SEARCH Journal of Media and Communication Research
Online ISSN: 2672-7080
© SEARCH Journal 2026
SEARCH 18(5), 21–37
Special Issue: 5th International Conference on Media Studies Conference (ICMS25)
DOI: 10.58946/search-18.5.P2
https://fslmjournals.taylors.edu.my/search/

From fandom to citizenship: Digital identity formation and hybrid campaigning in Indonesia's 2024 Election

*Syahirul Alim
Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia
syahirul@ub.ac.id

Abdul Wahid
Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia

Sekar Arum Nuswantari
Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia

Fariza Yuniar Rakhmawati
Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia

Ima Hidayati Utami
Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia

Azahar Kasim
Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This study examines how digital political campaigning shapes youth engagement and political identity through a qualitative case study of the "Anies Bubble" campaign during Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election. Drawing on debates surrounding digital political communication, fandom politics, youth participation, and hybrid campaigning, the study investigated how meme aesthetics, influencer-mediated communication, peer circulation, and online-offline campaign practices influence how Generation Z and Millennial voters interpret and engage with electoral politics. Data were collected through three focus group discussions involving six to eight participants aged 17–30 and 12 semi-structured interviews with students, young professionals, activists, and community organisers who were familiar with or engaged in the campaign. The data were analysed through thematic analysis supported by NVivo 12. The findings show that Anies Bubble made politics appear more relatable, emotionally resonant, and socially shareable. Memes, visual storytelling, influencer amplification, and peer interaction translated formal political messages into participatory cultural expressions that encouraged discussion, content creation, symbolic identification, and a sense of collective belonging. However, the campaign's reliance on platform visibility, humour, and aestheticized communication also created risks of superficial engagement, unequal access, and limited policy understanding, particularly among less-connected and non-urban voters. The study concludes that fandom-based campaigning can broaden youth participation, but its democratic value depends on whether affective engagement is connected to substantive civic education, inclusive offline mobilisation, and sustained deliberative practice. By demonstrating how political fandom, digital identity formation, influencer credibility, peer validation, and hybrid mobilisation interact within a candidate-centred campaign, this study contributes to scholarship on youth political communication in developing democracies.

Keywords: ***Digital politics, youth political identity, fandom politics, Anies Bubble, hybrid campaigning***

* Corresponding author

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election marked an important stage in the country's democratic development, as digital technologies increasingly shaped how candidates communicated with voters, circulated political narratives, and mobilised support. The election involved three major candidates—Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, and Ganjar Pranowo—whose campaigns reflected different political legacies and communication styles. Within this competitive environment, campaigning shifted further from conventional rallies, canvassing, and mass media exposure towards targeted, interactive, and data-driven digital ecosystems (Ma et al., 2024; Tasenţe, 2021).

This transformation is especially significant in Indonesia, where mobile internet use, platform-based communication, and a large youth electorate have altered the conditions of political participation. Campaigns increasingly rely on user-centred communication that emphasises personalisation, interaction, and participation rather than party-centred messaging alone (Solito & Sorrentino, 2018). Social media has also opened new channels between political actors and citizens, although its democratic value depends on whether it promotes substantive issue-based communication instead of visibility alone (Beers, 2014).

The "Anies Bubble" campaign provides a relevant case for examining these changes. It combined fan-based political marketing, meme aesthetics, influencer amplification, and online–offline engagement to build emotional proximity between Anies Baswedan and young supporters. Instead of relying exclusively on formal persuasion, the campaign used humour, visual storytelling, remix culture, and community participation—practices familiar to young social media users. This strategy reflects the growing overlap between fandom and youth activism (Andini & Akhni, 2021; Wahyuningroem et al., 2023).

Changing patterns of political information consumption strengthen the relevance of this case. A 2022 Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) survey found that 59% of Indonesian voters aged 17–39 used social media as their primary source of political information, compared with 39.5% in 2018, while reliance on television declined from 41.3% to 32% (Fernandes et al., 2023). These changes indicate that youth-oriented campaigns must be digitally accessible and culturally compatible with young citizens' everyday media practices. This pattern is consistent with the concept of social media political information dependency, which explains how young people use social media to meet informational, orientational, social, and participatory needs (Tan & Firdaus, 2023).

