an electoral variable independent of challengers' marketing quality.

By connecting Niffenegger's 4P model and Nursal's push–pull–pass typology to both campaign-stage strategy and post-inauguration delivery [1], [2], this study addresses the gap identified in smaller, non-metropolitan regency settings, where prior applications of these frameworks (Pratama & Rahmawati, Cahyani et al.) have not extended analysis into the incumbency period [6], [5]. The study's six objectives spanning targeted domains, media channels, drivers of support and resistance, communication strategy, and post-election realization map directly onto this dual-stage design, allowing campaign promises to be checked against constituents' subsequent satisfaction rather than treated as terminal outcomes of Election Day. This design responds to Ahmad's call to examine the marketization of Indonesian campaigning as an ongoing institutional process rather than an episodic event [8], and offers a scholarly contribution by showing,

at regency scale, how organization-mediated pass marketing can substitute for costly digital infrastructure while still meeting voters' expectations of transparent, delivery-oriented local governance.

For campaign practitioners and challenger candidates in similarly resourced regencies, the findings suggest that sustained pre-candidacy embedding within youth, sports, and religious organizations can substitute for expensive digital campaign infrastructure, consistent with the cost-effective pass-marketing patterns reported by Setiyani et al. and Sudarsono [4], [10]. For incumbent office-holders, the results imply that early, visible delivery on infrastructure- and livelihood-related promises here, irrigation and road repair is central to sustaining post-election satisfaction. For election administrators and local policymakers, the persistence of loyalty-based opposition tied to a defeated incumbent, similar to patterns identified by Aspinall and Sukmajati [9], points to the continued relevance of voter education programs that help constituents separate personal loyalty from policy evaluation. Local governments may also consider formalizing organization-mediated feedback channels, given that youth organizations in this study functioned as an informal grievance-hearing mechanism between officials and residents.

As a single-case study drawing on 19–21 questionnaire respondents and one key informant, these findings should be read as illustrative rather than statistically generalizable to Serdang Bedagai's full electorate or to Indonesian regencies at large. The respondent profile skewed toward younger, educated, digitally connected residents may overstate the salience of organizational and grassroots channels relative to segments less reachable through the study's sampling approach. Consistent with cautions raised by Abidin and Cahyani et al. regarding case-specific push–pull–pass dynamics [7], [5], the mechanisms identified here, particularly the substitution of youth-organization networks for costly digital campaigning, are best understood as regency-scale patterns that may recur in comparable semi-urban, agrarian districts, rather than as universal claims about Indonesian political marketing. Larger-sample and comparative studies are needed before these relationships can be extended with confidence beyond the Sergai context.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : This study examined how Darma Wijaya and Adlin Umar Yusri Tambunan marketed themselves in the 2020 Sergai election and how that marketing translated into post-election governance perceptions. The findings show that their political marketing centered on sustained community engagement through youth and religious organizations well before candidacy, was communicated primarily through interpersonal and organizational channels supplemented by social media, and succeeded largely through early trust-building, approachability, and support for local youth sports. Opposition to the pair stemmed mainly from residual loyalty to the previous incumbent rather than rejection of their platform. During their initial months in office, constituents reported visible progress on infrastructure, agricultural irrigation, and organized sports and religious programs, indicating that the marketed vision and mission were, in

respondents' perception, substantively pursued. These results directly answer the study's guiding questions concerning targeted domains, media, drivers of support and opposition, communication strategy, and post-election realization. **Implication** : Despite these constraints, the study offers a grounded, regency-level account of how grassroots-anchored political marketing can outperform an entrenched incumbent, contributing empirical detail to a still-growing field of Indonesian local political marketing research. **Limitation** : This study is limited by its small, non-probability-influenced sample of 19–21 questionnaire respondents and a single key informant, which restricts statistical generalizability and may underrepresent constituents outside the pair's organizational networks. The relatively short post-election observation window, roughly the first hundred days, captures early governance impressions rather than sustained policy outcomes, and reliance on self-reported satisfaction leaves open the possibility of social-desirability bias among respondents connected to the campaign's support network. **Future Research** : Future research would benefit from larger, more representative samples, longitudinal tracking of program realization across a full term of office, and comparative designs examining multiple regencies to test whether the organization-mediated marketing pattern identified here holds beyond Serdang Bedagai.

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