

The Utilization of Social Media by Presidential Candidates in The Formation of Political Image: A Study of Instagram Content During The 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election Campaign

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Keywords	Abstract
political communication, Instagram; digital campaign; presidential election; framing strategy	The 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election marked a significant shift in political communication strategies, with Instagram emerging as a key platform for image building and message dissemination. This study aims to analyze how the three presidential candidates—Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, and Ganjar Pranowo—utilized Instagram during the critical campaign period (D-7 to D+7 of voting day) to construct political images and influence voter perception. Using a quantitative content analysis approach, 126 Instagram posts were examined based on variables such as content type, messaging themes, visual storytelling, and interactivity. The findings reveal that video content dominated (58.7%), with Anies being the most active user, emphasizing personal narratives and public engagement. Ganjar focused on national issues, while Prabowo highlighted symbolic leadership. Key themes included candidate character (60.3%), voter support (61.9%), and vote mobilization (48.4%). However, interactivity features like polls and live sessions were underutilized. The study highlights the strategic role of digital storytelling and platform affordances in shaping political personas, supporting theories of framing and self-presentation. It suggests that successful political campaigns require not only compelling content but also platform literacy and two-way engagement strategies. The research contributes to the evolving discourse on digital democracy and offers practical insights for political actors navigating social media ecosystems.

INTRODUCTION

The technology and communications industry has grown tremendously in the past decade, with digital platforms such as Instagram becoming the center of interaction between public figures and the public. Social media platforms like Instagram are one of the fastest-growing social networking sites globally, and have made public figures more accessible, allowing for direct and immediate interaction with their followers through posts, (Cheng et al., 2019; Jackson & Luchner, 2018; Maclean et al., 2021; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016; Villanueva-Moya et al., 2023) *likes*, and direct messages. This phenomenon is increasingly relevant in the context of modern democracy, especially in the electoral process. In Indonesia, the 2024 Presidential Election (Pilpres) is an important momentum for the use of social media in shaping political image. Instagram is used to convey populist messages, by placing society as the main axis of discourse, and making it a battleground for campaigns. (Campbell et al., 2023; Monge et al., 2022; Zeren & Gökdağlı, 2020) (Santos & Cuquerella, 2024)

Politicians use Instagram to present themselves visually by incorporating cultural markers and strategic visual narratives to convey their political values and attitudes towards policy issues. It shows how political identities can be simulated and presented through these platforms. This digital platform offers a wide (Navarro et al., 2023) *affordance*, ranging from *visual storytelling*, *real-time engagement*, to *highly effective microtargeting capabilities* to reach certain groups of voters.

Quoted from DataReportal, in January 2025 Indonesia will be home to 103 million Instagram social media user identities. This figure confirms that Instagram social media is no longer just a complementary channel, but a crucial element in political campaign strategy. Instagram is very popular among the young demographic in Indonesia. Studies show that young people prefer Instagram over other platforms like Facebook because of its narrative-based features and visual appeal. Instagram is also used by young voters for political engagement. The platform facilitates political discourse and participation, which is essential for the democratic process. (Kemp, 2025) (Hajad et al., 2024; Rahmat et al., 2023) (Hajad et al., 2024; Saud & Margono, 2021)

Previous studies (Grall et al., 2021; Stubb, 2018) have emphasized the power of personalization and emotional narratives in enhancing audience engagement; however, little research has empirically compared how presidential candidates in Indonesia utilize Instagram's affordances and framing strategies during a critical campaign phase. This research addresses that gap by conducting a content analysis of the Instagram posts of Anies Baswedan, Ganjar Pranowo, and Prabowo Subianto from D-7 to D+7 of the 2024 presidential election. The study aims to examine how each candidate constructs their digital persona, the thematic focus of their messaging, and the extent to which Instagram features are optimized for political engagement. The novelty lies in combining media affordance theory, framing, and self-presentation theory to analyze political image construction in real-time electoral contexts. The results not only contribute theoretically to digital political communication studies but also offer practical insights for campaign strategists on optimizing social media engagement during electoral cycles.