Table 1. Sources of information for young Indonesian voters (2018 vs 2022)

Source of Information	2018 (%)	2022 (%)
Social media	39.5	59.0
Television	41.3	32.0
Online news	8.2	6.3
Newspaper	1.3	1.0
Radio	0.8	0.3
Podcast	-	0.3
More	1.1	0.3
No Answer/Unknown	7.7	0.9

Source: Fernandes et al. (2023)

Table 1 shows that social media has become the dominant political information source among young Indonesian voters. Political engagement is therefore increasingly shaped by platform interaction, peer circulation, and affective content (Hassim et al., 2020).

Indonesia's improving digital literacy further supports this shift. The national Digital Literacy Index increased from 3.46 in 2020 to 3.54 in 2022. During the same period, digital skills rose from 3.34 to 3.52, while digital culture increased from 3.55 to 3.84 (OpenGov Asia, 2023).

Table 2. Indonesia's Digital Literacy Index (2020–2022)

Component	2020	2021	2022
Digital Literacy Index	3.46	3.49	3.54
Digital Skills	3.34	3.44	3.52
Digital Ethics	3.72	3.53	3.68
Digital Safety	3.24	3.10	3.12
Digital Culture	3.55	3.90	3.84

Source: OpenGov Asia (2023)

Despite these advances, digital divide continues to restrict political information and participation among rural, low-income, and less-connected communities (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007; Ng et al., 2024).

This situation highlights the importance of hybrid campaigning. Digital mobilisation can generate visibility, emotional affiliation, and rapid circulation, but offline engagement remains necessary to reach digitally marginalised voters and sustain participation beyond platform-based interaction (Ohme, 2019; Sanders & Scanlon, 2021). Influencers and buzzers can also extend campaign reach and make political messages more relatable, but their involvement raises concerns about disinformation, declining trust, personality-based support, and temporary engagement (Dewantara et al., 2022; Wiredarme & Muttaqin, 2022).

These dynamics create an important democratic tension. Fan-based political communication can make politics more accessible and socially meaningful, yet engagement organised primarily around affect, personality, and platform visibility may weaken critical evaluation and encourage loyalty-based judgement (Banerjee, 2024). In Indonesia, digital media have become important platforms in which democratic ideals, ideological practices, and public deliberation are negotiated (Wahid et al., 2025). The key issue is therefore whether fandom-based engagement strengthens youth citizenship or produces only symbolic and short-term participation.

Although previous studies have examined social media campaigning, influencer communication, digital activism, and youth participation, limited empirical attention has been given to how fandom-based campaign practices operate in Indonesia's electoral context. Further research is needed to explain how meme aesthetics, influencer credibility, peer networks, digital inequality, and hybrid strategies interact in shaping youth political identity and democratic engagement.

This study addresses that gap by analysing the Anies Bubble campaign during Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election. It asks: (1) How did young voters interpret Anies Bubble as a form of digital political identity formation? (2) How did memes, influencers,

and peer networks shape engagement and perceived campaign credibility? (3) What limitations emerged from fandom-based and platform-dependent campaigning regarding inclusivity, deliberation, and sustainable citizenship?

By situating Anies Bubble within debates on digital political communication, youth participation, fandom politics, and hybrid mobilisation, this study contributes to understanding how media practices shape political belonging in a developing democracy. It argues that digital campaigning matters not only because it attracts attention, but also because it influences how young citizens understand, perform, and negotiate political identity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital political campaigning and youth engagement

Digital political campaigning has transformed electoral communication from a predominantly one-way model into a networked and participatory process. Contemporary campaigns increasingly depend on platform visibility, personalised content, peer circulation, and rapid audience feedback rather than rely exclusively on rallies, television, print media, and party-centred messaging.

For young citizens, social media functions as both an information source and a participatory arena. Political knowledge develops through deliberate information seeking, incidental exposure, and peer circulation (Jin, 2021; Lee & Kao, 2021; Poon, 2025). Tan and Firdaus (2023) described this as social media political information dependency, through which young people satisfy their informational, orientational, social, and participatory needs.

The democratic effects of digital campaigning remain ambivalent. Political content may influence attitudes towards candidates, parties, and democratic participation, particularly when messages address salient issues or identity concerns (Dong et al., 2022; Poon, 2025; Wang, 2024). However, social media may also expose young voters to misinformation, selective content, affective polarisation, and shallow participation. Its democratic value therefore depends on information quality, source credibility, openness of discussion, and whether online engagement contributes to informed civic action.

