

Navigating Democracy: The Role of Digital Media in Indonesia's Political Communication Landscape

SUKO WIDODO*

Universitas Airlangga, Indonesia

JOKHANAN KRISTİYONO

Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Komunikasi Almamater Wartawan Surabaya, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Since Indonesia's democratic transition in 1998, digital media has profoundly reshaped the country's political communication landscape. From elite-dominated television to grassroots-driven social platforms, the evolution of digital infrastructure has influenced how political messages are created, disseminated, and consumed. However, scholarly insights remain fragmented across scales and actors. This study aims to critically examine how digital media has transformed the logic of political communication in Indonesia across national and sub-national contexts between 2004 and 2024. Using a systematic literature review approach, 122 peer-reviewed articles were identified through searches in Scopus, Web of Science, and Garuda, using PRISMA 2020 protocols. Thematic and bibliometric analyses were conducted using NVivo and VOSviewer software to map key trends and actor dynamics. The findings indicate four dominant patterns: (1) the central role of television in national agenda-setting persists, but is increasingly contested by algorithm-driven social platforms; (2) significant variation exists at the local level, where WhatsApp and community radio play key roles; (3) new political actors including influencers and digital volunteers reshape campaign narratives; and (4) big-data tools enable hyper-targeted messaging, raising ethical concerns. These findings demonstrate how Indonesia's digital ecosystem mediates both centralised control and decentralised participation. The study contributes to debates on hybrid media systems and democratic deepening in emerging political contexts.

Keywords: *Big data, democratic transition, digital media, Indonesia, political communication.*

INTRODUCTION

Since the fall of Suharto's authoritarian regime in 1998, Indonesia has undergone a democratic transition that is often lauded as one of the most significant political transformations in Southeast Asia (Aspinall, 2010; Hadiz & Robison, 2013). Alongside institutional reforms such as the decentralisation of power and direct presidential elections, the Indonesian political landscape has witnessed the rapid expansion of digital technologies. Over the past two decades, the proliferation of the internet, mobile phones, and social media platforms has profoundly altered the ways in which political information is produced, disseminated, and contested (Lim, 2017; Nugroho, Siregar, & Laksmi, 2012).

These political and technological transformations have unfolded across distinct historical periods, each marked by different media regimes, communication logics, and dominant political actors. Table 1 summarises the key phases in Indonesia's political communication landscape from 1966 to the present.

*Corresponding author: suko.widodo@fisip.unair.ac.id

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Table 1: Historical phases in Indonesia's political communication landscape (1966–2024)

Period	Political Regime	Dominant Media	Communication Logic	Key Actors
1966–1998	New Order (Authoritarian)	State-controlled TV & press	Top-down propaganda	Military, Golkar
1999–2010	Reformasi (Democratic transition)	Commercial TV, newspapers	Open contestation, press freedom	Political parties, media moguls
2011–2024	Digital Democracy	Social media, online news	Participatory, algorithmic visibility	Influencers, activists, cyber troops

As Table 1 illustrates, Indonesia's political communication has evolved from a centralised, state-dominated structure to a decentralised and networked media ecology. However, existing research has rarely synthesised these transitions across time, space, and actor networks, leading to fragmented insights into how digital media shapes political discourse in the country. This study addresses that gap by systematically reviewing two decades of peer-reviewed research to identify dominant themes, key actors, and theoretical implications emerging from Indonesia's digital political landscape.

In a broader comparative perspective, Indonesia's experience aligns with global and regional trends in which digital media reshapes political participation, electoral strategy, and public discourse. Studies across Southeast Asia highlight the growing influence of platform algorithms, influencer-driven political messaging, and the rapid circulation of online misinformation in shaping political behaviour (Tapsell, 2020). Within this evolving ecosystem, Indonesia represents one of the most dynamic and complex cases due to its large population, high digital adoption rates, multi-party system, and decentralised governance structure. These characteristics create a diverse digital public sphere where national, provincial, and local political actors simultaneously negotiate visibility, legitimacy, and influence across interconnected online and offline arenas.

In this context, digital media has emerged as both a tool and a battleground in Indonesia's political communication. Political elites use Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, and YouTube to engage with constituents, promote policy agendas, and manage political image (Tapsell, 2015; Sastramidjaja & Hiariej, 2020). Meanwhile, grassroots actors civil society organisations, activists, influencers, and ordinary citizens use digital tools to challenge dominant narratives, mobilise support, and advocate for social and political change (Lim, 2017). Notably, online platforms such as WhatsApp and TikTok have played significant roles during electoral campaigns, particularly in shaping discourse, micro-targeting messages, and spreading (mis)information at unprecedented speed and scale (Nugroho, Siregar & Laksmi, 2012; Bradshaw, Bailey & Howard, 2021).

Despite this growing digital influence, Indonesia's political communication is shaped by a complex interaction between old and new media. Traditional mass media such as television and newspapers remain influential, especially in rural areas, while digital platforms increasingly dominate urban discourse. The result is a hybrid media system where legacy and digital platforms coexist, compete, and co evolve each influencing political agenda-setting, visibility of actors, and patterns of public opinion (Chadwick, 2017; Power & Warburton, 2020).

