

Political Podcasts and the Transformation of Public Debate in Indonesia: Long-Form Digital Communication and Electoral Discourse

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Abstract

The growth of political podcasts and long-form online interviews has transformed political communication in Indonesia by creating spaces for extended discussions between political figures, journalists, academics, and influencers. Unlike traditional campaign advertisements, podcasts can present political actors through informal conversations and personal narratives. This article examines how political podcasts shape electoral discourse in Indonesia. Using qualitative discourse analysis, the study investigates interview formats, candidate self-presentation, issue framing, audience interaction, and the role of podcast hosts as political intermediaries. The article argues that long-form digital communication can increase political engagement by providing voters with more contextual information than short campaign messages. However, informal communication may also blur the boundaries between journalism, entertainment, political endorsement, and campaign promotion. The study proposes a transparency framework for political podcasts that emphasizes disclosure of sponsorship, editorial independence, and factual verification. The article concludes that podcasts represent an increasingly important component of Indonesia's hybrid media system and are reshaping how political candidates communicate with citizens.

[Pertumbuhan podcast politik dan wawancara daring berdurasi panjang telah mengubah komunikasi politik di Indonesia dengan menciptakan ruang untuk diskusi yang lebih luas antara tokoh politik, jurnalis, akademisi, dan influencer. Tidak seperti iklan kampanye tradisional, podcast dapat menampilkan aktor politik melalui percakapan informal dan narasi pribadi. Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana podcast politik membentuk wacana pemilihan di Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan analisis wacana kualitatif, penelitian ini menyelidiki format wawancara, presentasi diri kandidat, pembedahan isu, interaksi audiens, dan peran pembawa acara podcast sebagai perantara politik. Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa komunikasi digital

berdurasi panjang dapat meningkatkan keterlibatan politik dengan memberikan informasi kontekstual yang lebih banyak kepada pemilih daripada pesan kampanye yang singkat. Namun, komunikasi informal juga dapat mengaburkan batasan antara jurnalisme, hiburan, dukungan politik, dan promosi kampanye. Penelitian ini mengusulkan kerangka kerja transparansi untuk podcast politik yang menekankan pengungkapan sponsor, independensi editorial, dan verifikasi fakta. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa podcast merupakan komponen yang semakin penting dari sistem media hibrida Indonesia dan membentuk kembali cara kandidat politik berkomunikasi dengan warga negara.]

Keywords: Political podcasts, digital media, electoral communication, political discourse, Indonesia

Introduction

The transformation of political communication in Indonesia has increasingly moved beyond television debates, newspaper interviews, campaign advertisements, and formal political rallies toward digitally mediated conversations. Among the emerging formats, political podcasts occupy a distinctive position because they combine conversational interaction, audiovisual presentation, extended duration, and direct audience access. Unlike conventional political advertising, which is generally designed around short and highly controlled messages, podcasts provide political actors with greater opportunities to explain positions, narrate personal experiences, respond to questions, and construct political identities through interaction. Panuju (2023) identifies political podcasts as an increasingly relevant component of Indonesian political communication, particularly in the preparation for the 2024 presidential election. His study distinguishes between podcasts produced by television organizations and those independently produced by individuals, demonstrating differences in editorial control and conversational flexibility.

The importance of podcasts should be located within the wider transformation of Indonesian digital political communication. Hasfi (2019) argues that digital media have altered the relationship between political actors and citizens by creating more interactive communication environments, while Adiputra, Irawanto, and Kurnia (2023) demonstrate that new media have become important arenas through which civil society participates in political communication. These developments indicate that digital political communication is not merely a technological replacement for traditional media. It represents a restructuring of how political messages are produced, distributed, interpreted, and discussed. Political podcasts intensify this transformation because they bring together characteristics traditionally separated across different media forms: the interview structure of

journalism, the accessibility of social media, the visual quality of television, and the participatory potential of online comments.

The long-form characteristic of podcasts is particularly relevant to electoral discourse. Traditional campaign messages frequently emphasize slogans, policy summaries, symbolic images, and emotionally appealing statements because political communication competes for limited audience attention. Long-form interviews operate under different communicative conditions. Candidates can discuss several issues within a single conversation and provide contextual explanations that would be difficult to accommodate within short advertisements. Panuju (2023) finds that individually produced political podcasts tend to provide greater flexibility for candidates to elaborate thoughts, feelings, visions, and political perspectives. This suggests that podcasts may create opportunities for voters to encounter politicians through narratives rather than isolated campaign statements. However, greater communicative depth does not necessarily mean greater informational quality because extended conversations may also provide more opportunities for selective framing, rhetorical persuasion, and unchallenged claims.

The emergence of political podcasts is also connected to the growing importance of YouTube as a political communication environment. Arofah (2015) found that YouTube could be used by political actors to provide clarifications and political statements in a more personal and dialogical form than conventional press releases. Setiawan (2018) similarly demonstrates that YouTube provided political actors with relatively inexpensive opportunities to distribute political messages widely and build political visibility. The contemporary podcast format develops these earlier practices by making extended conversations central to political communication. Rather than merely uploading a speech or statement, political actors can participate in an ongoing communicative encounter with hosts and audiences. Podcasts thus represent an evolution of the political use of online video rather than an entirely separate communication phenomenon.