Fandom politics, meme culture, and affective political identity

Fandom provides an important framework for understanding youth-oriented political communication. In electoral campaigning, fandom involves emotional attachment, symbolic identification, collective enthusiasm, and participatory cultural practices in support of political figures or causes.

Fandom may convert affective attachment into political energy when supporters connect admiration for a public figure or symbolic narrative with broader civic goals (Biswas, 2022; Campus et al., 2024; Clue, 2023). Meme production, fan art, hashtag circulation, fundraising, and coordinated posting can create collective involvement, while rallies and community campaigning may extend affective attachment into offline participation (Borges et al., 2024; Suwantawit, 2024). Through shared symbols and narratives, supporters may identify not only as followers of a candidate, but also as members of a civic community associated with reform, justice, or generational change.

However, fandom-based politics also carries democratic risks. Emotional attachment may stimulate participation while shifting attention from policy evaluation towards personality-centred loyalty. When support is organised primarily through affect, charisma, or symbolic belonging, voters may become more vulnerable to celebrity-driven narratives, polarisation, and uncritical endorsement (Clue, 2023; Poon, 2025).

Meme culture is central to this process because it translates political messages into concise, humorous, and recognisable formats. Memes, images, short videos, and remixable content can circulate rapidly and become embedded in everyday online conversation. Visual memes function as narrative devices that simplify political claims, frame issues, and attach emotional meanings to candidates or events (Pang & Woo, 2022). They may lower the threshold for participation by making politics appear familiar and creative, but their emphasis on humour and virality can also reduce complex debates to fragmented messages. Meme culture may therefore encourage mobilisation while limiting policy understanding.

Influencer-mediated communication and peer networks

Influencers have become important intermediaries between political actors and young publics. Unlike formal campaign representatives, they often communicate through personal storytelling, humour, lifestyle content, and platform-specific language. Influencer credibility is commonly associated with authenticity, relatability, expertise, and alignment with youth concerns. When influencers are perceived as genuine and socially relevant, their messages may appear more trustworthy than formal party communication (Klüver, 2024; Lobo & Bhat, 2022). Badrul Hisham et al. (2025) described influencers as cultural intermediaries who mediate meaning, build communities, and shape identity within fan-based digital environments. Although their study concerns popular culture, the concept is relevant to electoral communication because it explains how influencers transform campaign messages into recognisable narratives.

Influencer communication can also create emotional proximity through parasocial interaction. Repeated exposure and affective storytelling may encourage audiences to feel personally connected to influencers and become more willing to share content, join discussions, or support offline activities. However, paid endorsements, unclear sponsorship, misinformation, and personality-driven persuasion may weaken political deliberation. Influencer credibility can attract attention, but it should not replace policy scrutiny.

Peer networks also shape youth engagement. Political information circulates through friendship groups, student networks, fan communities, and informal discussion spaces. According to Hassim et al. (2020), peer engagement on social networking sites can influence youth voting by making political discussion more socially connected. Yet peer communication may also generate conformity, echo chambers, and performative support when political preferences become tied to group identity. Peer networks therefore, both enable and constrain participation.

Digital citizenship, hybrid campaigning, and democratic inclusion

Digital citizenship involves evaluating political information, participating in respectful discussions, and connecting online expressions with civic action. Digital campaigns can expand access to information, but their democratic value depends on whether online

activity contributes to political learning, deliberation, and offline participation (Koren, 2023; Mirra et al., 2022).

Hybrid campaigning links digital visibility with offline engagement. Online platforms can extend reach, circulate narratives, and mobilise young voters rapidly, while community discussions, volunteer networks, rallies, and local outreach can deepen engagement and reach less-connected groups. Hybrid strategies therefore combine the scale of digital communication with the relational depth of face-to-face interaction.

This combination is particularly important in societies with unequal digital access. Digital-first campaigns may disproportionately benefit urban, educated, and highly connected voters while excluding citizens with limited infrastructure, skills, or platform access. Frey et al. (2024) contended that reducing digital inequality can narrow participation gaps, indicating that inclusion is democratic rather than merely a technical concern. Digital campaigns should therefore be evaluated not only by their visibility, but also by who can access, interpret, and act on their messages.