Although a growing number of studies have examined aspects of digital media in Indonesian politics, the existing body of literature remains fragmented. Many studies focus on single platforms, specific election cycles, or elite political actors, without connecting broader trends across time and governance levels (Lim, 2017; Jurriëns & Tapsell, 2017). Furthermore, the applicability of classical theories such as agenda-setting or the spiral of silence is often assumed rather than critically examined within the Indonesian context. Few studies explore

how these theories adapt or transform within a decentralised, culturally diverse, and algorithmically mediated political environment (Couldry & Hepp, 2018; Sinpeng, 2020).

This research addresses these gaps by conducting a systematic literature review of peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2004 and 2024. The study aims to map the evolving role of digital media in Indonesia's political communication landscape, focusing on how it reconfigures relationships between political actors, media institutions, and the public. By synthesising findings across national and subnational levels, this paper offers a comprehensive analysis of the key themes, actors, platforms, and communication strategies that characterise the digital political ecosystem in Indonesia.

In doing so, the study makes two key contributions. First, it provides an empirical synthesis of two decades of scholarship on digital political communication in Indonesia, highlighting dominant patterns and emerging trends. Second, it critically engages with classical communication theories in light of Indonesia's hybrid media ecology, offering insights for scholars of political communication in similarly dynamic, digitally networked democracies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Political Communication

Political communication in Indonesia has been influenced by a distinctive interaction of socio-political elements and the swift advancement of digital technologies. This part analyses the fundamental theoretical frameworks, emphasising their relevance to the Indonesian environment.

Political communication functions as the conduit between political leadership, policy determinations, and public dialogue. Recent empirical studies in Indonesia show that political communication serves as a crucial mediator in linking political leadership and public policy delivery. For example, official communication strategies that integrate social media, traditional media, and grassroots collaborations were employed to disseminate COVID-19 policies (Rahmawati et al., 2025). Similarly, during regional elections, social media platforms and community-based outreach have been used to present and frame policy proposals to voters (Slamet & Supriadi, 2023). These findings reaffirm that communication channels play a pivotal role in translating political decisions into public understanding, acceptance, and engagement.

Indonesian political figures utilise communication to assert authority and shape public perception. The nation's decentralised administration and active civil society have rendered political communication a crucial instrument for connecting local and national political forces. This complex situation necessitates comprehensive frameworks that consider the interplay among traditional media, social media, and grassroots involvement.

Key Theories in Political Communication

Table 2 presents the analytical framework of this study, summarising the core political communication theories, their contextual relevance in Indonesia, and how they inform the interpretation of empirical findings. These theories are further elaborated in the Results and Discussion section as thematic anchors.

Table 2: Analytical framework: Key theories and their application in the Indonesian digital political context

Theory	Core Concepts	Relevance in Indonesia	Empirical Application in This Study
Agenda-Setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972)	Media influence salience of issues	TV remains dominant in national campaigns; social media reshapes salience in urban discourse	Interprets national TV framing vs. viral TikTok campaigns during elections
Spiral of Silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974)	People stay silent when they perceive being in the minority	WhatsApp groups and digital tribes embolden “majority” voices in micro-communities	Used to analyse self-censorship in minority discourse on Facebook comments
Hybrid Media System (Chadwick, 2017)	Co-existence and mutual influence of old and new media	Candidates use both TV ads and meme warfare	Applied to analyse media convergence strategies by political actors
Networked Agenda-Setting (Guo & McCombs, 2011)	Users and media co-construct agenda online	Activist-driven hashtags compete with party-driven narratives	Used to read issue amplification via #ReformasiDikorupsi

Theories selected in Table 2 serve not only as conceptual anchors, but also as analytical lenses in interpreting the findings. In the Results and Discussion section, each theory will be revisited and evaluated against empirical patterns across media platforms, political actors, and communication flows.

Agenda-setting and the spiral of silence are crucial to understanding Indonesian political communication. The country's diversified media ecosystem, including national broadcasters and hyperlocal outlets, shows how agenda-setting shapes political discourse across areas. The spiral of silence shows that self-censorship about sensitive themes persists despite modern channels that allow new expression. In conclusion, these theories, anchored in communication studies, take on new meanings in Indonesia's democracy. The challenges of a decentralised political system, various cultural norms, and fast digital technology adoption in political discourse are emphasised.

Beyond agenda-setting, spiral of silence, and hybrid media systems, recent scholarship suggests the need to incorporate theories of platform governance, algorithmic public spheres, and data colonialism into analyses of political communication. Platform governance theory posits that private digital platforms increasingly function as regulatory actors that shape political participation through content moderation, recommendation systems, and data-driven advertising structures (Gillespie, 2018; Gorwa, 2019). Meanwhile, the concept of algorithmic public spheres highlights how automated curation influences political visibility, agenda construction, and information inequalities (Hintz et al., 2018). In the Indonesian context, such frameworks are crucial because platform-mediated political communication often intersects with localised patronage networks, informal digital volunteers, and micro-targeted persuasion. These newer theoretical approaches reveal gaps in classical models that assume mass-mediated environments and centralised information flows. Therefore, integrating these theories offers a more comprehensive lens for understanding Indonesia's evolving digital political landscape and guides future research directions.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a systematic literature review approach to analyse scholarly publications on digital media and political communication in Indonesia. A systematic review enables the identification, evaluation, and synthesis of relevant studies using transparent and replicable

procedures (Siddaway, Wood, & Hedges, 2019). The protocol follows the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines, ensuring methodological rigor and comprehensiveness (Page et al., 2021).