Recent Indonesian scholarship provides more direct evidence concerning podcast-based political communication. Panuju (2023) demonstrates that political podcasts surrounding the 2024 presidential election differed according to their institutional origins and editorial structures. Kisesa, Wuryaningrum, and Parto (2024), through their analysis of the Total Politik YouTube channel, identify multiple forms of assertive, directive, expressive, and commissive speech acts in political podcast conversations. Their findings indicate that podcast interaction is not simply informational; language itself performs political functions. Political actors can make claims, persuade, promise, criticize, construct solidarity, and respond strategically to questions. This makes the podcast an important object of political communication research because political meaning emerges through interaction rather than through isolated messages.

Audience participation adds another layer to this transformation. Putri and Gautama (2022) demonstrate that comments surrounding political podcast content

on YouTube can function as a digital public space in which audiences exchange opinions and respond to political issues. Their study of the Close The Door channel during the 2019 election shows that comment sections contain political reactions and forms of interaction among users. Research on Total Politik similarly demonstrates that political content and audience conversation are closely related, with comment discussions becoming part of broader public opinion formation (De Putri and Toni 2024). Thus, the political podcast should not be analyzed only as a conversation between host and guest. It is better understood as a multi-layered communicative environment involving producers, hosts, guests, viewers, commenters, and algorithmic distribution.

The interaction between political podcasts and public debate also requires attention to media convergence. A podcast may be distributed through YouTube, Instagram clips, TikTok excerpts, X discussions, and news coverage. A long-form interview can therefore generate numerous shorter political messages that circulate independently of the original conversation. This dynamic resembles the broader transformation identified by Zalzillah and Gumelar (2024), who find that digital media can contribute to public opinion formation during elections. The political meaning of a podcast consequently extends beyond the duration of the original episode. Particular statements may become viral clips, memes, quotations, or controversies, allowing fragments of a long conversation to reach audiences who never watch the complete episode.

This fragmentation creates an important paradox. Long-form communication potentially provides greater context, but platform circulation often rewards shorter and more emotionally salient fragments. A carefully qualified statement may therefore become detached from its surrounding explanation when converted into a short video. Utami (2025) demonstrates the importance of virality in Indonesian political communication, showing how audiovisual political content can spread rapidly through networked platforms. The political podcast thus operates simultaneously under two communicative logics: the logic of long-form conversation and the logic of platform-based circulation. The first encourages context and continuity, while the second favors attention, emotional intensity, novelty, and shareability. Understanding political podcasts therefore requires analyzing both the original conversation and the subsequent circulation of its fragments.

Another important development concerns the increasing personalization of political communication. Political candidates no longer depend entirely on party organizations or mainstream journalists to introduce themselves to voters. Through digital media, they can construct personal narratives, display informal behavior, and communicate directly with audiences. Fatika et al. (2025), examining political communication through a personal YouTube account, demonstrate how personalization can become a central communication strategy for political actors. Podcasts strengthen this tendency because the conversational setting often emphasizes personality, biography, humor, spontaneous reactions, and personal

values. The political actor becomes not only a representative of a party or policy program but also a media personality. This personalization can humanize candidates, but it can also shift electoral evaluation away from substantive policy toward personality and mediated intimacy.

The informal nature of podcast communication creates a further analytical problem concerning boundaries between political journalism, entertainment, and political promotion. Kulau (2024) argues that Indonesian electoral campaigns have increasingly incorporated politainment, particularly on TikTok and Instagram, where political communication becomes intertwined with entertainment-oriented presentation. Political podcasts may produce a similar hybridization through humor, informal conversation, storytelling, celebrity participation, and emotionally engaging discussions. The distinction between an interview intended to inform citizens and an appearance intended to promote a candidate can therefore become difficult to identify. This ambiguity makes editorial transparency important because audiences need to know whether a conversation is journalistic, sponsored, campaign-related, or produced primarily for political branding.

The credibility of podcast-based political information also depends on the role of hosts. Unlike traditional interviewers working within formal newsroom structures, podcast hosts may simultaneously function as journalists, commentators, influencers, entertainers, entrepreneurs, and political opinion leaders. Panuju (2023) shows that individually produced podcasts offer hosts considerable flexibility in selecting themes and developing conversations. Such flexibility can create more substantive political discussions, but it also places greater responsibility on hosts to determine how questions are framed, which claims are challenged, and what information is emphasized. The host therefore becomes a political intermediary whose editorial choices influence how audiences encounter political actors.

The Indonesian literature has examined many aspects of digital political communication, including social media campaigning, political personalization, online participation, political polarization, YouTube communication, and digital public spheres (Budiyo 2015; Eliya and Zulaeha 2018; Adnan and Mona 2024; Purnomo, Gunawan, and Anggraini 2022). However, political podcasts require more specific examination because their communicative structure differs from short-form social media content. A short video may be designed around one message, whereas a podcast develops meaning through sequential questions, answers, interruptions, elaborations, and reactions. The political implications of this format cannot therefore be inferred entirely from studies of conventional social media campaigning.

Previous studies also reveal an unresolved tension between increased political engagement and declining deliberative quality. De Putri and Toni (2024) show that YouTube political content can facilitate public discussion, while Budiyo (2015) warns that social media political communication may involve attacks, ridicule, and destructive forms of expression. Studies of echo chambers further demonstrate that

digitally mediated political conversations can become fragmented when users repeatedly encounter politically similar viewpoints. The implication for podcasts is significant: long-form communication can provide more information, but its democratic contribution depends on the openness of the surrounding communicative environment. A lengthy discussion does not automatically constitute deliberation if the conversation remains ideologically homogeneous or if audiences consume only excerpts that confirm prior political preferences.