In Indonesia, digital media have become important spaces for political discourse and ideological negotiation. Beers (2014) demonstrated that social media has opened new channels between political actors and citizens, although its democratic contribution depends on substantive, issue-based communication. Wahid et al. (2025) similarly argued that Indonesia's digital political spheres are shaped by communicative discourses and ideological practices that influence democratic deliberation. The significance of digital campaigning therefore cannot be assessed solely through popularity or virality, but must also be judged by its contribution to informed, inclusive, and deliberative participation.

Research gap and analytical focus

Existing studies have examined digital participation, youth engagement, political fandom, meme culture, influencer communication, parasocial interaction, peer networks, and hybrid campaigning. However, these dimensions are often studied separately. Limited attention has been given to how they operate simultaneously within a candidate-centred electoral campaign in a developing democracy such as Indonesia.

Previous research shows that social media can expand political information and participation, fandom can mobilise affective attachment, memes can increase circulation, and influencers can enhance perceived authenticity. Less is known about how these mechanisms interact in shaping youth political identity, how digital enthusiasm is translated into offline engagement, and how platform inequality affects the inclusiveness and sustainability of participation. Existing research also provides limited explanation of the tension between emotional mobilisation and policy understanding.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the Anies Bubble campaign as an integrated case of digital political communication during Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election. It focuses on four interconnected dimensions: affective political identity, fan-based and meme-driven participation, influencer-mediated credibility, and hybrid online–offline engagement. This framework supports the analysis of how young voters interpret campaign messages, negotiate political belonging, participate in digital communities, and assess whether emotionally resonant communication can develop into sustained citizenship.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study to examine the strategies, meanings, and perceived effects of the "Anies Bubble" campaign during Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election. A qualitative design was appropriate because the study sought to understand how young voters interpreted and experienced the campaign within its social and cultural context. The case study approach enabled an in-depth examination of a bounded contemporary phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The case was bounded by the Anies Bubble campaign, the 2024 presidential election, and young voters who had encountered or engaged with the campaign.

Data were collected through focus group discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured interviews. FGDs were used to examine shared meanings, peer interactions, and areas of agreement or disagreement, while interviews provided more detailed individual accounts of political attitudes, digital media use, and perceptions of fan-based and influencer-mediated communication. These methods were selected because FGDs reveal how meanings develop through interactions, whereas interviews allow participants to discuss experiences that may not emerge fully in group settings (Morgan, 1997; Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Three FGDs were conducted, each involving six to eight participants aged 17–30. This group size allowed all participants to contribute while still generating diverse interactions (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Morgan, 1997). Participants included university students, young professionals, activists, and informal community organisers. They were recruited through purposive sampling based on their knowledge of, exposure to, or engagement with Anies Bubble. Purposive sampling was appropriate because the study required information-rich participants familiar with the case (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Twelve semi-structured interviews were also conducted with participants who had substantial engagement with the campaign or grassroots digital activism. Combining FGDs and interviews enabled comparison between collectively negotiated meanings and individual interpretations of political identity, campaign credibility, and digital participation.

All sessions were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. Field notes documented non-verbal cues, interactional dynamics, and contextual conditions. Trained moderators facilitated the FGDs in accessible settings, including community centres and university spaces. The interview guide was based on the research objectives and refined iteratively after the FGDs. Questions covered motivations for engaging with Anies Baswedan's campaign, perceptions of Anies Bubble, evaluations of its digital strategies, and the relationship between online participation and offline mobilisation.

Participants received information about the study's objectives, procedures, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and ethical safeguards before data collection. Written informed consent was obtained, and personal identifiers were removed or replaced with pseudonyms. The study received approval from the host institution's review board in accordance with institutional ethics procedures.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis supported by NVivo 12. Thematic analysis was chosen for its systematic and flexible approach to identifying and interpreting patterns across qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). NVivo 12 supported

transcript organisation, coding, excerpt retrieval, category comparison, and analytic memoing, while interpretation remained researcher-led.

The analysis followed six phases adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021): familiarisation with the transcripts and field notes, initial coding, grouping related codes into categories, developing candidate themes, reviewing themes against the dataset, and lastly, defining and naming the final themes. The final themes concerned political identity and belonging, meme-based expression, influencer-mediated credibility, platform limitations, and hybrid engagement.

Trustworthiness was strengthened through triangulation, member checking, retention of divergent accounts, and a reflexive journal documenting analytical decisions and potential bias.