Data Sources and Search Strategy

The review was conducted using a multi-database strategy. Four major academic databases were selected based on relevance and indexing scope:

- Scopus;
- Web of Science (Core Collection);
- Garuda (Garba Rujukan Digital Indonesia); and
- Dimensions AI.

Boolean search strings were formulated to capture key concepts and local context. The following search string was adapted across databases:

("political communication" OR "komunikasi politik") AND ("digital media" OR "media digital" OR "social media" OR "media sosial") AND "Indonesia"

Searches were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between January 2004 and March 2024, in either English or Bahasa Indonesia. Conference papers, book chapters, opinion pieces, and duplicate entries were excluded.

Screening Process

The selection process followed four PRISMA stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Initial searches yielded 1,246 records, of which 317 duplicates were removed. Titles and abstracts of 929 records were screened for relevance, leading to full-text review of 287 articles. Based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, 122 articles were selected for final analysis. See Figure 1 presents the PRISMA flow diagram below.

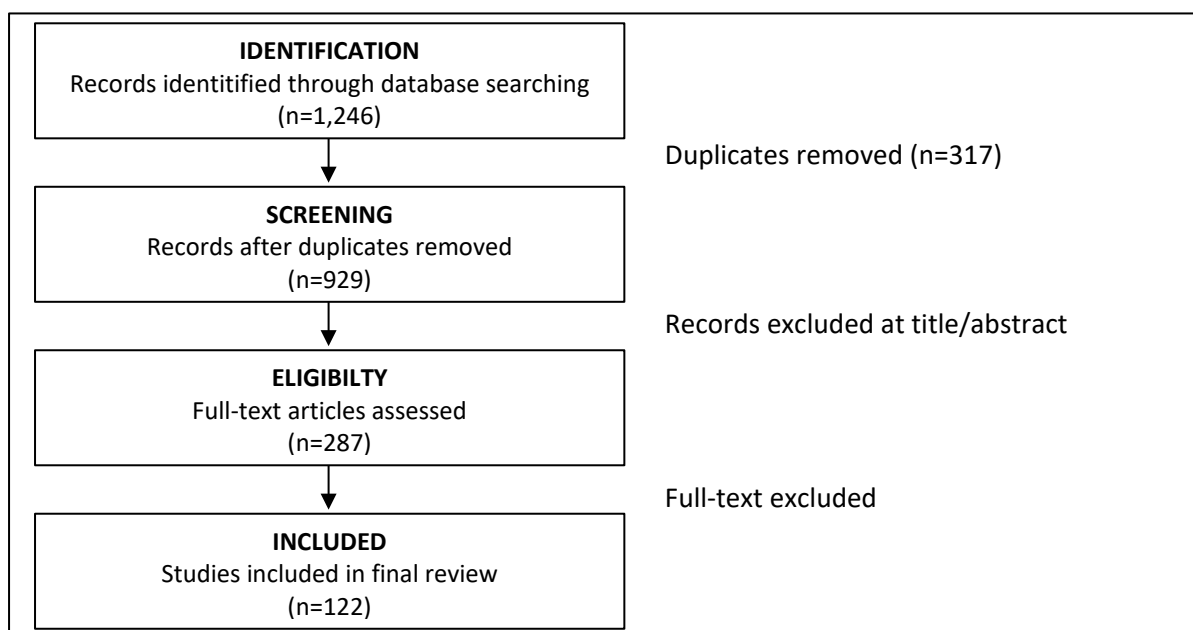


Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram of article selection process

Inclusion Criteria

1. Focused on Indonesia
2. Examines digital or online media in political communication contexts
3. Empirical or theoretical basis
4. Peer-reviewed journal publication

Exclusion Criteria

1. Non-political communication scope (e.g., commercial advertising, e-commerce)
2. Purely technical studies without socio-political interpretation
3. Non-peer-reviewed or grey literature

Data Analysis Tools and Procedures

To analyse the 122 articles, this study employed both bibliometric mapping and qualitative thematic coding:

1. VOSviewer 1.6.20 was used to visualise co-authorship patterns, keyword co-occurrence, and citation networks. This helped to identify dominant thematic clusters and influential works in the field (van Eck & Waltman, 2010).
2. NVivo 14 Plus was used for inductive thematic coding. A preliminary codebook was developed based on recurring themes (e.g., digital campaigning, influencer roles, misinformation, algorithmic governance), and refined through iterative coding cycles. Inter-coder reliability was tested with Cohen's Kappa ($\kappa = 0.82$), indicating high consistency.

The combined use of bibliometric and qualitative coding allowed for both macro-level trend analysis and micro-level conceptual exploration. This dual strategy enabled triangulation of findings, improving validity.

Research Questions

The review was guided by the following research questions:

1. How has digital media transformed political communication in Indonesia across national and subnational contexts?
2. What are the dominant themes, actors, and platforms that shape the contemporary landscape?
3. How do existing communication theories explain or fail to explain these developments in the Indonesian context?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from the systematic review of 122 peer-reviewed journal articles on digital political communication in Indonesia. The analysis reveals significant transformations in how political actors, media institutions, and citizens engage with one another across digital platforms. These transformations are shaped by a combination of national and subnational dynamics, actor interactions, and technological shifts.