This article addresses the following research question: how do political podcasts transform public debate and electoral discourse in Indonesia, and what communicative conditions determine whether long-form digital conversations strengthen political engagement or merely intensify political promotion? The article argues that political podcasts transform electoral communication through three interconnected processes. First, they expand the temporal and narrative space available for political discussion. Second, they reposition hosts as important intermediaries who shape the meaning of political encounters. Third, they produce hybrid communication environments in which journalism, political branding, entertainment, audience participation, and platform circulation overlap. The democratic value of this transformation therefore depends not simply on the existence of long-form content but on editorial transparency, substantive questioning, audience literacy, and mechanisms for factual verification.

The contribution of this article is to conceptualize political podcasts as long-form hybrid political communication rather than simply another social media format. This perspective connects scholarship on digital political communication with research on political journalism, public opinion, political participation, and electoral discourse. It also distinguishes between the communicative depth of the original podcast and the subsequent platform circulation of its fragments. The article proposes that podcast transparency should be evaluated through three criteria: disclosure of political or commercial sponsorship, clarity concerning editorial positioning, and systematic attention to factual verification. These criteria are particularly relevant because the increasing popularity of political podcasts can make hosts and podcast brands influential political intermediaries without necessarily subjecting them to the same institutional expectations as conventional news organizations.

Methodologically, the study employs qualitative discourse analysis and interpretive literature analysis. The analysis draws on Indonesian journal articles published before 2026 concerning political podcasts, YouTube political communication, social media campaigning, digital public spheres, political participation, electoral discourse, and political polarization. Podcast communication is examined through four analytical dimensions: conversational structure, political self-presentation, host mediation, and audience interaction. The study does not attempt to measure electoral effects statistically. Instead, it investigates how communicative practices create particular opportunities and risks for democratic debate. This approach allows the article to connect the specific

characteristics of political podcasts with the broader transformation of Indonesia's hybrid media environment.

Long-Form Conversation and the Expansion of Electoral Discourse

Political podcasts change electoral communication first by altering the amount of communicative time available to political actors. Conventional political advertising requires compression: a candidate must communicate identity, achievements, promises, and emotional appeals within a few seconds or minutes. Long-form podcasts loosen this constraint. Panuju (2023) demonstrates that individually produced political podcasts allow candidates to elaborate thoughts, feelings, and visions more freely than institutionally controlled formats. This expanded temporal space can produce a more complex political narrative because candidates have opportunities to explain relationships between problems, policies, and personal experiences. The democratic significance lies in the possibility of contextualization. Voters can hear not merely what a candidate promises but how the candidate constructs the reasoning behind that promise. Yet the same additional time can also become a resource for persuasive storytelling, meaning that communicative depth must not automatically be equated with political substance.

The conversational structure distinguishes podcasts from campaign advertisements because political meaning emerges through interaction. A candidate responds to questions rather than simply delivering a prepared message. Kisesa, Wuryaningrum, and Parto (2024) demonstrate that political podcast conversations contain different forms of speech acts, including assertions, directives, expressions, and commitments. This indicates that the podcast environment permits political actors to perform several communicative functions simultaneously. They can defend a position, challenge assumptions, promise future action, express emotions, and construct relationships with audiences. Such interaction may reveal aspects of political reasoning that remain invisible in scripted advertisements. At the same time, the absence of formal constraints may allow rhetorical performance to dominate substantive discussion. The quality of electoral discourse consequently depends heavily on how hosts structure conversations and whether questions lead candidates toward specific, verifiable claims.

Long-form discussion also changes the way political identity is constructed. Candidates can communicate through personal anecdotes, humor, family stories, professional experiences, and informal reactions. This differs from traditional campaign communication, where candidates often appear through carefully designed speeches, advertisements, and official photographs. The informal podcast environment creates an impression of proximity between political actors and audiences. Personalization research in Indonesian digital communication indicates that political actors can use direct digital channels to construct individualized political images. Fatika et al. (2025) show that personal YouTube communication can function as an alternative political communication strategy. Podcasts extend

this strategy by transforming political communication into a mediated interpersonal encounter. The candidate appears less like a distant institutional actor and more like a conversational participant, even though the encounter remains carefully mediated and technologically produced.

The impression of intimacy is politically significant because electoral decisions are influenced not only by policy preferences but also by perceptions of credibility and authenticity. A candidate who speaks spontaneously may be perceived as more genuine than one who communicates through highly scripted advertisements. However, authenticity in digital media is itself a communicative performance. The appearance of spontaneity may be carefully produced through studio design, editing, host selection, episode timing, and promotional strategy. Political podcasts should therefore not be treated as transparent windows into political personalities. They are mediated environments in which authenticity is constructed. The relevant analytical question is not whether a candidate is “really authentic” but how the podcast format produces particular perceptions of authenticity among audiences.

The extended format also creates possibilities for issue complexity. Political problems such as economic inequality, education, environmental policy, healthcare, corruption, or constitutional reform rarely fit easily into campaign slogans. Long-form discussion permits candidates to move between causes, consequences, examples, and policy alternatives. This potential is particularly relevant to electoral communication because voters require more than recognition of candidate names. They require information that helps them compare political alternatives. Research on digital political campaigns by Adnan and Mona (2024) shows that political actors increasingly use social media strategically to construct political messages and reach voters. Podcasts can complement these strategies by providing a space in which campaign narratives are elaborated rather than merely circulated as short promotional statements.