Research Focus

This research focuses on analyzing the Instagram content of three presidential candidates in the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election: Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, and Ganjar Pranowo. The observation period is set from D-7 to D+7 voting, taking into consideration that this time span is a critical phase in the election cycle. Research Cunill et al. (2018) shows that online political activity tends to increase during election campaigns. Higher consumption of news and online information during the campaign period is significant, in the Indonesian context, this includes public debates, quiet days, and post-voting. This activity increases the individual's likelihood of choosing. This time span also allows researchers to observe the evolution of political narratives before and after election results are announced.

Research Objectives and Contributions

This research has two objectives: first, to identify political communication strategies used by presidential candidates in shaping their self-image; Second, to make an empirical contribution

to the literature on digital reputation management in the political realm. From a practical perspective, the results of the research can be a reference for political parties, survey institutions, and academics in designing adaptive and inclusive communication strategies.

Social Media as an Innovation in the Communication Industry

Social media is a disruptive innovation in the communications industry, which allows for two-way interaction between individuals and institutions. This allows stakeholders to engage directly with the organization and each other. Digital platforms have replaced traditional top-down communication models with a more participatory (Raman, 2018) *bottom-up* approach. In a political context, this has a huge impact on the way politicians convey messages and build relationships with voters. (Wachanga, 2011)

Instagram, as one of the largest visual platforms, occupies a strategic position in the social media ecosystem. The focus on visual content makes it an effective tool for storytelling and marketing. This visual emphasis allows brands to promote their products and services creatively and innovatively, increasing audience engagement and brand visibility. The ability to combine text, images, videos, and interactive features makes it an ideal tool for (Harry & Muthusamy, 2024; Puertas-Hidalgo et al., 2023; Salunke & Jain, 2022) personal and emotional political storytelling. Features like *Stories*, *Reels*, and *Polls* allow politicians to greet voters in *real-time*, even on a mass scale.

Framing and Digital Image Formation

One of the relevant theoretical frameworks in understanding the strategy of conveying political messages on social media is the framing concept put forward by Robert M. Entman. In his paper entitled Entman (1993) *Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm*, Entman explains that framing is a selective process in the presentation of information, in which communication actors determine certain elements of reality to be emphasized or prioritized to the public. This process is very important in shaping the audience's perception, interpretation, and evaluation of an issue or figure.

According to Entman, there are four main functions of framing:

1. Problem *definition*: Identify what is the main problem.
2. Causal *interpretation*: Establishes who or what is responsible for the problem.
3. Moral evaluation: Provides an assessment of the parties involved, either as victims, perpetrators, or third parties.
4. Treatment recommendation: Offer actions or policies to address the problem.

In the context of this study, framing was used to analyze how the three presidential candidates presented information through their Instagram content. Specifically, the focus of the analysis includes: (1) Does the content highlight the personality and character of the presidential candidate? (2) Is the focus on national issues and public policy? (3) Or does it emphasize popular support and popularity claims?

In addition, the use of *hashtags*, *location tags*, and *emojis*, is a strong indicator in identifying how framing is done digitally. For example, the use of *hashtags* such as #IndonesiaMaju or #PerubahanYangDitunggu not only serves as a promotional tool, but also as a means of *framing* to put candidates in positions as agents of change or figures who care about the future of the nation.

In line with the *framing approach*, the self-presentation theory developed by Erving in his work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* Goffman (1959) is also an important foundation in understanding the dynamics of self-image formation in the digital space. Goffman posits that individuals actively "play a role" in social interaction situations, with the goal of creating a certain impression on others. This concept is often referred to as social dramaturgy, how social life is likened to a theatrical stage, and each individual is an actor who tries to control the way he or she is perceived by the audience.

In the modern world of politics, social media has become a new stage where politicians play their role. Instagram content, for example, is a form of performance for presidential candidates to present themselves according to the ideal identity they want to project to the public. Whether it's through short documentary videos, family photos, to posts that show closeness to ordinary citizens, all of them are an effort to present the desired political persona, whether it's as a reformist figure, a strong leader, or a humanist and caring figure.