The discussion is structured thematically, drawing on four core theoretical frameworks: agenda-setting, spiral of silence, hybrid media systems, and networked agenda-setting as outlined in Table 1. Each sub-section below focuses on a major dimension of Indonesia's political communication evolution: national-level media control, regional variations, emerging actors, and the role of big data and digital inequality.

By integrating these themes with relevant theoretical perspectives, the discussion aims to critically reflect on both the empirical patterns and their conceptual implications for the study of digital democracy in Indonesia and beyond (Widodo & Kristiyono, 2025).

Table 3: Thematic clusters in Indonesia's digital political communication (2004–2024)

Theme	Description	Number of Articles	Associated Theory
National media and elite agenda-setting	Role of TV and online news in shaping national discourse	28	Agenda-setting
Subnational/local political discourse	WhatsApp, local media in regional identity politics	21	Spiral of silence
Digital influencers and media hybridisation	Buzzer, relawan, and social media activists	34	Hybrid media system
Big data & targeted campaigning	Use of algorithmic tools in elections	17	Networked agenda-setting

Based on the systematic review of 122 peer-reviewed articles published between 2004 and 2024, four major thematic clusters were identified in Indonesia's digital political communication landscape. These clusters emerged from inductive coding and bibliometric mapping, reflecting both content focus and theoretical anchoring of the reviewed studies. Table 3 summarises these thematic domains, each of which forms the basis for the analytical sub-sections that follow.

National-Level Media Dynamics and Agenda-Setting

The review of selected studies reveals that national-level media in Indonesia especially television and major online news portals continues to exert significant influence on the public agenda, particularly during election cycles. This dominance aligns with the classical theory of agenda-setting, which asserts that mass media do not tell people what to think, but rather what to think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In the Indonesian context, this has been evident in how mainstream television networks such as Metro TV and TVOne have shaped issue salience by prioritising political controversies, elite debates, and electoral horse-race coverage (Jurriëns & Tapsell, 2017).

However, the rise of digital platforms especially Twitter (now X), YouTube, and TikTok has introduced competing spaces of agenda formation. Unlike centralised broadcast media, these platforms allow users to amplify issues organically through hashtags, viral videos, and influencer-driven narratives. Studies included in this review (e.g., Lim, 2017; Bradshaw, Bailey & Howard, 2021) demonstrate that during the 2019 and 2024 presidential elections, hashtag campaigns such as #2019GantiPresiden and #JokowiMenangTotal were able to shape national discourse, often independent from traditional media framing.

This shift reflects what Guo and McCombs (2011) termed networked agenda-setting a third level agenda-setting process where users, influencers, and media organisations co-construct the salience of political issues through online interactions. In Indonesia, these agenda-setting dynamics are hybrid and often conflictual: television may prioritise elite-framed policy narratives, while social media brings forward grassroots concerns, identity-based mobilisation, or even disinformation. One study (Sastramidjaja & Hiarij, 2020) found that YouTube channels aligned with religious or populist groups often gain more traction than official campaign content, particularly among younger or marginalised voters.

Despite the growing reach of digital platforms, their impact is uneven. Television remains the primary source of political information in rural and peri-urban areas due to infrastructure gaps and digital literacy barriers (Nugroho et al., 2012). Furthermore, ownership concentration in both legacy and digital media spaces reinforces oligarchic control over agenda-setting, as media conglomerates often have direct ties to political parties or presidential candidates.

These findings suggest that Indonesia's political communication at the national level operates within a hybrid media ecology (Chadwick, 2017), where traditional and digital media co-exist, compete, and reinforce one another. The agenda-setting power is no longer monopolised by the state or media elites, but is now negotiated across platforms, actors, and audiences. However, this hybridity also creates new vulnerabilities: fragmented information environments, polarised audiences, and strategic manipulation of trending issues by political cyber troops (Bradshaw & Howard, 2021).

Thus, while agenda-setting remains a useful lens to understand the Indonesian media landscape, its classical formulation must be expanded to account for digital affordances, algorithmic amplification, and participatory media practices. Future studies should explore how issue salience is not only constructed but also contested and reconfigured in real-time by decentralised digital publics.