The study did not seek statistical generalisation because participants were purposively selected for their familiarity with Anies Bubble. However, multiple data sources, transparent thematic procedures, triangulation, member checking, and reflexive documentation strengthened the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents findings from the focus group discussions (FGDs), semi-structured interviews, and field notes. Participants viewed Anies Bubble not merely as a promotional strategy, but as a youth-oriented political communication space where identity, emotion, humour, peer validation, and civic aspirations intersected. They described the campaign as relatable and socially shareable, while also raising concerns about superficial engagement, platform dependency, unequal access, and the limited conversion of online enthusiasm into sustained participation.

The thematic analysis generated five interrelated themes: youth political identity and peer belonging, meme culture and visual authenticity, influencer-mediated credibility, inclusivity and digital fragmentation, and hybrid campaigning. Together, these themes demonstrate that the campaign's appeal depended not only on its political messages, but also on the cultural forms, social relationships, and communication channels through which those messages circulated.

Youth political identity and peer belonging

Participants described Anies Bubble as a cultural space that made politics more accessible and connected to their everyday digital lives. Their interest in Anies was partly shaped by knowledge of his previous public leadership, including programmes such as JakLingko and the Jakarta International Stadium. However, these achievements became politically meaningful when translated into accessible digital narratives rather than technical policy language.

Andra, a 21-year-old student from Yogyakarta, stated:

> *Kalau lihat kampanye ini, rasanya kayak ada yang ngerti generasi kita. Nggak terlalu berat, tapi nyampe ke isu-isu yang kita pikirin.*
> [Looking at this campaign, it feels like someone actually understands our generation. It's not too heavy, yet it addresses the issues that are on our minds.]

The phrase *ngerti generasi kita* indicates that participants perceived the campaign as recognising young people's emotional and cultural language. They associated it with educational equity, inclusive leadership, urban accessibility, and political change, but encountered these issues mainly through personal stories, humour, visual symbols, and informal discussion.

Peer validation was also central. Seeing friends circulate campaign content made political participation feel more socially acceptable. Dina, a 23-year-old participant from Malang, explained:

> *Kalau teman share konten Anies, aku jadi ngerasa kayak ikut bagian dari gerakannya juga. Bukan cuma nontonin aja.*
> [When friends share content about Anies, I feel like I'm part of the movement too—not just watching from the sidelines.]

Sharing and commenting allowed participants to signal affiliation, affirm group membership, and feel part of a wider movement. This finding is consistent with evidence that peer interaction on social networking sites can make youth political participation more socially embedded (Hassim et al., 2020). It also supports Tan and Firdaus' (2023) argument that young citizens use social media to fulfil informational, orientational, social, and participatory needs.

Youth political identity is therefore shaped not only by issue agreement, but also by emotional recognition, shared aesthetics, and peer acceptance. Anies Bubble functioned as a space where participants could perform political belonging through familiar cultural practices rather than formal party affiliation.

Table 3. Dimensions of identity construction in the Anies Bubble campaign

Dimension	Expression in Anies Bubble
Digital Expression	Active engagement through memes, viral videos, Instagram stories, and Twitter/X threads
Cultural Relatability	Narratives about local justice, youth access to education, and economic equity
Political Socialisation	Sharing political opinions through digital forums, group discussions, and user-generated content
Influencer Amplification	Validation of political alignment by trusted youth icons and social media personalities
Emotional Connectivity	Narratives around hope, compassion, and change that evoke a sense of shared struggle
Challenges	Risk of exclusive discourse, shallow engagement, and visibility gaps across regions

Fan-like participation could make politics more engaging, but its democratic value depends on whether symbolic belonging developed into political understanding and sustained civic action.

Meme culture, visual authenticity, and fan-based engagement

Participants identified memes, short videos, symbolic gestures, and informal visual content as the campaign's most appealing elements. These formats were central to how they interpreted and circulated its political identity.

Examples included images of Anies walking with a cat, behind-the-scenes content, humorous edits, and the sign-language gesture for *perubahan* (change). Such content constructed a persona perceived as approachable and emotionally accessible. Raka, a 22-year-old student from Jakarta, shared:

> *Konten visualnya bikin Anies kelihatan kayak orang biasa, bukan elite yang jauh. Apalagi pas muncul meme yang lucu tapi tetap nyambung ke isu.*
> [The visual content makes Anies come across as an ordinary person, rather than a distant member of the elite—especially when funny memes appear that still tie back to the issues at hand.]

