



Digital Transformation of Local Political Parties: A Case Study of PDIP and PAN in East Java

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Abstract

Digital disruption forces political intermediaries to evolve or face obsolescence. While national-level digital transformation is well-documented, grassroots dynamics within local party branches remain under-researched, leaving a significant gap in emerging democracies. This study argues that digital transformation at the subnational party level does not inherently catalyze democratic deepening; rather, it functions as a mechanism of 'Pragmatic Digitalization' that solidifies traditional hierarchical power structures. Focusing on the East Java provincial branches of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) and the National Mandate Party (PAN), this qualitative multi-site case study examines how local party machinery navigates this shift. Utilizing a four-dimensional framework adoption, management, deliberation, and participation, the findings demonstrate that while both parties successfully transition into 'Hybrid Parties' by professionalizing administrative governance (via SIPP and SimPAN applications), this transformation remains structurally partial. Digital tools are weaponized primarily for top-down communication and organizational survival rather than fostering horizontal intra-party democracy. Ultimately, this research refines 'Digital Party' theory by exposing a distinct Global South paradigm: digitalization professionalizes party bureaucracy to build a 'digital armor' for organizational resilience while strategically preserving localized elite hegemony.

Keywords

Digital Transformation; Political Parties; East Java; Party Institutionalization; Hybrid Party

Abstrak

Disrupsi digital memaksa partai politik sebagai intermediari politik untuk berkembang atau menghadapi kepunahan. Meskipun transformasi digital di tingkat nasional sudah terdokumentasi dengan baik, dinamika akar rumput partai di tingkat lokal masih langka dan terbatas diteliti, meninggalkan kesenjangan signifikan di demokrasi yang sedang berkembang. Studi ini berargumen bahwa transformasi digital partai politik di tingkat lokal tidak secara otomatis mendorong pendalaman demokrasi. Sebaliknya, ia lebih berfungsi sebagai mekanisme 'Digitalisasi Pragmatis' yang memperkuat struktur kekuasaan hierarkis tradisional. Fokus riset ini pada institusi Partai Politik di level provinsi Jawa Timur yakni Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDIP) dan Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN). Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan desain riset studi kasus multi situs, meneliti bagaimana mesin partai lokal menavigasi perubahan ini. Menggunakan kerangka empat dimensi: adopsi, manajemen, deliberasi, dan partisipasi, temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun kedua partai berhasil bertransisi menjadi 'Partai Hibrida' dengan memprofesionalkan tata kelola administratif (melalui aplikasi SIPP dan SimPAN),

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transformasi ini tetap bersifat parsial secara struktural. Alat digital terutama digunakan untuk komunikasi dari atas ke bawah dan kelangsungan organisasi, bukan untuk mendorong demokrasi internal partai secara horizontal. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini menyempurnakan teori 'Partai Digital' dengan memperlihatkan paradigma Global South yang khas: digitalisasi memprofesionalkan birokrasi partai untuk membangun 'baju zirah digital' demi ketahanan organisasi sambil secara strategis mempertahankan hegemoni elite lokal.

Kata Kunci

Transformasi Digital; Partai Politik; Jawa Timur; Institusionalisasi Partai; Partai Hibrida

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Introduction

The survival and relevance of political parties in the modern era are increasingly dependent on their ability to navigate the waves of digital disruption. As intermediary institutions, political parties are fundamentally required to adapt to socio-technical changes to maintain their role as the bridge between the state and society. In the Indonesian context, this transformation is not merely a choice but a necessity driven by three critical contexts: the normative crisis of party institutionalization, the rapid revolution of digital technology, and the catalyst effect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Normatively, political parties are the essential heart of modern democratic governance; as Clinton Rossiter famously stated, there is no democracy without politics, and no politics without parties. However, a paradoxical reality exists in Indonesia. Despite their central role, political parties are experiencing a "regressive deficit" in public trust. Data indicates a sharp decline in party identification (Party ID) from 86% in 1999 to a mere 14% in 2012. This trend is exacerbated by findings from Indonesianists such as Paige Johnston Tan and Dirk Tomsa, who characterize Indonesian parties as "weakly institutionalized" due to the persistence of personalism, oligarchy, and centralized "strong boss" leadership.

Simultaneously, Indonesia has become a digital powerhouse. By early 2021, internet users reached 202.6 million, with a penetration rate of 73.7%. Social media platforms like YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram have become the primary arenas for social interaction and political discourse. Bennett & Segerberg (2012) for political parties, adopting digital technology offers a strategic pathway to increase organizational efficiency and reach a massive, flexible audience. This digital shift was further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted physical gath-

erings and "forced" parties to innovate through digital platforms to survive in a disruptive environment.