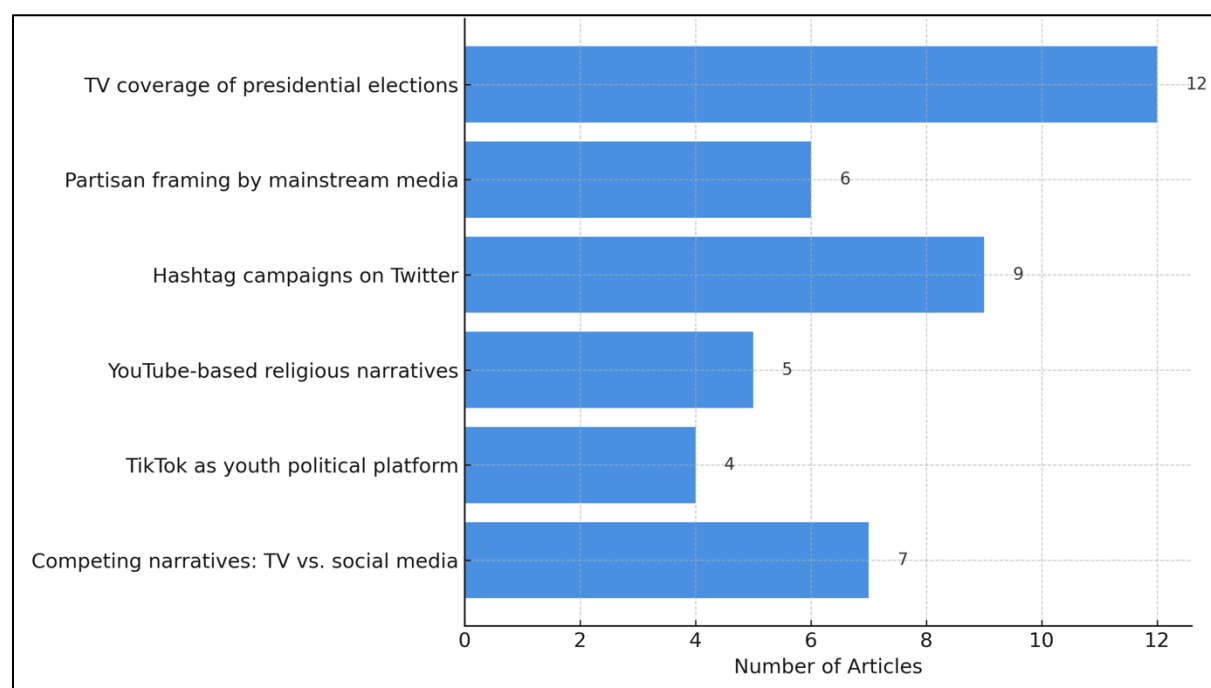


Figure 2: Key issues in national-level media agenda-setting (from 122 articles)

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of agenda-setting themes identified from 122 peer-reviewed articles. Television coverage of presidential elections remains the most discussed topic (n=12), followed by hashtag campaigns on Twitter (n=9) and competing narratives between television and social media (n=7). These findings reflect a hybrid media dynamic where traditional and digital platforms compete to influence issue salience at the national level.

Subnational Political Communication: Fragmentation and Local Voices

While national-level political discourse in Indonesia is largely shaped by television and major social media campaigns, the subnational landscape presents a more fragmented and diverse picture. The systematic review reveals that at the local level, political communication is heavily shaped by cultural identity, linguistic variation, and informal social networks, particularly through platforms such as WhatsApp, community radio, and local Facebook groups.

Several studies indicate that WhatsApp dominates political communication in rural and semi-urban areas, functioning both as a trusted information channel and a space for mobilisation. Unlike open platforms such as Twitter, WhatsApp's encrypted and closed-group structure fosters a sense of intimacy and trust, enabling politically sensitive discussions to unfold outside public visibility. These dynamics also contribute to the formation of echo chambers, where misinformation and polarising narratives circulate without verification. Lim (2017) observes that such algorithmic enclaves reinforce tribal nationalism and intensify group-based political identities in Indonesia. Similarly, Sastramidjaja and Hiariej (2020) note that coordinated cyber troop activities and targeted messaging often exploit closed digital spaces to influence opinion. Furthermore, Ida, Saud and Mashud (2020) emphasise that social media—including private messaging apps—plays a significant role in shaping political learning and participation, particularly among younger voters, illustrating how WhatsApp supports decentralised and highly personalised modes of political communication.

At the subnational level, local actors such as religious leaders, school teachers, and village officials play a disproportionately large role in shaping political opinions. These informal communicators often act as gatekeepers of political narratives, particularly in areas where digital literacy remains low. This dynamic contrasts with national-level media narratives and reflects a decentralised logic of persuasion. Studies from various regions highlight how ethnic and religious identities intersect with political mobilisation, frequently outside the purview of mainstream media. Ida, Saud and Mashud (2020), for instance, show how local youth and community structures rely on social media and interpersonal networks to circulate political messages, while Yilmaz and Barton (2021) demonstrate how religious and chauvinist populist groups mobilise support through culturally resonant symbols and online-offline networks.

These findings also complicate the applicability of the spiral of silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) within Indonesia. While the theory predicts self-censorship when individuals perceive themselves to be in the minority, several studies report that users in private WhatsApp groups feel emboldened to express controversial or polarising opinions, particularly in homogeneous religious or ethnic communities. This supports Lim's (2017) argument that algorithmic enclaves and culturally embedded micro-publics can invert the spiral, producing "loud minorities" within closed digital environments.

Fragmentation in subnational political communication is similarly visible in the media platforms used. Local community radio stations remain important sources of civic information in regions where internet connectivity is unstable, and traditional media logics often coexist with emerging digital practices (Tripambudi, 2019). These patterns reinforce the broader hybrid communication ecology of Indonesia's political system.

Therefore, political communication at the subnational level does not merely replicate national trends. It is filtered, reframed, and reinterpreted through local lenses. Understanding these localised dynamics is essential for any comprehensive analysis of Indonesia's digital democracy. More importantly, these dynamics point to the urgent need for context-sensitive communication policies and community-based media literacy interventions.

Figure 3 highlights the major themes emerging from studies on subnational political communication in Indonesia. The use of WhatsApp for political mobilisation is the most frequently discussed topic (n=11), followed by the influence of local gatekeepers (n=9), and the prevalence of echo chambers in rural digital environments (n=7). These findings underscore the fragmentation and localisation of political discourse outside national media narratives.