Visual content reduced the perceived distance between candidate and voter. Participants preferred political substance in culturally familiar formats, often describing memes as *ringan tapi nyampe* (light, but it gets the job done). This supports Pang and Woo's (2022) view of memes as devices that simplify political claims and attach emotional meaning.

Participants nevertheless recognised the risk of prioritising style over substance. Intan, a 25-year-old NGO volunteer from Bandung, cautioned:

> *Kadang jadi terlalu fokus gaya, bukan isi. Orang suka karena lucu, tapi nggak semua ngerti apa yang diperjuangkan.*
> [Sometimes the focus shifts too much to style rather than substance. People like it because it's funny, but not everyone understands what is being fought for.]

Humour and visual simplicity increased reach but did not necessarily deepen policy understanding. The qualities that made memes effective could also make aesthetic identity more memorable than political substance.

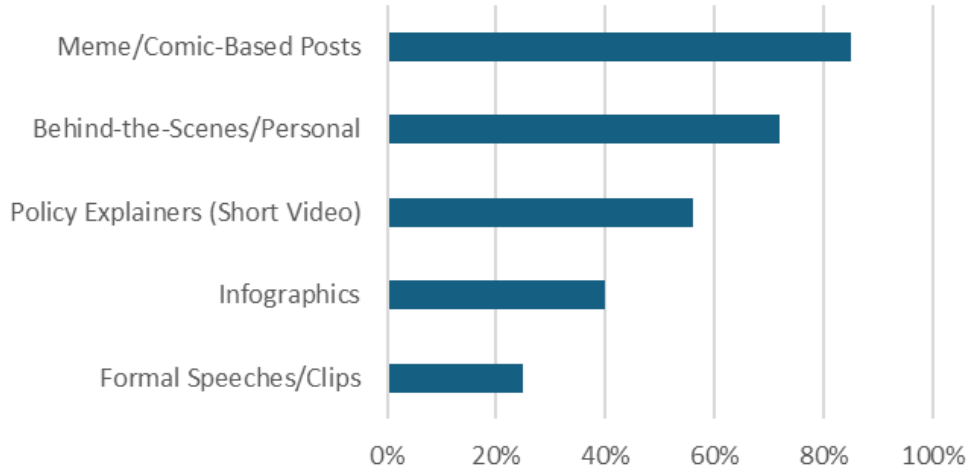

Figure 1. Most engaging content types among youth participants

Figure 1 presents the proportion of participants who identified each format as memorable, shareable, or persuasive; the figures are descriptive rather than statistically generalisable. Fan-based participation further strengthened supporters' sense of

ownership. Participants shared memes, produced fan art, designed merchandise, reposted slogans, and adapted campaign messages to their own online styles. Rizky, a 24-year-old designer from Surabaya, shared:

> *Aku ikut bikin desain kaos dan nyebarin stiker online. Jadi ngerasa kampanye ini kayak milik kita bareng.*
> [I took part in making t-shirt designs and distributing stickers online. So we feel like this campaign is ours together.]

Creative participation transformed supporters from audiences into co-producers of the campaign's symbolic identity. However, without civic education, policy clarity, and inclusive dialogue, such participation could remain symbolic rather than contribute to sustained democratic understanding.

Influencer credibility and traditional political outreach

Participants described influencers as more relatable and emotionally accessible than formal political figures. Influencers translated political issues into everyday language and communicated through platforms familiar to young voters, including TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and podcasts. Fira, a 21-year-old university student from Malang, explained:

> *Aku nggak terlalu ngerti politik, tapi kalau ngomong soal Anies, aku jadi dengerin. Soalnya dia ngomongnya kayak temen, bukan kayak pejabat.*
> [I don't really understand politics, but when it comes to Anies, I actually listen. That's because he speaks like a friend, not like an official.]

Influencer credibility is therefore based less on policy expertise than on informality, familiarity, and perceived closeness. Traditional political communication, by contrast, was often considered scripted and distant. The FGDs revealed that influencers helped reframe issues such as educational access, anti-corruption, climate justice, and inclusive governance into shareable narratives.