Nevertheless, additional communicative time does not guarantee greater substantive complexity. A candidate may speak for an hour without providing evidence for important claims. Long-form communication can even create an illusion of depth because audiences associate duration with seriousness. The danger is particularly relevant when hosts prioritize conversational flow over verification. A lengthy episode may contain extensive political discussion while leaving central factual claims unexamined. The democratic value of long-form communication therefore depends on the relationship between duration and editorial rigor. The relevant standard should not be “how long did the discussion last?” but “how much political reasoning, evidence, comparison, and accountability did the discussion make possible?”

The host becomes crucial at this point. In a traditional political debate, moderators operate under explicit rules governing speaking time, candidate responses, and topics. Podcast hosts generally possess greater flexibility. They determine the opening topic, sequence of questions, degree of interruption, tone,

and transition between issues. Panuju (2023) emphasizes the difference between institutional and individual podcast production, demonstrating how production context influences conversational freedom. A politically influential host can therefore exercise considerable agenda-setting power. By selecting which subjects deserve extended attention and which receive only brief treatment, the host indirectly shapes electoral discourse.

This agenda-setting role can strengthen democratic communication when hosts challenge candidates with substantive questions. It can expose inconsistencies, force clarification, and introduce issues that candidates might prefer to avoid. However, the same power can be used to construct favorable political appearances. If a host avoids difficult questions or permits long uninterrupted responses, the podcast may function as political promotion rather than independent political discussion. The distinction cannot be determined solely from the presence of a question-and-answer format. Editorial independence requires examination of the kinds of questions asked, the consistency of scrutiny across political actors, and whether hosts challenge claims regardless of ideological affiliation.

The problem becomes more complex when podcast hosts possess their own political identities. Digital creators are not necessarily neutral intermediaries. They may have political preferences, ideological commitments, commercial relationships, or personal networks that influence guest selection and framing. Indonesian research on political communication demonstrates that political messages increasingly circulate through personalized digital figures rather than institutional media alone. Eliya and Zulaeha (2018), for example, show how political actors construct communication strategies through language choices on social media. In the podcast environment, similar processes operate through conversational style, humor, vocabulary, questioning patterns, and personal positioning. The host's communicative identity consequently becomes part of the political message itself.

Audience interaction further differentiates podcasts from traditional broadcast communication. Putri and Gautama (2022) show that YouTube comment sections can become spaces where audiences discuss political content and respond to political actors. De Putri and Toni (2024) similarly demonstrate that conversations around Total Politik content can contribute to the formation of public opinion. The political podcast therefore generates at least three layers of communication: the host-guest conversation, audience responses, and subsequent circulation of those responses. The democratic potential of this structure lies in its capacity to make political communication more participatory. Citizens are not limited to consuming a political message; they can react, criticize, reinterpret, and circulate it.

Yet audience participation does not necessarily mean deliberation. Comment sections can contain agreement, disagreement, sarcasm, insults, misinformation, and identity-based attacks. Budiyo (2015) identified ethical problems in Indonesian political communication on social media, particularly the use of

language for attacking and humiliating political opponents. Research on echo chambers similarly demonstrates that online political discussion can become concentrated within ideologically homogeneous communities. The audience surrounding a political podcast may therefore become a supportive community rather than a deliberative public. The existence of thousands of comments is not sufficient evidence of democratic debate. What matters is whether interaction exposes audiences to competing arguments and encourages reasoned evaluation.

The relationship between long-form podcasts and short-form circulation creates another transformation. A two-hour interview can generate dozens of short clips, each carrying a particular statement or emotional moment. Utami (2025) shows how virality can transform audiovisual political material into rapidly circulating political content. Once extracted from the original conversation, a statement may acquire a new political meaning. A candidate's carefully qualified argument can become a provocative thirty-second clip. Consequently, the democratic value of the original long-form discussion can be weakened by the platform economy of attention. The full podcast provides context, but the viral clip may become the version encountered by the majority of users.

This fragmentation is especially consequential during election periods. Political campaigns compete not only to communicate but also to control which parts of communication become visible. A candidate may participate in a long podcast discussing multiple policies, while supporters circulate only the section that portrays the candidate positively. Opponents may circulate another segment that appears controversial. The podcast thus becomes a repository from which competing political narratives can extract material. This differs from conventional television because the audience itself becomes involved in selecting, editing, and redistributing political messages. Digital electoral discourse consequently becomes increasingly decentralized.

The long-form format nevertheless remains important because it provides an archival source from which claims can be evaluated in context. Journalists, researchers, fact-checkers, and citizens can return to the complete conversation and compare viral excerpts with the original statement. Arofah (2015) already identified YouTube's potential for political clarification because audiovisual content can provide direct access to political statements. Podcasts extend this possibility through their greater duration and searchable digital archives. The democratic benefit is therefore potentially significant: political actors can be held accountable not only for what they currently say but also for what they previously said. Long-form archives can support political memory and consistency checking.