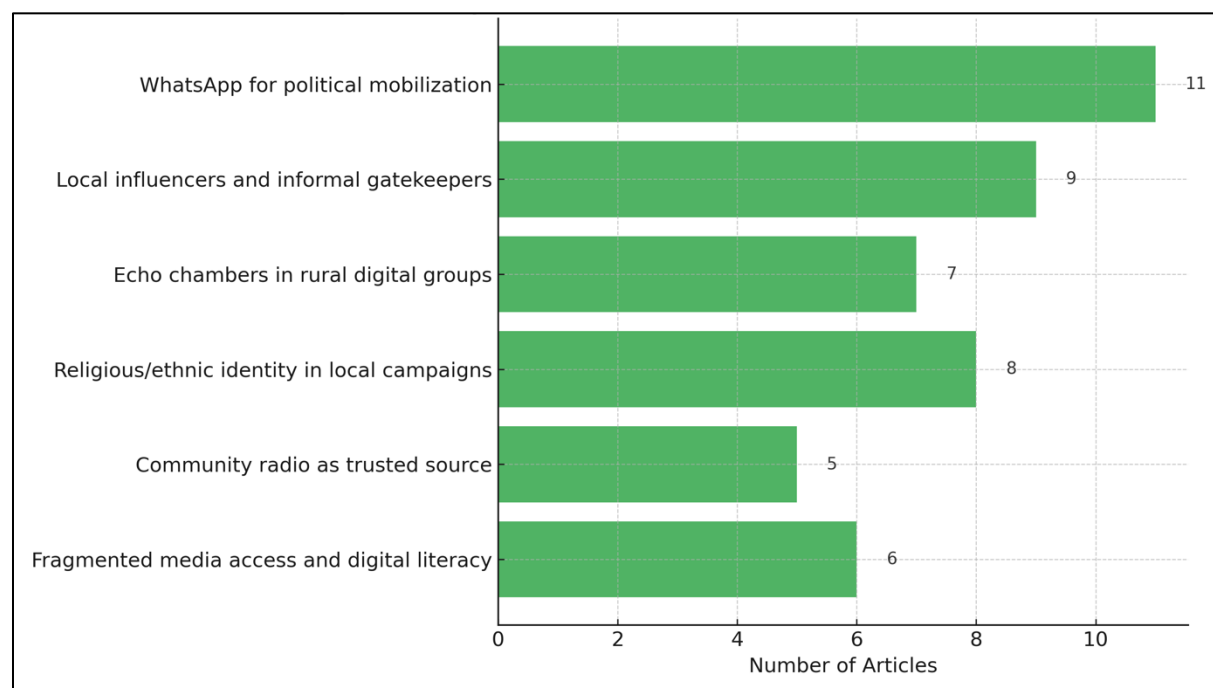


Figure 3: Key issues in subnational political communication (from 122 articles)

Hybrid Actors and Media Convergence

Indonesia's digital political communication landscape is increasingly characterised by the convergence of traditional and new media practices, facilitated by the emergence of hybrid actors who operate across both spheres. This convergence reflects what Chadwick (2017) theorises as a hybrid media system, where political actors adapt their strategies to leverage the strengths of multiple media forms mainstream news, television, and algorithmically driven platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram.

The systematic review identified 34 studies that discuss the role of non-traditional political actors such as social media influencers, digital volunteers, buzzers (cyber troops), and online opinion leaders as central figures in shaping political narratives. Unlike conventional politicians or media elites, these hybrid actors often possess high digital fluency and personal branding skills, enabling them to bypass editorial gatekeeping and directly mobilise public opinion (Tapsell, 2017; Sastramidjaja & Hiarij, 2020).

During the 2014 and 2019 elections, political campaigns increasingly incorporated celebrity endorsers, micro-influencers, and online communities into their digital outreach. These hybrid actors — combining entertainment, social media reach, and personalised branding — reflect a shift in campaigning strategies from traditional party-mediated communication to more direct engagement with voters. This shift illustrates how digital media blurred the boundaries between political elites and popular culture, enabling new forms of persuasion and mobilisation beyond conventional political machinery.

The convergence is not only seen in personnel, but also in message design and distribution. Political content is often cross-platform, with memes, short videos, and livestreams designed for repurposing across television broadcasts, YouTube channels, Instagram reels, and even TikTok dance challenges. This strategy blurs the line between formal and informal communication, between entertainment and ideology. Several studies highlight how political parties outsource content production to digital agencies or influencer networks, creating a commodified political aesthetic (Tapsell, 2017; Jurriëns & Tapsell, 2017).

While this hybridisation broadens participation, it also raises concerns about authenticity, manipulation, and ethical boundaries. Buzzers often operating anonymously or semi-anonymously have been reported to engage in coordinated amplification, disinformation campaigns, and online harassment of dissenting voices (Bradshaw, Bailey & Howard, 2021). In some cases, government-affiliated or oligarch-owned entities fund such actors to simulate grassroots support, a practice sometimes referred to as astroturfing.

This dynamic interaction between legacy institutions and emergent digital actors has transformed Indonesia's political communication into a fluid, responsive, and highly mediated space. However, as several scholars warn, the empowerment of hybrid actors does not necessarily translate into more democratic communication. Instead, it may reproduce existing power hierarchies under the guise of digital populism (Mietzner, 2020; Rakhmani & Saraswati, 2021).