This finding is consistent with research showing that influencer credibility is shaped by authenticity, relatability, and cultural proximity (Klüver, 2024; Lobo & Bhat, 2022). It also supports the view of influencers as cultural intermediaries who translate institutional messages into forms that resonate with digital communities (Badrul Hisham et al., 2025). However, participants questioned the durability of influencer-led engagement. Dimas, a 25-year-old freelance editor from Makassar, noted:

> *Kalau dukungannya cuma karena fans sama orangnya, nanti bisa gampang luntur. Harusnya juga dikasih pemahaman soal isu, bukan cuma gaya dukungannya aja.*
> [If support is based solely on fandom for the individual, it can easily fade. There should also be an understanding of the issues involved, rather than just focusing on the style of support.]

This statement highlights the risk of fandom fatigue. If support depends mainly on admiration for an influencer or candidate, it may decline when trends or reputations

change. Thus. influencer communication can attract attention and reduce communicative distance, but it cannot replace policy explanation, accountability, or sustained civic learning.

Table 4. Comparison between influencer-based and traditional political outreach

Aspect	Influencer-Based Outreach	Traditional Political Outreach
Communication Style	Informal, emotional, visual, and platform-native	Formal, structured, and policy-oriented
Audience Engagement	High among youth, especially Gen Z and Millennials	Higher among older or institutionally engaged demographics
Perceived Authenticity	High, based on familiarity and relatability	Moderate to low, often seen as elite or distant
Issue Framing	Value-based and emotionally driven	Procedural, often abstract or generalised
Sustainability of Engagement	Vulnerable to trend shifts and individual reputation	Potentially more stable, but may lack youth appeal
Accessibility of Channels	TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and podcasts	Town halls, news media, and community forums

Table 4 indicates that influencers offer relatability, whereas traditional outreach provides greater policy depth and institutional continuity.

Inclusivity and digital fragmentation

Although participants generally viewed Anies Bubble as creative and effective among digitally active youth, they criticised its uneven reach. The campaign appeared strongest among urban, educated, and platform-literate voters, particularly those active on Twitter/X, Instagram, and TikTok. Participants questioned whether it reached young people outside major cities or those with limited digital access. Abrar stated:

> *Kalau hanya fokus Twitter, itu jadi bolong… TikTok harusnya juga lebih aktif, apalagi di luar Jakarta.*
> [If the focus is solely on Twitter, there will be gaps... You really need to be more active on TikTok as well, especially outside Jakarta.]

This comment points to the limits of platform concentration. Strong visibility on one platform does not ensure access among users of other platforms or digital cultures. Participants outside Jakarta also felt that the campaign's language and references were sometimes metropolitan-centred. Digital campaigns may therefore introduce civic inequality when visibility depends on algorithms, platform literacy, humour, and urban cultural knowledge. This finding supports research showing that digital inequality affects citizens' access to political information and participation (Frey et al., 2024).

Participants recommended broader use of TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp groups, community radio, offline youth forums, and local influencers, alongside multilingual and regionally sensitive content. The popularity of Anies Bubble among digitally fluent youth should not be treated as evidence of universal engagement. Campaign reach should therefore be assessed through audience diversity and accessibility, not only engagement metrics.

Hybrid campaigning and the sustainability of engagement

Participants appreciated the creativity of Anies Bubble but considered online enthusiasm insufficient for sustained participation. They expected digital engagement to be linked to local discussions, volunteer initiatives, youth forums, and community events. Hanif, a 24-year-old community organiser from Surabaya, explained:

> *Kontennya bagus dan bikin semangat, tapi nggak cukup kalau cuma di medsos. Harus ada kegiatan langsung supaya gerakannya nyata.*
> [The content is great and inspiring, but social media alone isn't enough. There need to be in-person activities to make the movement tangible.]

Participants distinguished digital visibility from civic substance. Viral content generated attention, but offline activities made the campaign more tangible, credible, and socially rooted. Thus, direct engagement is associated with dialogue, trust, and deeper political learning. Participants from non-metropolitan areas also regarded offline outreach as essential for inclusion. Aulia, a 23-year-old student from Pontianak, stated:

> *Kampanye digital banyak yang keren, tapi kalau nggak sampai ke kota kecil atau desa, ya dampaknya timpang.*
> [There are many great digital campaigns, but if they don't reach small towns or villages, the impact is uneven.]

Hybrid campaigning is therefore important not only for sustaining existing support, but also for reducing inequality in campaign access. This finding supports the argument that digital participation gains democratic value when it contributes to political learning, deliberation, and civic action (Koren, 2023; Mirra et al., 2022).