The expansion of electoral discourse through podcasts should therefore be understood as a change in communicative capacity rather than an automatic improvement in political quality. Podcasts provide more time, greater narrative flexibility, direct access, and opportunities for interaction. These characteristics can strengthen political understanding when combined with substantive questioning and verification. However, the same characteristics can facilitate political

personalization, emotional persuasion, selective editing, and promotional communication. The democratic contribution of podcasts consequently depends on how the communicative space is governed by hosts, producers, platforms, political actors, and audiences.

Hosts, Political Intermediation, and the Hybridization of Journalism and Political Promotion

The political importance of podcast hosts emerges from their position between political actors and audiences. In conventional media systems, journalists operate within organizational structures that establish editorial standards, professional norms, and accountability mechanisms. Podcast hosts may operate under much more flexible arrangements. Some are journalists working within established media organizations, while others are independent creators or media entrepreneurs. Panuju (2023) demonstrates that the institutional background of a podcast affects its communication style and degree of flexibility. This difference makes the host an increasingly important political intermediary. The host does not simply transmit what candidates say; the host determines how political encounters are organized and interpreted.

This intermediary role can be understood through agenda setting. A host decides which political issues receive attention and which remain peripheral. The decision is consequential because political candidates often have strategic preferences regarding which topics they want to discuss. A skilled host can redirect conversation from campaign slogans toward concrete policy questions. Conversely, a host can provide an environment in which candidates emphasize biography, personality, or emotionally appealing stories. The podcast therefore creates a selective representation of political reality. Political communication researchers should examine not only candidate speech but also the editorial decisions that determine the structure of the conversation.

The host's questioning style is particularly significant. Kisesa, Wuryaningrum, and Parto (2024) show that podcast conversations contain multiple types of speech acts. The question is therefore not merely a request for information. It can challenge, accuse, invite justification, or encourage self-presentation. A question such as "What is your economic policy?" opens a different communicative pathway from "Why did your opponent fail?" The first encourages policy explanation, whereas the second may encourage conflict-oriented framing. Host language consequently contributes directly to the construction of electoral discourse. The podcast should be analyzed as a co-produced communicative event rather than as a neutral container for political speech.

The host can also influence the perceived legitimacy of political claims through conversational reactions. Agreement, laughter, skepticism, interruption, follow-up questions, and silence all communicate evaluative meanings. A candidate's statement may appear credible when a host responds affirmatively, but

questionable when immediately challenged. These interactional cues are especially important in podcasts because audiences observe not only what is said but also how participants react to one another. Unlike written political statements, audiovisual conversations communicate through tone, facial expression, pauses, and interpersonal dynamics. Political credibility is consequently constructed through multimodal interaction.

This creates an opportunity for journalism-oriented podcasts to provide a form of political accountability. A host can ask candidates to clarify contradictions, provide evidence, explain previous statements, or respond to criticism. The extended format permits follow-up questions that are difficult to accommodate in short interviews. Such questioning can improve the informational quality of political communication. However, accountability depends on consistency. If one candidate receives rigorous questioning while another receives a friendly conversational treatment, the podcast becomes politically asymmetrical. Editorial independence therefore requires not absolute neutrality but consistent standards of scrutiny.

The distinction between journalism and political promotion becomes difficult when podcasts are commercially organized. Production requires studios, equipment, personnel, editing, distribution, and audience development. These costs create incentives for monetization through advertising, sponsorship, memberships, platform revenue, or political partnerships. Political podcasts may consequently face financial relationships that influence editorial decisions. Purwanto, Mujab, and Madonna (2021) demonstrate that political communication and advertising are closely connected to financial and regulatory considerations in Indonesian media. Although their study concerns television advertising, its implications extend to digital political communication: commercial incentives can affect how political messages are packaged and distributed.

Transparency therefore becomes a central democratic requirement. Audiences should be able to distinguish editorial content from paid political promotion. Sponsorship disclosure is particularly important when a political actor or organization has a financial relationship with the producer. Without disclosure, audiences may interpret promotional communication as independent journalism. The problem is not necessarily that sponsored political discussion exists. Political advertising is a legitimate component of electoral competition. The democratic problem arises when its persuasive character is concealed. Transparency allows audiences to evaluate messages with greater awareness of the interests involved.

Editorial independence also requires disclosure of political affiliations. A host who openly identifies with a political perspective does not automatically lose credibility. In some cases, explicit positioning may be more transparent than presenting partisan communication as neutral. The central issue is whether audiences understand the communicative position from which political discussion is produced. This principle is especially relevant in Indonesia's increasingly personalized digital media environment, where political commentators and

influencers can acquire large audiences without operating within conventional newsroom structures. Disclosure can therefore function as a substitute for some forms of institutional transparency.

The hybrid nature of podcasts becomes clearer when entertainment is incorporated into political conversation. Kulau (2024) demonstrates that politainment has become significant in Indonesian electoral campaigns, particularly on visual social media platforms. Political podcasts can employ similar techniques through humor, informal language, celebrity guests, personal stories, or controversial questions. Entertainment can lower barriers to political engagement, especially among audiences who rarely consume conventional political news. Yet entertainment can also change the criteria through which political messages are evaluated. A candidate who is humorous or emotionally engaging may receive greater attention even when the substantive political content is limited.

The relationship between entertainment and political education is therefore ambivalent. A politically complex issue may become more accessible when explained through conversation and humor. The podcast format can make politics less intimidating and encourage younger audiences to encounter political information. Arone and Putra (2024) demonstrate the potential of YouTube podcast content as a medium for political literacy. Their findings suggest that podcast-style digital content can be used to introduce political information to audiences through accessible media forms. The democratic opportunity is significant because political education does not necessarily need to occur through formal institutions. Digital conversations can become informal political learning environments when content provides accurate and contextual information.