Consequently, analysing hybrid actors requires going beyond surface-level metrics of engagement to understand who controls the infrastructure, who funds the messaging, and whose voices are amplified or suppressed. As media logic becomes increasingly platform-driven, future research must address the algorithmic governance and commercial interests that shape visibility and virality in Indonesia's hybrid political sphere.

Table 4: Themes in hybrid political communication actors (from 122 articles)

Theme	Number of Articles
Influencers in electoral campaigns	8
Buzzers and political cyber troops	7
Cross-platform political content (TV–TikTok)	6
Digital agencies and political branding	5
Online grassroots movements	4
Disinformation via hybrid actor networks	4

Table 4 presents key themes related to hybrid political actors in Indonesia's digital landscape. Influencers in electoral campaigns are the most studied (n=8), followed by buzzers and cyber troops (n=7), highlighting the strategic blending of informal digital figures with formal political communication structures.

Big Data Politics, Targeting, and Ethical Concerns

The integration of big data analytics into political communication in Indonesia represents a significant shift in electoral strategy, enabling highly targeted voter outreach. Analysis from the systematic review highlights that big data facilitates sophisticated voter segmentation, predictive modeling, and personalized messaging. These methods leverage demographic, behavioral, and psychographic profiles derived from citizens' online activities, significantly increasing campaign efficiency and effectiveness (Farkas & Bene, 2021).

Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube have become central to big-data-driven campaigns, notably during the 2019 and 2024 elections. Political candidates employ micro-targeting techniques to deliver personalized messages tailored to users' interactions, behaviors, and historical data. For instance, undecided voters are targeted with messages emphasizing local economic issues or cultural values, while committed supporters receive reinforcing messages (Evitha et al., 2023; Ahmad, 2024).

Further analysis of the reviewed empirical studies indicates that data-driven political communication practices in Indonesia are not uniform across regions or electoral cycles. Research on the 2024 elections shows a rise in AI-assisted sentiment analysis and automated voter segmentation used by major political parties, particularly in urban constituencies (Setiawan & Prananta, 2024). However, smaller parties and local candidates tend to rely on low-cost digital tools such as WhatsApp broadcasting groups, TikTok micro-influencers, and community-level digital volunteers. This asymmetry demonstrates how big data politics reinforces existing socio-economic and political hierarchies. Several studies also highlight that algorithmic amplification on TikTok and Instagram Reels increases emotionalised political content, further polarising audiences. These findings complement earlier works and strengthen the argument that Indonesia's digital campaign environment operates within a multi-layered ecosystem of advanced analytics, platform logics, and grassroots digital activism.

However, these capabilities raise significant ethical concerns regarding privacy, consent, and data ownership. Scholars warn about potential misuse of personal data and opaque data-driven campaign practices, often conducted without voters' explicit consent (Baudier et al., 2021; Jafar et al., 2021). Ethical implications intensify with targeted misinformation and emotional appeals, increasingly prevalent tactics in digital campaigns (Bradshaw, Bailey & Howard, 2021; Sastramidjaja & Hiariej, 2020).

Moreover, there are concerns about digital inequality. Big data-driven campaigns inherently favor urban areas with higher digital connectivity, exacerbating the political information divide between urban and rural voters. This creates uneven democratic participation and undermines equitable representation (Ida, Saud & Mashud, 2020; Purwanto, Zuiderwijk & Janssen, 2020). Effective regulation, transparency, and enhanced digital literacy are essential to mitigate these ethical issues and democratize information access.

To address these challenges, future research should focus on data governance mechanisms, accountability frameworks for political actors, and the socio-political impacts of algorithmic decision-making. Scholars recommend comprehensive regulations ensuring transparency, protecting privacy, and fostering equitable digital engagement across diverse populations (Baudier et al., 2021; Purwanto et al., 2020).

Ultimately, while big data analytics offers significant advantages for targeted political communication, ethical considerations and societal implications require rigorous scrutiny and responsible governance. Figure 4 identifies the dominant thematic issues related to big data politics in Indonesia. Micro-targeting and personalized campaigns are the most discussed topics (n=10), highlighting the strategic importance of data-driven electoral techniques. Ethical issues, particularly around privacy and consent (n=8), and the urban-rural digital divide (n=7), underline the critical need for responsible governance and inclusive digital policies.