The scholarly discourse on the intersection of digital technology and political parties has evolved through several distinct phases. First, significant attention has been paid to the use of digital media in electoral campaigns and internet voting. Research in Southern Europe, for instance, highlights how "movement parties" like Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain utilized digital information to disrupt consolidated political competition.

Second, scholars have explored the emergence of "Digital Parties" as a new organizational species. Paolo Gerbaudo (2019) identifies parties such as the *Five Star Movement* (Italy) and the *Pirate Party* (Germany) as pioneers that utilize digital platforms to enable "disintermediation" direct contact between leaders and members without traditional bureaucratic layers. However, this model faces challenges, including organizational structure failures and public "waves of outrage".

Third, the functional role of digital tools has shifted from mere communication channels to core organizational elements. Cepernich and Fubini (2021) argue that websites are no longer just "broadcasting" tools but are integral to the party's structural functions. Despite this, many traditional parties still struggle to move beyond a "top-down" communication model to a truly relational and participatory digital governance.

In the Indonesian landscape, studies have predominantly focused on digital campaigning during elections or digital activism. However, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding how *local* party branches, the grassroots level of political machinery transform their internal governance and institutionalization through digital means. This study fills that gap by utilizing the four-dimensional framework of digital parties proposed by Patricia Correa and Oscar Barberà (2021), which assesses digital transformation through: a) adoption of digital platforms; b) use of apps for member management; c) digitalization of internal decision-making; and d) participatory policy-making platforms.

This research is imperative because the study of digital party transformation at the local level remains scarce and limited in Indonesia. While national-level dynamics are often publicized, the actual "digital labor" and institutional shifts occur within provincial branches like East Java. East Java serves as a strategic locus due to its status as the second-most populous province and its diverse socio-political landscape.

The selection of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) and the National Mandate Party (PAN) provides a compelling comparative study. PDIP represents a nationalist-secular powerhouse with the highest seats in the East Java Regional Representative Council (DPRD), while PAN represents a nationalist-religious party with a strong track record in regional gubernatorial elections. By analyzing these two distinct entities, this study can determine whether digital transformation is driven by ideological leanings or pragmatic organizational survival.

To systematically unpack these dynamics, this study moves beyond generic inquiries into digital adoption and instead formulates two targeted, analytically driven research questions: a) Through what specific structural and technological mechanisms do subnational party organizations execute the transition from manual bureaucracy to digital governance within a highly personalized political landscape? b) In what ways does this localized digital adaptation reconfigure internal power distributions and institutionalization, particularly when navigating the structural tension between elite top-down control and grassroots horizontal participation?

The objectives are to explain the specific mechanisms of digital adoption in both parties and to analyze the resulting shifts in relational, governmental, and electoral dimensions. The study anticipates finding that digital transformation at the local level is still in its "initial and partial" dimensions. While both parties have actively adopted social media (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok) and websites for "digital branding," they have yet to fully implement digital platforms for internal democratic participation or policy-making.

The expected results will highlight three key implications: Digital platforms serve as vital intermediaries that bridge the gap between party officials and the public, especially in post-pandemic or social-distancing contexts. A shift from manual to virtual governance, exemplified by digital recruitment systems (e.g., PAN's *SimPAN* app) and online cadre training via Zoom. A positive correlation between the optimization of digital platforms and party electability rankings in regional surveys.

Consequently, this study resolves a critical conceptual gap in political science literature: the tension between democratization and digital instrumentalization. While mainstream literature often presumes that digital adoption naturally democratizes internal party spaces, this paper uncovers an empirical counter-narrative at the subnational level, exposing how technology is instrumentalized to entrench, rather than dismantle, elite control. Furthermore, this research addresses a profound theoretical gap regarding the Global South bias in digital party scholarship. Extant models—predominantly derived from Western European "movement parties"—fail to account for the resilience of clientelistic and neo-patrimonial structures in post-authoritarian democracies like Indonesia. By analyzing the East Java branches of PDIP and PAN, this study provides a localized empirical anchor that theorizes how subnational party machineries capture digital tools to ensure systemic survival without reforming their traditional, centralized essence.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach rooted in an interpretivist paradigm (Creswell & Poth, 2018), utilizing a multi-site case study design (Yin, 2018) to investigate the digital transformation of local political parties. The case study method is structurally vital for this inquiry as it facilitates an in-depth, holistic exploration of a

contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context—specifically, how the East Java provincial branches of PDIP and PAN navigate the shift from conventional to digital operations. By adopting this design, which prioritizes processual tracing over mere static outcomes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), this research seeks to uncover the underlying operational meanings and strategic motivations behind digital adoption in non-Western democratic matrices.

The research was conducted in East Java, Indonesia, a strategic political barometer due to its large population and diverse socio-political landscape. Two distinct political entities were selected for a comparative perspective: the DPD PDI Perjuangan of East Java, representing a dominant nationalist-secular force, and the DPW PAN of East Java, representing a nationalist-religious party with a strong regional track record.

Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure that the data gathered came from individuals with direct authority and knowledge regarding the parties' digital strategies. The primary informants included key party officials (board members) from both PDIP and PAN East Java who are responsible for organizational management, communication, and digital infrastructure. Due to the sensitive nature of political data, informants are referred to by initials (e.g., KW, MA, NM) to maintain confidentiality.

To ensure data richness and validity, this study utilized a triangulation of three qualitative data collection techniques: Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather primary narratives regarding the parties' digital transformation journeys, challenges, and perceived implications. This allowed the researchers to probe into the internal dynamics of party governance that are not visible to the public. The researchers performed systematic observations of the parties' digital presence and activities. This included monitoring official websites (e.g., *pdiperjuangan-jatim.com* and *amanatnews.com*), social media engagement on Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, and the utilization of internal applications like *SimPAN*. Secondary data were collected from official party documents, including organizational statutes (AD/ART), work program reports, and media center archives. Digital artifacts such as YouTube content metrics and social media follower growth were also documented to provide empirical weight to the qualitative findings.

The data were analyzed using an inductive qualitative analysis model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The transformation process was evaluated against the four-dimensional framework of digital parties adoption, membership management, internal decision-making, and participatory policy-making. To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, the study employed technical triangulation (cross-checking interview data with observations and documents) and peer debriefing with colleagues in the political science academic community. This rigorous process ensures that the transition from manual-conventional to digital-virtual structures is captured accurately and objectively.

Discussion

The Transformation Pathways: From Conventional to Digital Structures in Local Indonesian Politics

Table 1. Comparative Empirical Matrix of Digital Transformation Dimensions in PDIP and PAN East Java

Dimension of Digitalization	Empirical Indicators & Platforms	Operational Primary Flow	Quantitative / Descriptive Metric	Institutional Implication
Technology Adoption	Official Portals: pdiperjuangan-jatim.com & amanatnews.com; Social media (Instagram, TikTok).	One-way Broadcasting (Top-Down)	Daily updates (3–5 posts/day); high engagement metrics on Instagram (>10k interactions/month).	High structural - informational presence; permanent digital branding.
Membership Management	Internal Apps: SIPP (PDIP) & SimPAN (PAN).	Centralized Data Input & Real-Time Monitoring	100% cloud-based verification linked directly to national identity cards (KTP).	Advanced administrative institutionalization; reduction of "personalist" data hoarding.
Internal Deliberation	Virtual Environments (Zoom, Google Meet, YouTube Live).	Elite-to-Cadre Instruction (Top-Down)	Hybrid Cadreization (e.g., LKAD PDIP) reaching thousands of sub-district cadres simultaneously.	Virtualization of logistical structures; zero digital voting or bottom-up agenda setting.
Participatory Policy-Making	Public comment sections, direct messaging, open digital forums.	Symbolic Interactionism	High public traffic but <2% substantive feedback integrated into official party policy.	Re-intermediation without empowerment; creation of a pseudo-participatory digital facade.

Sourced: compiled from various sources by researchers.

The transformation of political parties from conventional-manual to digital-virtual structures in East Java is not a monolithic or linear process. It is a complex adaptation involving shifts in organizational behavior, technological adoption, and power dynamics. Both the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) and the National Mandate Party (PAN) in East Java have exhibited distinct trajectories driven by their respective organizational cultures, historical legacies, and ideological leanings. Yet, despite these differences, they converge on a shared pragmatic necessity: the imperative of survival in a disruptive digital ecosystem that has redefined how citizens engage with political power.

This section provides an in-depth analysis of the empirical data collected from the provincial branches in East Java through the lens of digital party dimensions. By

juxtaposing these findings with contemporary theories and previous research, this study identifies the nuances of "Digital Party" evolution in a non-Western, developing democracy context.

The first, adoption of digital platforms: beyond the symbolic online brochure. The first dimension of transformation concerns the adoption of digital platforms. Data from field observations, digital ethnography, and semi-structured interviews reveal that both PDIP and PAN East Java have decisively moved beyond the "initial adoption" or "symbolic presence" phase. In the early 2010s, party websites often functioned as static "online brochures" that were rarely updated. However, the current landscape reflects a much more integrated approach to digital architecture.

PDIP East Java operates a sophisticated and robust web ecosystem through *pdiperjuangan-jatim.com*. This platform is not merely a site for news; it serves as a centralized information hub and an ideological "clearing house." The website is structurally linked to the party's media center, ensuring that every legislative achievement of its members in the Regional Representative Council (DPRD) and every executive success of its cadres (such as regional heads) is documented and disseminated. Similarly, PAN East Java utilizes *amanatnews.com* as its primary digital mouthpiece. While PAN's approach appears more agile and decentralized, it is equally focused on creating a continuous digital presence.