Goffman said that individuals use *the front stage* and *back stage* in self-presentation. In the digital age, Instagram and other social media platforms are becoming *the main front stage* for politicians, where they showcase the best version of themselves. Meanwhile, more spontaneous or *behind-the-scenes content* can be seen as a backstage representation, although in many cases, even the moment is planned for imagery purposes.

Visual Dynamics and Interactivity

Visual content, especially high-quality videos and photos, has a higher engagement rate than regular text. For example, image posts have been shown to outperform text-based posts in engagement metrics such as likes and comments. Short videos (Reels) are the most viral form of content, especially among the younger generation. Interactive features such as polls, Q&A, and comment columns are also effective means of building closeness with your audience. (Li & Xie, 2020; Madlberger & Jizdny, 2021)

In the context of this study, visual storytelling is used as the main parameter to measure the intensity and creativity of political communication. Videos that show *behind-the-scenes moments*, direct dialogue with volunteers, or vision-mission presentations are indicators of visual strategies used by presidential candidates.

The Influence of Social Media on Voter Perception

The use of social media for political information is linked to voter choice, with younger voters showing a significant reliance on these platforms to make voting decisions. Platforms like Instagram are a place to shape public opinion in (Mannonen & Skippari, 2022; Patel et al., 2020) *real-time*, thus requiring politicians to have a responsive and adaptive communication strategy.

In addition, the phenomenon of "*algorithmic visibility*" shows that content that gets a lot of likes, shares, and comments will more easily reach a wider audience. This confirms that in addition to content quality, technical factors such as *hashtag optimization* and *post timing* are important elements in social media strategy.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Approach

This study uses a quantitative approach with a content analysis method on primary data from the Instagram posts of three Indonesian presidential candidates in the 2024 presidential election, namely Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, and Ganjar Pranowo. Data was collected from D-7 to D+7 voting dates (February 7 to February 21, 2024), corresponding to the critical period in the campaign cycle.

Data Collection Techniques

Primary data was collected from an Excel file containing a recapitulation of the presidential candidates' Instagram content. Each post is analyzed based on several variables, including:

- Content type (static images, videos, animations)
- Narrative and hashtags
- Existence of figures (presidential candidates, campaign teams, celebrities)
- Key messages (focus on issues, support, thanks, etc.)
- Interactivity (emojis, polls, web addresses)

Unit of Analysis

Unit of analysis is every post posted on the official Instagram accounts of the presidential candidates during the research period. The total number of posts analyzed was 126, consisting of 65 posts by Anies Baswedan, 24 posts by Prabowo Subianto, and 37 posts by Ganjar Pranowo.

Analytical Instruments and Techniques

The instrument used is a *categorization-based coding sheet compiled based on* aspects of media affordance, framing, and interaction. The data was then analyzed in a statistical descriptive manner to identify the pattern of social media use by each presidential candidate.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Media Affordance Use Patterns

Based on primary data obtained from the analysis of the Instagram content of the presidential candidates during the D-7 to D+7 period of voting, there are variations in the use of *social media affordance* that are interesting to observe. Of the total 126 posts, 74 content (58.7%) was in the form of videos, making it the dominant form of content among static images (54 contents/42.9%) and animation (6 contents/4.8%). Short videos, particularly in Reels format, are a top choice due to their ability to reach a wide and fast audience.

Table 1. Number of Instagram Content for Presidential Candidates

Presidential Candidates	Content	
	Sum	Percentage
Anies Baswedan	65	51,6
Prabowo Subianto	24	19,0
Ganjar Pranowo	37	29,4
TOTAL	126	100

Source: Data from Researchers

Anies Baswedan became the presidential candidate with the highest upload frequency (65 posts), with 50 of them being videos (76.9% of Anies' total content). Ganjar Pranowo followed with 37 posts, 21 of which were videos (56.8%), while Prabowo Subianto only uploaded 24 contents, 3 of which were videos (12.5%). This difference reflects a varied digital communication strategy: Anies tends to be more active and responsive, while Prabowo is more selective in sharing content.