However, political education requires a distinction between information and persuasion. A podcast may discuss political institutions, elections, or policy while simultaneously promoting a particular candidate or ideological position. These functions can coexist, but audiences should not be encouraged to confuse them. The host's responsibility is therefore not to eliminate political positioning but to clarify when the conversation moves from explanation toward advocacy. The distinction is particularly important during elections because voters are exposed to a large amount of persuasive communication. Transparent labeling can help audiences understand whether they are watching journalism, commentary, campaign content, sponsored material, or entertainment.

The problem of verification is equally important. Long-form conversations can contain dozens of factual statements, statistics, historical claims, and descriptions of policy outcomes. It is unrealistic to expect hosts to verify every sentence in real time, but important claims should receive some form of post-production verification. Without such mechanisms, the podcast may amplify inaccurate information simply because the conversational format prioritizes spontaneity. Political podcasts therefore need editorial procedures appropriate to their format. These might include preparation notes, source documents, post-interview fact-

checking, corrections, episode descriptions containing references, and visible corrections when important errors are identified.

Verification also affects the relationship between podcasts and traditional journalism. Podcasts should not be understood as replacing journalism. Instead, they represent a new form through which journalistic practices can be adapted. A media organization can use podcast interviews to provide longer political conversations while maintaining professional standards of verification and editorial review. Panuju's (2023) distinction between television-produced and individually produced podcasts is useful here because institutional context influences editorial practices. The more independent the production structure, the greater the need for transparent self-regulation. Conversely, institutional affiliation may provide stronger editorial resources but can also introduce organizational interests.

The credibility of a political podcast should therefore be understood as a multidimensional construct. Audience size is insufficient. High view counts may indicate successful distribution but do not demonstrate accuracy, independence, or democratic value. Credibility depends on the relationship between expertise, transparency, questioning, evidence, consistency, and audience trust. De Putri and Toni (2024) demonstrate that YouTube political channels can become significant public discussion spaces because audiences use them to obtain information and express political opinions. The challenge is to ensure that popularity does not become a substitute for editorial accountability.

Host power also creates an issue of political concentration. If a small number of influential hosts become primary gateways through which candidates communicate with voters, these hosts can acquire agenda-setting power comparable to traditional media institutions. The difference is that their institutional accountability may be less formal. This creates a new form of gatekeeping rather than the disappearance of gatekeeping. Digital media have reduced some traditional barriers to political communication, but they have not eliminated intermediaries. They have transformed who the intermediaries are. Political podcasts consequently redistribute gatekeeping power from centralized newsrooms toward combinations of hosts, creators, platforms, and audience communities.

The resulting model can be described as intermediated political intimacy. Political podcasts create a sense of direct access between citizens and political figures, but that access is structured by hosts, production choices, platform algorithms, and commercial arrangements. The communication feels interpersonal while remaining institutionally mediated. This paradox explains both the appeal and the democratic risk of political podcasts. They can reduce psychological distance between voters and candidates while simultaneously making political communication more dependent on personalities and media brands. Understanding this structure is necessary if podcasts are to contribute to informed electoral debate rather than merely become another channel of political image construction.

Audience Participation, Platform Circulation, and the Conditions of Democratic Debate

The political significance of podcasts ultimately depends on what audiences do with the communication they receive. Unlike traditional broadcast audiences, podcast viewers can comment, share, remix, quote, criticize, and redistribute content. Putri and Gautama (2022) demonstrate that YouTube comment sections can become spaces of political interaction. De Putri and Toni (2024) similarly show that audiences surrounding Total Politik engage with political topics through comment discussions. These findings suggest that podcast audiences are not merely passive recipients. They participate in the circulation and interpretation of political discourse. The podcast consequently functions as a starting point for broader digital conversations rather than a closed communicative event.

Audience participation can strengthen democratic engagement by allowing citizens to express political preferences and challenge political actors. Comments can introduce questions that were not addressed during the interview. Users can correct claims, provide alternative interpretations, and bring additional evidence into the discussion. This creates a form of distributed political communication in which no single actor completely controls meaning. Digital political communication research has repeatedly emphasized the participatory potential of social media. Hasfi (2019) argues that digital communication changes the relationship between citizens and political actors by increasing opportunities for interaction. Podcasts intensify this relationship because long-form content provides substantial material for audiences to interpret and debate.

Yet participatory communication can also become fragmented. Audience members do not enter political discussions with identical information, political identities, or interpretive frameworks. Research on echo chambers in Indonesia indicates that social media can reinforce political homogeneity and polarization. Khairina et al. (2022), for example, find that users can experience the effects of echo chambers without necessarily understanding the mechanism itself. This suggests that political podcast audiences may interpret the same conversation through highly different ideological frameworks. A podcast designed as open political discussion may therefore become incorporated into closed political communities. Democratic communication requires not merely participation but exposure to meaningful disagreement.