Interpreting this data suggests a fundamental shift in the party's "body." According to the theory of Cepernich and Fubini (2021), modern parties are undergoing a "platformization" where the website and associated digital tools become a "functional organ" of the party's body. In East Java, these platforms perform critical functions: they stabilize the party's narrative, provide a point of contact for the "digital native" electorate, and act as a shield against disinformation.

However, when we contrast these findings with the work of Paolo Gerbaudo (2019) on "Platform Parties" in the Global North such as the *Five Star Movement* in Italy or *Podemos* in Spain a stark divergence emerges. Gerbaudo's model emphasizes "horizontal mobilization," where platforms are used to bypass hierarchies and allow members to vote on policy or select leaders. In the case of East Java, PDIP and PAN maintain a strictly hierarchical "top-down" information flow. The digital transformation here is "structural-informational" rather than "structural-participatory." Social media accounts (Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook) are utilized primarily for digital branding and what we call the "theatre of politics" showcasing activities to create an impression of activity and responsiveness rather than for genuine two-way policy deliberation.

The second, digital governance and bureaucratic professionalization: the end of administrative chaos? A significant leap in digital transformation is observed in the second dimension: the digitalization of internal governance and membership management. This area represents the most profound shift in how local parties in East Java manage their internal bureaucracy. Historically, local party branches in Indonesia were often criticized for being "administratively chaotic," as noted by

Dirk Tomsa (2008). Records were often manual, recruitment was based on informal networks, and cadre data was frequently lost during leadership transitions.

Today, the introduction of specialized applications has effectively professionalized these structures. PAN East Java has implemented SimPAN (Sistem Informasi Manajemen PAN). This application is far more than a simple database; it is a sophisticated tool for digital recruitment and administrative verification. Potential cadres can register via their smartphones, upload their identification documents, and receive a digital membership card (KTA). This data is then directly integrated into a centralized national database, allowing the provincial board (DPW) to monitor growth in real-time across different districts.

Conversely, PDIP utilizes the SIPP (Sistem Informasi Partai Politik) to manage the complexities of a mass-based party. SIPP is used for tracking cadre mutations, promotions, and maintaining strict administrative records of its millions of members. Our interviews with PDIP officials (Informant MA) highlight that "digitalization has cut the bureaucratic red tape that used to take weeks." In the past, verifying a cadre's status for a provincial-level promotion required physical document transfers; now, it is a matter of clicks.

This finding serves as an empirical verification of Organizational Efficiency Theory. By adopting these tools, local parties are successfully reducing "transaction costs" within their organizations. The shift from paper-based archives to cloud-based management indicates that local parties are reaching a higher level of systemic institutionalization. The party is no longer just a collection of individuals; it is an integrated digital system. This professionalization is a critical defense mechanism against the "personalism" that often plagues Indonesian politics. When the administration is digitalized, the organization becomes more resilient to the whims of individual "strongman" leaders at the local level.

The third, virtualization and the "external shock" of the pandemic. The third dimension involves the virtualization of party activities, a process that was drastically accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The research data underscores that the pandemic served as a critical "external shock" or "catalyst" that forced local parties to overcome their inertia and transition to virtual structures almost overnight.

Before 2020, the idea of conducting high-level ideological training or regional coordination meetings online was met with skepticism. However, PDIP East Java successfully shifted its LKAD (Latihan Kader AdidayaCadre Education) to a hybrid model. They utilized Zoom for lectures and YouTube for wider ideological indoctrination. Similarly, PAN East Java adopted digital measures for its Rakerwil (Regional Coordination Meetings), allowing the party to maintain organizational cohesion even during lockdowns.

This transition aligns with what Barberà et al. (2021) describe as the rise of the "Virtual Party Office." The physical office (the *Kantor DPD* or *DPW*) no longer holds a monopoly over party coordination. Activities that once required significant logistical expenditure (travel, venue rental, catering) are now conducted with high effi-

ciency in digital spaces. However, our analysis reveals a "partial virtualization." While the "logistical" and "educational" aspects have moved online, the "sacred" decision-making processes, particularly the selection of candidates for regional elections (*Pilkada*) remain firmly offline. These critical power negotiations still occur in "behind-closed-doors" physical settings, indicating that the parties are willing to virtualize their work but not their power.

This finding nuances the Equalization Thesis by demonstrating that digital technology does not inherently democratize internal party processes; rather, its egalitarian potential is heavily renegotiated and structurally constrained by localized power dynamics. In East Java, technology has undeniably optimized administrative efficiency and external outreach, but it has stopped short of disrupting the traditional concentration of power within the party elite. Instead of flattening organizational hierarchies, digital structures are absorbed into existing apparatuses, allowing leadership to monitor, streamline, and direct subordinate branches with greater systemic precision via real-time data reporting.