Hashtags or hashtags are also used intensively as a tool to increase content visibility. A total of 79 hashtags were found in the entire content, with details: Anies used 53 hashtags (67.1%), Ganjar 21 (26.6%), and Prabowo only 5 (6.3%). *Hashtags* such as #IndonesiaMaju, #PilihPresidenBaru, and #PerubahanYangDitunggu became popular among the three presidential candidates, but the intensity of their use was very different.

Table 1. Media Affordance used

Calon Presiden	Jumlah Konten	Media Affordance								
		Static Image	Video	Animation	Hashtag	Handle (@)	Location Tag	Emojis	Interactive Polls	Web Adress
Anies Baswedan	65	17	50	3	53	29	9	16	0	0
Prabowo Subianto	24	21	3	3	5	9	3	2	0	0
Ganjar Pranowo	37	16	21	0	21	12	15	17	0	0
Total	126	54	74	6	79	50	27	35	0	0

Source: Data from Researchers

Interactivity such as polls has not been taken advantage of, although such features are available on Instagram. None of the posts used interactive polls, suggesting that communication is still *one-way*. This is a big gap in optimizing *the affordance* of digital platforms to build a two-way relationship with voters.

Table 3. Framing and Message Types Instagram Content Widely Used

Theme	Number of Content	Percentage
Candidate Character	76	60,3%
National Issues	26	20,6%
Political Attack	2	1,6%
Voter Support	78	61,9%
Behind-the-Scenes	14	11,1%
Acknowledgments	23	18,3%
Voice Mobilization	61	48,4%
Hybrid or Other	99	78,6%
Total Content	126	

Source: Data from Researchers

Framing Messages and Main Themes

Analysis of message *framing* shows that the main themes often raised by presidential candidates include:

1. Presidential Character (*Candidate Character*): 76 content (60.3%) focused on personal image, such as daily life, campaign activities, or emotional moments.
2. National Issues (*Issue*): 26 content (20.6%) discussed economic, environmental, infrastructure, and education issues.

3. Political Attacks: Only 2 content (1.6%) had elements of direct or indirect attacks on political rivals, indicating low polarization in Instagram content.
4. Voter Support: A total of 78 content (61.9%) featured support from volunteers, community leaders, or voter groups.
5. Behind-the-Scenes : 14 pieces of content (11.1%) provide an overview of the behind-the-scenes campaign process.
6. Acknowledgments: 23 content (18.3%) contained gratitude to volunteers and supporters.
7. Voter Mobilization: 61 content (48.4%) aims to mobilize votes, both through invitations to vote and participation in campaign events.
8. Hybrid or Other Content: 99 content (78.6%) is a combination of some of the above themes.

Table 4. Framing and Message Types for Presidential Candidates (1)

Calon Presiden	Candidate Character		Issue		Attack		Voter Support		Notable Individuals	
	Jumlah	%	Jumlah	%	Jumlah	%	Jumlah	%	Jumlah	%
Anies Baswedan	31	40,8	12	46,1	1	50,0	39	50,0	4	44,4
Prabowo Subianto	9	11,8	2	7,7	0	0,0	10	12,8	3	33,3
Ganjar Pranowo	36	47,4	12	46,2	1	50,0	29	37,2	2	22,3
Total	76	100	26	100	2	100	78	100	9	100

Source: Data from Researchers

Research conducted by Grall et al. (2021) and shows that personal narratives and storytelling in content can elicit stronger engagement and emotional responses from audiences compared to non-personalized messages. This is because personal stories are processed more consistently and reliably within certain brain regions, thus making them more interesting. Stubb (2018) Content that contains elements of personalization and relevance to everyday life tends to be more receptive to audiences.

In addition, the emotional tone of social media messages also plays an important role. Positive and trust-related emotions in communication, especially during crises, have proven to be effective in building trust. Therefore, messages that not only propose concrete solutions but also convey a positive and trustworthy tone can be more effective (Kaur et al., 2021).