The problem becomes particularly visible when audiences selectively consume podcast fragments. A viewer may watch only a clip that confirms an existing political belief and ignore the remainder of the discussion. Algorithmic distribution reinforces this tendency because highly engaging clips can circulate more widely than less emotionally intense sections. The political podcast thus becomes part of a larger attention economy in which context competes against virality. Utami (2025) demonstrates that viral political videos are shaped by the interaction between content characteristics and social media logic. Long-form

political communication consequently faces an unusual problem: the more carefully contextualized the original conversation, the more vulnerable it may become to decontextualized circulation through short clips.

This transformation affects political accountability. On one hand, viral clips can expose statements that might otherwise receive little attention. Citizens can use them to scrutinize candidates and demand explanations. On the other hand, selective clips can create misleading impressions when statements are removed from their original context. Both possibilities occur simultaneously. The political communication environment therefore becomes more accountable and more vulnerable to distortion at the same time. A candidate can no longer fully control how a statement circulates, but audiences also cannot assume that every viral clip accurately represents the original discussion. The complete podcast becomes increasingly important as a reference point for evaluating fragments.

Digital media organizations can respond by designing distribution strategies that preserve context. Podcast descriptions can identify topics and timestamps, while social media clips can provide links or references to complete episodes. Producers can also accompany controversial excerpts with contextual explanations. Such practices would not eliminate selective circulation, but they could improve the informational environment. The principle is simple: if long-form communication is used as a source for short-form political content, the relationship between fragment and original should remain traceable. This would strengthen accountability because audiences could verify whether viral claims accurately represent the complete conversation.

The role of comments deserves equal attention. Comments can extend political debate beyond the original podcast, but their quality varies substantially. Budiyo (2015) identifies the potential for destructive language in social media political communication, including ridicule and attacks against opponents. Such communication can discourage participation by users who do not want to enter hostile environments. Political podcasts therefore face a paradox: opening comments can increase participation while simultaneously reducing the diversity of voices if discussion becomes toxic. Moderation is consequently not necessarily anti-democratic. Appropriate moderation can protect the conditions required for meaningful participation, provided that it is transparent and does not suppress legitimate criticism.

Political polarization further complicates this issue. Political podcasts can become associated with particular ideological audiences, especially when hosts repeatedly invite politically compatible guests. This may increase audience loyalty but reduce exposure to alternative viewpoints. The danger is not simply that audiences hear partisan perspectives. Democratic media environments can contain partisan media. The concern is that audiences may come to regard politically different voices as illegitimate rather than simply different. Political podcast producers can counter this tendency through guest diversity, explicit disagreement, and comparative discussion. The objective should not be artificial balance in every

episode but broader exposure to competing arguments across the podcast's overall programming.

Digital political literacy becomes crucial in this environment. Audiences require skills to distinguish evidence from rhetoric, editorial opinion from factual reporting, and political promotion from independent analysis. Arone and Putra (2024) demonstrate the potential of podcast-based content as a medium for political literacy, suggesting that digital audio-visual formats can support political education. The challenge is to extend literacy beyond understanding political institutions. Audiences also need platform literacy: an understanding of how algorithms select content, how clips are edited, how sponsorship influences production, and why emotionally engaging material may receive greater visibility. Political literacy in the podcast era therefore requires both civic knowledge and media-critical competence.

The relevance of platform literacy becomes clearer when considering political campaigning. Adnan and Mona (2024) demonstrate that Indonesian presidential candidates increasingly employ strategic social media communication to reach voters. Podcast appearances can become part of a broader campaign ecosystem in which candidates appear across multiple platforms. A long-form interview may provide the source material, while campaign teams distribute selected clips across TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and X. The podcast is therefore not necessarily separate from campaign communication. It can become an upstream content-production mechanism from which campaign-oriented material is generated. This reinforces the importance of sponsorship and political-affiliation disclosure because audiences may encounter campaign content without realizing that it originated from a coordinated political communication strategy.

The relationship between podcast content and electoral persuasion also requires attention to personalization. Social media campaigning increasingly emphasizes individual candidates rather than political institutions. Setiawan (2018) shows how YouTube can be used to construct political visibility around a political figure. Contemporary podcasting extends this logic by placing the candidate's personality at the center of extended conversation. This may help voters understand candidates as individuals, but it can also marginalize party platforms and institutional questions. Elections risk becoming competitions among personalities rather than contests among policy alternatives. The democratic value of political podcasts therefore increases when personal narratives are connected to substantive policy discussion rather than allowed to replace it.

The issue of politainment reinforces this concern. Kulau (2024) demonstrates that Indonesian campaign communication on TikTok and Instagram has increasingly incorporated entertainment. Entertainment can attract audiences who would otherwise ignore political content, but it also changes the communicative standards applied to politicians. Humor, relatability, attractiveness, and emotional storytelling may become more important than policy expertise. Podcasts are particularly suited to this hybridization because their informal structure makes

entertainment and political discussion easy to combine. The resulting political discourse can be accessible and engaging, but audiences require sufficient media literacy to distinguish entertainment value from political competence.

Another important consideration is the relationship between podcast audiences and political trust. Direct communication can strengthen trust when audiences perceive politicians as transparent and responsive. However, excessive personalization can create parasocial relationships in which audiences feel emotionally close to political figures without possessing sufficient information to evaluate them critically. The candidate may become trusted because of perceived familiarity rather than demonstrated competence. Long-form conversations intensify this possibility because repeated exposure can create a sense of interpersonal familiarity. Democratic communication should therefore distinguish relational engagement from informed trust. Political podcasts can humanize candidates, but humanization should complement rather than replace scrutiny.