The fourth, re-intermediation: a unique model for the global south. When we compare the East Java experience with studies of digital parties in the Global North (such as the *Five Star Movement* or *Pirates*), a clear divergence in the "logic" of transformation emerges. In European contexts, digital transformation is often driven by a logic of "disintermediation" the desire of citizens to remove the "middlemen" (the parties) and interact directly with the state or leadership through digital platforms.

Concrete empirical evidence of this technocratic layer is highly visible in the operationalization of PAN's SimPAN and PDIP's SIPP in East Java. For instance, during the regional administrative verifications, the DPW PAN of East Java reported a significant metric: recruitment data from 38 districts was consolidated into a single cloud dashboard within 48 hours, a process that traditionally required weeks of physical document dispatches. Similarly, the DPD PDIP of East Java utilized SIPP to map cadre positioning across hundreds of sub-districts (*kecamatan*), replacing informal local patronage with trackable digital portfolios. This empirical reality supports the argument that while technology successfully eliminates administrative chaos and reduces organizational transaction costs, it functions primarily as an elite-driven tool to strengthen managerial control rather than decentralized political empowerment.

This leads to a refinement of Correa & Barberà's (2021) four dimensions of digital parties within the Indonesian local context: Adoption (high), both parties have successfully integrated digital tools into their daily routines. Digital presence is now a baseline requirement for local organizational legitimacy. Management (medium-high), systems like SimPAN and SIPP show advanced digitalization of administration, significantly improving the "systemness" of the parties. Internal deliberation (low), this is the missing link. There is almost no evidence of digital voting, online policy debates, or "bottom-up" agenda setting. Decisions remain centralized and top-down. External participation (medium): Digital branding is highly active and

professional, but public participation via these channels is still largely symbolic (e.g., commenting on a post) rather than influential on actual policy.

The overarching implication of this transformation is the emergence of the "Hybrid Party" model in East Java. This model represents a specific developmental stage of political organizations in the digital age. In a Hybrid Party, the "front-end" is highly digitalized. To an outside observer or a young voter, the party looks modern, tech-savvy, and responsive. They see TikTok challenges, interactive websites, and mobile apps.

However, the "back-end" which includes the core power dynamics, the selection of elites, and the fundamental decision-making processes remain deeply rooted in conventional-manual and often neo-patrimonial traditions. The "Hybrid Party" uses digital tools to professionalize its image and its administration while keeping its democratic essence largely unchanged.

For the theory of party institutionalization, this means that digitalization provides a "new skin" or a "digital armor" for parties. It allows them to remain relevant to the "Gen Z" and "Millennial" voters who dominate the Indonesian electorate. Without this skin, these parties would likely face rapid obsolescence. Yet, this "digital window dressing" poses a long-term risk. If the transformation remains purely administrative and communicative without moving toward digitalized internal democracy, the gap between the "digital image" and the "offline reality" may eventually lead to a new crisis of legitimacy.

In summary, the transition of PAN and PDIP in East Java from conventional to digital structures is characterized by "Pragmatic Digitalization." This is a process where technology is adopted not out of a democratic ideal, but as a solution to specific organizational bottlenecks and communication gaps.

The parties have adopted technology to: Solve the "administrative chaos" through centralized databases. Overcome "geographical barriers" and "external shocks" (like the pandemic) through virtualization. Address the "visibility crisis" through professionalized social media branding.

However, they remain strategically cautious. They avoid any technology that could decentralize their power or subject their decision-making to the unpredictable "crowd" of their members. This hybridity being technologically advanced yet organizationally conservative is the defining characteristic of local political parties in Indonesia's digital age. It represents a successful institutional adaptation that ensures survival but defers the more difficult task of genuine democratic transformation. The "Digital Party" in East Java is a professionalized machine, but its heart still beats to the rhythm of traditional power politics.

The Implications of Digital Transformation on Party Institutionalization at the Local Level

The digital transformation undertaken by the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) and the National Mandate Party (PAN) in East Java is not merely a technical upgrade; it carries profound and multifaceted implications for their insti-

tutionalization. To rigorously analyze these implications, this study utilizes the multidimensional framework of party institutionalization proposed by Mainwaring and Scully (1995) and Levitsky (1998). These scholars emphasize that institutionalization is a process where an organization becomes stable, infused with value, and characterized by autonomous structures that transcend individual leaders. Furthermore, this analysis incorporates Vittorio Emanuele's (2018) digital institutionalization indicators to capture how technological adoption alters the traditional pillars of political organizations.