Table 5. Framing and Message Types for Presidential Candidates (2)

Calon Presiden	Behind-the-Scenes		Thank You Messages		Mobilization		Other/Hybrid	
	Jumlah	%	Jumlah	%	Jumlah	%	Jumlah	%
Anies Baswedan	14	100,0	7	30,4	35	57,4	64	64,6
Prabowo Subianto	0	0,0	6	26,1	9	14,8	19	19,2
Ganjar Pranowo	0	0,0	10	43,5	17	27,8	16	16,2
Total	14	100	23	100	61	100	99	100

Source: Data from Researchers

Visual Storytelling as a Digital Image Forming Tool

Visual storytelling is a key element in the formation of digital images. Short videos, especially those featuring presidential candidates in real situations such as direct dialogue with residents, field visits, or volunteer activities, become an effective form of narrative. According to the theory, Goffman (1959) *visual storytelling* is a way for individuals to "play" the role they want to be shown to the public. In this context, Instagram has become a digital stage for presidential candidates to build their ideal personas.

Table 6. Storytelling Presenter on Instagram content

Calon Presiden	Candidate		Campaign Workers		Celebrity/ Political Figures		Voter Group		Voters		Children	
	Jumlah	%	Jumlah	%	Jumlah	%	Jumlah	%	Jumlah	%	Jumlah	%
Anies Baswedan	53	47,3	18	45,0	28	47,5	2	25,0	36	36,0	15	45,5
Prabowo Subianto	24	21,4	9	22,5	15	25,4	0	0,0	10	10,0	5	15,1
Ganjar Pranowo	35	31,3	13	32,5	16	27,1	6	75,0	28	28,0	13	39,4
Total	112	100	40	100	59	100	8	100	74	100	33	100

Source: Data from Researchers

Anies Baswedan, for example, uses a lot of short documentary videos that show him in natural conditions, such as having a dialogue with fishermen or farmers. Ganjar Pranowo displayed more real work activities, such as infrastructure project inspections or visits to disaster sites. Meanwhile, Prabowo Subianto more often shares content that highlights moments of togetherness with the campaign team and volunteer troops.

Implications of the Technology and Communication Industry

This research confirms that social media, especially Instagram, has become an integral part of the technology and political communication industries. The platform not only serves as a messaging tool, but also as a reputation management, mass mobilization, and strategic decision-making tool.

From a technology perspective, Instagram's algorithm that prioritizes viral content (video, interaction, and *high engagement*) is a key factor in the distribution of political messages. In other words, it is not only the content of the message that determines the effectiveness of the campaign, but also how the message is optimized to reach a wider audience through *the digital affordance* mechanism.

In terms of communication, these results support framing theory and *self-presentation theory*, which can be seen from the way presidential candidates choose narratives and visuals that can shape specific public perceptions. However, the results also show a gap between the potential for social media interactivity and its practical implementation in political campaigns in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Instagram has become a strategic platform for Indonesian presidential candidates—Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, and Ganjar Pranowo—in shaping political image and delivering campaign messages during the 2024 election period. From 126 analyzed posts, 58.7% were videos, highlighting the dominance of visual storytelling as the platform's primary affordance. Anies Baswedan demonstrated the most active usage with a focus on emotional narratives and humanist imagery, while Prabowo relied on symbolic content emphasizing leadership collectives, and Ganjar balanced policy messaging with personal branding. The dominant themes across all candidates' posts include presidential character (60.3%), national issues (20.6%), voter support (61.9%), and vote mobilization (48.4%), with 78.6% of content combining multiple themes—reflecting layered communication strategies and a notably low incidence of political attacks (1.6%), suggesting low polarization in this digital campaign phase. These variations underscore diverse political communication styles shaped by each candidate's strategic positioning within the modern digital ecosystem. To enhance impact, campaign teams are advised to optimize interactive features (polls, live streaming, Q&A), personalize content for targeted demographics, employ authentic visual storytelling, and deepen their understanding of digital platform mechanics. Academically, future research should integrate content analysis with voter perception surveys, develop tools for sentiment analysis, explore cross-national comparative studies, and examine the influence of Instagram's algorithm on political message distribution.

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