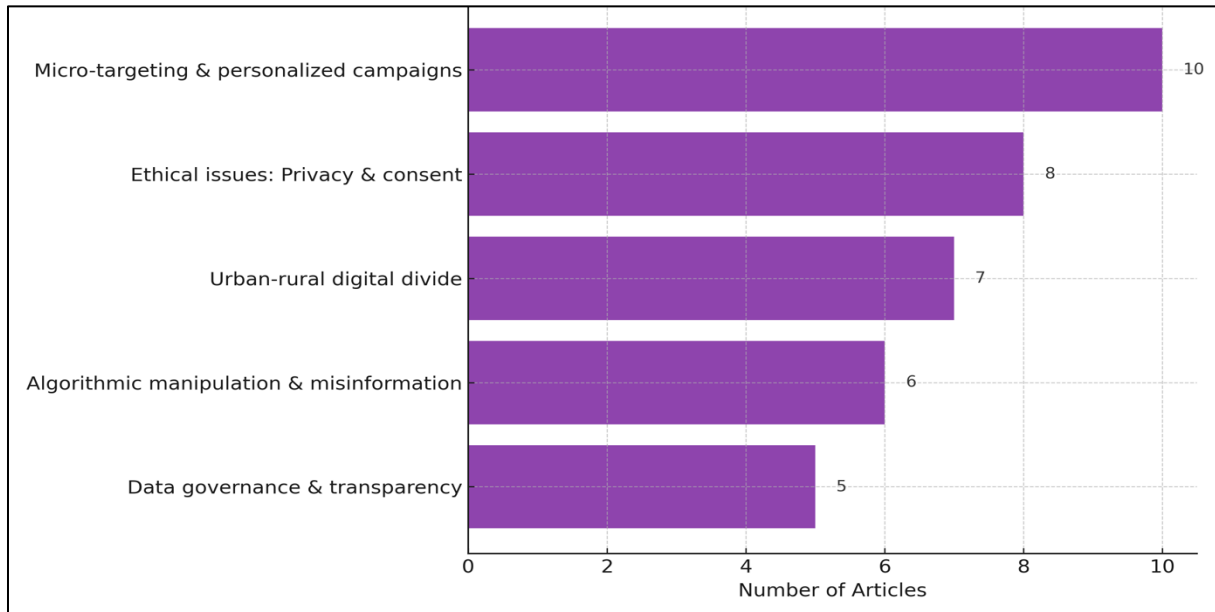


Figure 4: Themes in big data politics and ethical concerns (from 122 articles)

Theoretical Reflection and Future Research Agenda

Reflecting on the theoretical frameworks employed throughout this review, it is evident that classical communication theories such as agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974), and hybrid media systems (Chadwick, 2017) require significant adaptation to explain contemporary digital political communication in Indonesia effectively. While foundational, these theories must account for nuances introduced by digital technologies, particularly algorithms, datafication, and micro-targeting.

Hybrid media system theory effectively highlights the dynamic intersection of traditional and digital media. Yet, it must incorporate insights into algorithmic governance, influencer economies, and networked publics. Similarly, agenda-setting theory needs to address how digital platforms decentralize issue salience, fostering networked and participatory forms of agenda construction.

The spiral of silence theory must also reconsider digital spaces, particularly closed platforms like WhatsApp, which can enable rather than silence minority opinions within echo chambers or digital enclaves. Indonesian empirical evidence suggests complexities that challenge the theory's original predictions (Putra & Eriyanto, 2019).

Future research should prioritize exploring these theoretical tensions and adaptations more systematically. Proposed research agendas include:

1. In-depth ethnographic studies of digital communication practices within local communities.
2. Longitudinal analyses of how algorithmic recommendation systems shape political information exposure and voter behavior.
3. Evaluations of policy responses to digital political manipulation and misinformation.
4. Comparative studies across Southeast Asia to understand regional variations and commonalities in digital political communication practices.

These agendas will not only refine existing theoretical frameworks but also provide actionable insights to policymakers, activists, and media practitioners aiming to foster a healthier digital political environment.

CONCLUSION

This study systematically addresses the research question regarding the evolving role of digital media in Indonesia's political communication from 2004 to 2024. Findings demonstrate that digital media has transformed political communication by decentralizing agenda-setting, empowering hybrid actors, and enabling targeted electoral campaigns through big data analytics.

Specifically, the research identifies four critical dimensions: hybrid national media dynamics, fragmented subnational political discourse, the rise of hybrid actors, and ethical challenges associated with big data-driven campaigning. Each dimension highlights both democratic opportunities and significant threats.

Theoretically, this study emphasizes the need for classical communication theories to adapt to digital affordances, algorithmic interventions, and platform-specific practices. Practically, it advocates for stronger regulatory frameworks, transparency in digital campaigns, and targeted efforts to bridge digital divides.

Overall, digital media in Indonesia offers transformative democratic potential but simultaneously presents significant ethical and regulatory challenges. Future research must further interrogate these complexities to enhance theoretical understanding and practical governance of digital political communication.

Taken together, these findings reaffirm that digital media has reshaped political communication in Indonesia through complex interactions between technological affordances, platform governance, and evolving voter behaviours. They also demonstrate that the country now operates within a broader regional trend of data-driven, influencer-mediated political campaigning. The study's synthesis thus contributes not only to Indonesian political communication scholarship but also to theoretical debates on hybrid media systems and algorithmic public spheres in developing democracies. Future research should examine platform-specific dynamics, particularly the role of TikTok, AI-driven political persuasion, and cross-border disinformation flows in shaping democratic outcomes.

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BIODATA

Suko Widodo is a senior lecturer at Universitas Airlangga, Indonesia. Research interests include Political Communication, Media and Communication, and Social Media Communication Technology. Email: suko.widodo@fisip.unair.ac.id

Jokhanan Kristiyono is a lecturer in the Communication Science Study Program in Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Komunikasi – Almamater Wartawan Surabaya (Stikosa-AWS), Indonesia. The expertise in the fields of Visual Culture Communication and Digital Activities. Several studies he has conducted related to the topics of media, digital art, marketing communication, and visual culture. Email: jokhanan.k@stikosa-aws.ac.id

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