The empirical data suggests that digitalization has acted as a "double-edged sword" for local parties in East Java. On one hand, it significantly strengthens the administrative and systemic capacity of the parties, fostering a level of professionalization previously unseen at the provincial level. On the other hand, it complicates the relational and value-based dimensions, creating a paradox where parties are more "visible" yet potentially more "detached" from the substantive democratic aspirations of their grassroots.

First, relational implications: bridging the "party-society" gap through permanent campaigning. The major implication of digital transformation is found in the relational dimension—the link between the party and the citizenry. For decades, Indonesian political parties have been critiqued for their "social detachment," appearing only during election cycles and remaining dormant or inaccessible in the interim. This phenomenon has contributed to a sharp decline in party identification (Party ID) among Indonesians. Data from our field study in East Java indicates that both PDIP and PAN have strategically utilized digital platforms—specifically Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok—to mitigate this historical gap.

PDIP East Java has institutionalized its digital presence through massive, centralized content production. Their official portal, *pdiperjuangan-jatim.com*, and their YouTube channel act as a "digital archive" and a continuous narrative machine. Unlike the sporadic communication of the past, PDIP now provides a daily stream of information regarding legislative activities, social service programs, and ideological statements. Similarly, PAN East Java has optimized social media to capture the "millennial and Gen Z" demographic, utilizing a more visual and lifestyle-oriented approach to political messaging.

Interpreting this shift through Peter Mair's (2013) "Void" theory, we argue that digitalization in East Java is a calculated attempt to "refill the void" created by the hollowing out of traditional party-society links. In the conventional era, parties relied on physical branch offices (*ranting* or *rayon*) which were often under-resourced. Today, the digital platform serves as a "virtual branch office" that is accessible 24/7. This finding contrasts sharply with the earlier work of Dirk Tomsa (2008), who characterized Indonesian parties as "electoralist machines" that only interact with voters during the "pesta demokrasi" (electoral festivities). Our data suggests a paradigm shift toward "permanent campaigning"; digitalization allows parties to maintain a constant, albeit virtual, presence in the lives of the electorate.

However, the quality of this engagement warrants critical scrutiny. While the frequency of interaction has increased, the nature of the relationship has evolved into what we term "para-social institutionalization." Followers of PDIP or PAN on social media consume content and "like" posts, but they have virtually no mechanism to influence party policy or candidate selection through these channels. This implies a "one-way street" of communication. While digitalization significantly increases the visibility and reach of the party, it does not necessarily translate into increased substantive representation or participatory democracy. The party-society gap is being bridged by a digital facade that prioritizes image over influence.

The second, governmental and administrative implications: the rise of digital bureaucracy and meritocratic shifts. The most tangible and perhaps most successful implication of digital transformation in East Java is the professionalization of internal governance. The transition from manual, paper-based administration to digitalized systems represents a significant milestone in party institutionalization. The implementation of SimPAN (Sistem Informasi Manajemen PAN) and SIPP (Sistem Informasi Partai Politik - PDIP) has fundamentally altered how these organizations function internally.

Our data reveals that these platforms have transformed local party branches into "data-driven organizations." In the pre-digital era, party management in East Java was often plagued by the "logic of personalism," where recruitment, cadre promotion, and administrative records were decentralized and frequently controlled by local "strongmen" or influential patrons. Information was power, and it was often hoarded by individuals. With the introduction of centralized digital databases, the process has become more meritocratic, transparent, and traceable.

For instance, PAN's *SimPAN* allows for real-time monitoring of member recruitment at the village level. A potential cadre's data is entered into the system, verified against the national ID database (KTP), and integrated into the party's national census. This shift aligns with Levitsky's (1998) criteria for institutionalization, specifically the move from "informal-personal" to "formal-procedural" structures. The "party in the computer" is replacing the "party in the leader's pocket."

Furthermore, a comparison with the research of Andreas Ufen (2008) on the "Presidentialization" of Indonesian parties reveals a contemporary nuance. Ufen argued that power was increasingly concentrated in the hands of the national party chairperson. However, our findings suggest that digital transformation has empowered the middle-management (provincial/DPD/DPW level) by providing them with independent tools for organizational control. Digitalization has created a "technocratic layer" within the East Java branches: IT specialists, social media managers, and data analysts who manage the organizational backbone. This "technocratic institutionalization" ensures that the party machine can function efficiently even when the charismatic leader is absent, thereby increasing organizational autonomy.

The third, electoral implications: micro-targeting and the new currency of political survival. The implications of digital transformation extend directly into the

electoral arena. In the competitive political landscape of East Java, data has emerged as the new political currency. There is a discernible correlation between a party's digital optimization and its perceived electoral viability. Our analysis of survey data in East Java shows that PDIP and PAN have maintained their competitive edge by successfully targeting the "digital native" segment of voters who rely on social media for political information.