Table 5. Comparison of engagement modes

Mode	Strengths	Weaknesses	Ideal Use-Case
Online (Anies Bubble)	Rapid dissemination, viral potential, emotionally engaging, and low cost	Risk of superficiality, digital divide, and limited intergenerational access	Raising awareness, youth mobilisation, and identity construction
Offline (Desak Anies, Meetups)	High credibility, trust-building, and inclusive of non-digital communities	Logistically intensive, less scalable, and vulnerable to regional disparities	Community building, direct persuasion, and trust reinforcement
Hybrid Strategy	Combining reach with depth fosters loyalty and sustained engagement	Requires resource alignment, strategic consistency, and coordination complexity	Sustained movement-building, narrative coherence, and identity anchoring

Hybrid campaigning combines these strengths, although it requires strategic coordination, adequate resources, and local adaptation. Overall, the findings show that political identity, fandom, meme culture, influencer credibility, peer validation, digital inequality, and hybrid mobilisation operated interdependently within the Anies Bubble campaign. The campaign made politics more familiar and socially meaningful, but the transition from fandom to citizenship remained conditional on policy understanding, inclusive communication, critical discussion, and sustained online–offline participation.

CONCLUSION

This study found that Anies Bubble translated electoral politics into cultural forms familiar to young voters. Through memes, visual storytelling, influencer communication, peer circulation, and hybrid practices, it supported expressive and community-based political identity beyond formal institutional affiliation.

However, the transition from fandom to citizenship was neither automatic nor complete. The campaign's reliance on humour, visual culture, influencers, and platform visibility created risks of superficial participation, unequal access, and limited policy understanding. Its stronger appeal among urban and digitally fluent youth also risked excluding rural, less-connected, and non-platform-centred audiences. Affective engagement therefore contributes to democratic participation only when linked to policy clarity, civic learning, inclusive communication, and sustained offline involvement.

This study contributes by showing how political fandom, digital identity, influencer credibility, peer validation, platform inequality, and hybrid mobilisation interact within a candidate-centred campaign. It demonstrates that platform-native communication can make politics more accessible, but its democratic value depends on whether symbolic participation develops into informed, inclusive, and sustained civic engagement.

Practically, youth-oriented campaigns should use memes, influencers, and visual storytelling as entry points rather than substitutes for substantive communication. Digital strategies should be supported by accessible policy explanations, cross-platform outreach, regional adaptation, offline deliberation, and community participation.

The study is limited by its purposive sample and focus on a single electoral period. Future research should compare candidate-centred campaigns, examine platform and regional differences, and assess whether fandom-based engagement produces durable political participation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the generous support provided by the Dosen Berkarya Grant Program, Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia, under the 2025 joint research and publication grant scheme. This study also benefited from valuable collaboration and academic exchange with colleagues from the School of Multimedia Technology and Communication at Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), whose perspectives enriched the development of the research framework.

The authors further thank all FGD and interview participants for their candid contributions, as well as the institutional support from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Brawijaya, during the research process.

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Syahirul Alim

is a lecturer in the Department of Communication Science, Universitas Brawijaya. He holds degrees in communication science, sociology of communication, and disaster management. His research interests include digital communication, political public relations, policy communication, and disaster and environmental communication.

Abdul Wahid

is a lecturer in the Department of Communication Science, Universitas Brawijaya. He earned his bachelor's degree from Universitas Brawijaya and his master's degree in communication science from Universitas Gadjah Mada. His teaching areas include cultural studies, semiotics, political communication, journalism, and media text analysis.

Sekar Arum Nuswantari

is a lecturer in the Department of Communication Science, Universitas Brawijaya. She earned her bachelor's degree from Universitas Brawijaya and her master's degree in communication science from Universitas Gadjah Mada. Her research interests include public relations, marketing communication, and disaster communication.

Fariza Yuniar Rakhmawati

is a faculty member in the Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Brawijaya. Her research focuses on family communication, interpersonal communication, and new media.

Ima Hidayati Utami

is a faculty member in the Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Brawijaya. She holds a doctorate in communication science from Universitas Padjadjaran, Indonesia. Her scholarly interests include health communication and social marketing.

Azahar Kasim

is a senior lecturer at the School of Multimedia Technology and Communication, College of Arts and Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia. He specialises in communication and media technology, particularly journalism, and has extensive experience in both industry and academia.