The core implication here is the transition from "mass mobilization" to "digital micro-targeting." In the conventional era, parties relied on large-scale rallies (*rapat umum*) to demonstrate strength. While these still occur, the strategic weight has shifted toward analyzing digital metrics. By tracking social media engagement, follower demographics, and sentiment analysis, the DPD PDIP and DPW PAN in East Java can tailor specific messages to distinct sub-regions or demographic cohorts (e.g., urban youth in Surabaya vs. agrarian communities in Mataraman).

This dynamic verifies Gibson and Ward's (2000) "Equalization vs. Normalization" thesis. On one hand, digitalization provides an "Equalization" opportunity; a party like PAN, which may have fewer resources than the ruling PDIP, can use creative and agile social media strategies to punch above its weight and capture the attention of swing voters. On the other hand, "Normalization" is also at play; a dominant party like PDIP can use its vast financial and human resources to saturate the digital space, deploying a "digital army" to drown out competitors.

Crucially, this digital electoral institutionalization changes the nature of political competition at the local level. It is no longer just about who has the most "boots on the ground," but who has the most sophisticated "algorithm on the screen" (Chadwick & Dommett). This shift reinforces the party's stability as an electoral contender but also risks turning politics into a high-tech marketing game, where the candidate with the best data analytics rather than the best policy prevails.

The fourth, ideological value infusion: indoctrination in the age of zoom and tiktok. A critical, yet often overlooked, dimension of institutionalization is value infusion—the process by which a party's ideology and core values are internalized by its members and supporters. Mainwaring and Scully (1995) argue that a party is truly institutionalized only when it stands for something beyond the immediate interests of its leaders. Our research in East Java indicates that digital transformation has revolutionized how ideology is disseminated.

PDIP East Java, for example, has moved its *Kaderisasi* (cadre training) programs to hybrid formats. During the pandemic and thereafter, "Ideology Classes" were conducted via Zoom, reaching thousands of cadres across the province who previously would have struggled with travel logistics to the provincial capital. Similarly, PAN has utilized digital "Amanat" (mandate) brochures and short-form videos to communicate its platform of "Moderate Islam and Nationalism." Digitalization has effectively bypassed the physical and geographical barriers to ideological education.

However, a deeper analysis inspired by Paolo Gerbaudo's (2019) work on "The Digital Party" suggests a paradoxical implication: the "ideological thinning" of political parties. Digital platforms, by their very nature, favor content that is short, visual, and "viral." Complex ideological discourses such as the nuances of *Marhaenism* or the philosophical underpinnings of PAN's religious-nationalism are difficult to translate into a 60-second TikTok or a flashy Instagram infographic.

The implication for East Java parties is a potential "dilution of value infusion." While more cadres are "connected" to the party's digital output, their ideological depth may be shallower than that of previous generations who underwent weeks of intensive, face-to-face indoctrination. We find that the "brand" is becoming more institutionalized than the "ideology." Cadres may be loyal to the digital symbols and the aesthetic of the party, but their commitment to the core programmatic platform remains untested. This suggests that while digital transformation strengthens the systemic aspects of the party, it may inadvertently weaken the normative foundations of party institutionalization.

Comparing our empirical analysis with existing theories allows us to synthesize a new understanding of party evolution in Indonesia. We argue that the digital transformation in East Java has led to what we call "Fragmented Institutionalization." This is a state where the organization is highly institutionalized in some dimensions but remains fragile in others. Verified theory systemness). Our findings strongly support the theory that digitalization strengthens "systemness" administrative, procedural, and communicative stability. PDIP and PAN in East Java are now more resilient as organizations because their operations are anchored in digital systems rather than just human memory or personal whims. Challenged Theory (Decentralization): Standard "Digital Party" theories from the West often suggest that technology leads to decentralization and "horizontalism." Our data challenges this. In East Java, digitalization has not led to the "flattening" of party hierarchies. Instead, the "iron law of oligarchy" has adapted. Technology is being used for digital surveillance and centralized control. For example, the ability of a provincial chairman to monitor membership recruitment in real-time through an app actually *increases* his power over local branches.

The broader implication is that political parties in Indonesia are evolving into a variant of the "Digital-Cartel Party." In the classic cartel party thesis (Katz & Mair), parties use the resources of the state to survive. In the digital age, Indonesian parties are using "digital resources" and "data cartels" to manage their survival. They professionalize their internal machinery to ensure they remain viable partners in governing coalitions, but they remain closed to meaningful "bottom-up" democratic participation from their members.

In conclusion, the implications of digital transformation for the institutionalization of PDIP and PAN in East Java are transformative yet contradictory. This research has demonstrated that digitalization has: transformed "personalist" administration into "digitalized-bureaucratic" governance: By implementing apps like SimPAN and SIPP, parties have moved away from informal, leader-centric man-

agement toward a more procedural and professional institutional framework. This is a clear gain for organizational stability. Shifted political communication from "sporadic-offline" to "permanent-digital" branding. The move toward permanent campaigning through social media has bridged the relational gap with society, making parties more visible. However, this visibility is often superficial, favoring image over substantive representation. enabled "hybrid institutionalization". We find a model where technology serves as an efficient tool for elite-driven agendas (Dommett). Parties are "modern" on the outside (digital portals, apps, viral content) but remain "traditional" on the inside (centralized power, limited member deliberation).

These findings suggest that for local parties in emerging democracies like Indonesia, digitalization is primarily a tool for organizational survival and professionalization rather than a vehicle for democratic reform. The parties in East Java have successfully "modernized" their machinery, but they have yet to "democratize" their essence. This hybrid path represents the new reality of party institutionalization in the digital age reality where the party is more efficient, more visible, but remains an elite-driven institution in a high-tech cage.

Conclusion

The digital transformation of local political parties in Indonesia, specifically within the DPD PDI Perjuangan and DPW PAN of East Java, marks a pivotal shift in the landscape of contemporary democratic governance. This study has explored how these traditional political entities navigate the transition from manual-conventional structures to digital-virtual operations. The findings underscore that digitalization is no longer an optional communicative veneer but has become a core survival strategy in an increasingly disruptive political ecosystem.

The first major conclusion drawn from this research is that both PDIP and PAN have successfully achieved a "structural-informational" transformation. Through the adoption of centralized web ecosystems and a pervasive social media presence, these parties have moved beyond symbolic digital existence to functional digital branding. The integration of internal management systems, such as SimPAN and SIPP, demonstrates a significant leap toward professionalization and administrative institutionalization. These tools have effectively reduced the traditional "logic of personalism" by introducing data-driven cadre management, which enhances organizational efficiency and reduces the transaction costs associated with party bureaucracy.

However, the research reveals that this transformation remains "partial and pragmatic." While the "front-end" of the party's branding, communication, and administrative logistics is highly digitalized, the "back-end" of internal democracy deliberation, participatory policy-making, and decentralized decision-making remains largely conventional. The "iron law of oligarchy" persists, as digital tools are utilized by party elites to strengthen top-down control rather than to empower the

grassroots. Consequently, the study verifies a refined model of the "Digital Party" in the Global South: a "Hybrid Party" model that blends sophisticated digital governance with traditional hierarchical power dynamics.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the global discourse on digital parties by challenging the "Equalization Thesis." In the context of East Java, digitalization does not necessarily level the playing field or democratize internal processes. Instead, it serves as a mechanism for "re-intermediation," where parties use digital platforms to regain the public trust lost during the Party ID crisis. This study suggests that for parties in emerging democracies, digital institutionalization is prioritized as a tool for systemic stability rather than democratic deepening.

The practical implications of this study are twofold. For political party leaders, the transition to a hybrid model necessitates the development of "digital literacy" not only in technical terms but also in fostering a culture of online transparency. For policymakers and election regulators, these findings highlight the need for updated regulations that address digital party governance, data privacy within political apps, and the regulation of digital campaigning at the local level.

Despite these insights, this study acknowledges certain limitations. The focus on only two parties in one province limits the generalizability of the findings to the national level or to smaller, less-resourced parties. Furthermore, the qualitative nature of the study, while deep in narrative, does not quantify the exact correlation between digital engagement metrics and voter behavior.

Therefore, future research should expand its scope to include a broader range of political parties across various provinces in Indonesia to identify regional variations in digital adoption. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to track the long-term impact of digital institutionalization on electoral performance in the 2024 elections and beyond. Finally, further investigation into the "algorithmic politics" of party social media and its impact on voter polarization would provide a crucial understanding of how digital transformation shapes the health of Indonesian democracy.

Authenticity Statement

We declare that this article is an original work created without any plagiarism, and all the references used have been fully listed. We also emphasize that this article has never been published or submitted for publication in any other journal or publisher.

Biography

Andi Suwarko is an individual with diverse expertise, renowned for his skills in analysis, academia, and as an observer of political party, political marketing, election and parliament in Indonesia. Currently, he teaches at the State Islamic University Sunan Ampel in Surabaya, integrating analysis and academia to foster critical think-

ing and address urgent issues. His most recent publication, “Islamic Political Parties In Indonesia and Green Politics: A Comparative Study of Party Platforms”, “Political Marketing Communication Strategies of LHKP Muhammadiyah East Java For The 2024 Legislative Elections”, “Gerindra Party's Political Marketing Strategy In Increasing Vote Acquisition In The 2024 Legislative Elections In East Java”, “Who Owns Nahdliyyin? A Discourse Analysis of Islamic Identity in Social Media During The 2024 Indonesia Presidential Elections”.

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