Podcast audiences can also become important sources of political counter-information. When a candidate makes a claim, viewers may search for supporting or contradictory evidence and share it in comments or other platforms. This creates a distributed fact-checking environment. However, distributed verification is not automatically reliable. Users may circulate inaccurate corrections or partisan interpretations. The most effective system therefore combines audience scrutiny with professional verification. Podcasts can strengthen this process by providing source lists, references, data links, and correction notices. Transparency transforms audiences from consumers into participants in an informational accountability system.

The role of journalists is consequently not eliminated by podcasting. Instead, journalists may increasingly operate across multiple formats, including written articles, television, podcasts, newsletters, and social media. Podcasting can become an extension of journalistic reporting rather than a competitor to it. The crucial distinction is whether professional norms such as verification, correction, source protection, and editorial independence remain present. Research on the balance of *Bocor Alus Politik* during the 2024 presidential election indicates that podcast journalism must still be evaluated according to journalistic principles of independence, objectivity, and balance (Hamid, Yudhapramesti, and Bakry 2024).

The concept of balance, however, requires careful interpretation. Political communication does not become democratic simply by giving every political actor equal speaking time. Some claims require stronger scrutiny because they are factually questionable or politically consequential. A host should therefore distinguish between neutrality and fairness. Fairness requires consistent standards, while neutrality can be interpreted as the avoidance of any evaluative position. In political podcasting, complete neutrality may be unrealistic because selection itself involves editorial judgment. What matters more is transparency about editorial standards and consistency in applying them.

The digital public sphere also requires attention to unequal visibility. Algorithmic systems may give greater exposure to candidates or guests who already possess large audiences. This creates a feedback loop: popularity generates visibility, visibility generates engagement, and engagement generates further algorithmic distribution. Less prominent political candidates may struggle to enter this cycle. Political podcasts can therefore democratize access to political communication while simultaneously reinforcing inequalities in attention. Independent hosts can mitigate this by diversifying guest selection, but platform dynamics remain difficult to control. Democratic media policy should consequently consider not only access to publication but also the conditions under which content becomes visible.

A related concern involves commercial incentives and audience metrics. Podcast producers increasingly evaluate success through views, watch time, subscribers, shares, and advertising revenue. These indicators encourage content that retains attention. Political controversy, conflict, humor, and emotionally charged statements can therefore become attractive because they generate engagement. This does not mean that popular political podcasts are inherently sensationalist. Rather, the platform economy creates structural incentives toward content that is highly engaging. Editorial independence consequently requires producers to recognize the difference between what maximizes attention and what best serves political understanding.

A transparency framework can respond to these challenges through three interconnected practices. First, producers should disclose sponsorship, political affiliations, and relevant commercial relationships. Second, hosts should clarify the editorial character of the program, especially when it combines journalism, commentary, entertainment, and campaign communication. Third, important factual claims should be subjected to verification, with corrections made publicly when necessary. These practices do not require podcasts to imitate conventional newspapers or television news programs. They recognize the distinctive nature of digital conversation while establishing minimum conditions for informed political participation.

Such a framework also benefits audiences. Transparency allows viewers to interpret political messages with knowledge of the interests behind production. Editorial disclosure does not tell audiences what conclusion to reach; it provides information necessary for independent judgment. This principle is particularly important because political podcasts create strong perceptions of interpersonal intimacy. When audiences feel that they are listening to an ordinary conversation, they may lower their critical defenses. Disclosure restores some analytical distance by reminding audiences that the conversation is produced within institutional, commercial, and political contexts.

The broader implication is that political podcasts should be understood as participatory electoral infrastructures rather than merely content products. They create spaces where candidates communicate, hosts mediate, audiences respond,

and fragments circulate across platforms. Their democratic significance therefore emerges from the relationships among these actors. When the relationships are transparent and substantively oriented, podcasts can enrich political debate by providing context and encouraging engagement. When they are dominated by promotion, personalization, commercial incentives, or polarization, the same infrastructure can reproduce weaknesses already present in digital political communication.

The transformation of public debate through podcasts ultimately depends on whether long-form communication can maintain its contextual richness after entering a fragmented platform environment. The complete conversation offers opportunities for political learning, while short clips offer opportunities for rapid political mobilization. Democratic communication requires connecting these two levels rather than allowing one to completely replace the other. Political podcast producers can contribute by preserving access to complete episodes, providing contextual descriptions, identifying sources, and correcting misleading interpretations. Audiences can contribute through critical engagement rather than simple sharing. The result would be a digital political environment in which speed and context coexist rather than compete absolutely.

Conclusion

Political podcasts have transformed Indonesian electoral discourse by expanding the temporal, narrative, and interactive possibilities of political communication. Unlike short campaign advertisements, long-form conversations allow political actors to elaborate policy positions, explain personal experiences, respond to questions, and construct political identities through interaction. The format can consequently strengthen political engagement and provide voters with richer contextual information. However, the study demonstrates that communicative length should not be confused with democratic quality. The political value of a podcast depends on the quality of questioning, evidence, editorial independence, and audience interaction. Podcasts become democratically valuable when extended communication produces greater opportunities for political understanding rather than merely creating longer forms of political promotion.

The second major conclusion concerns the transformation of political mediation. Podcasts do not eliminate gatekeepers; they redistribute gatekeeping power to hosts, producers, media organizations, influencers, and digital platforms. Hosts increasingly function as political intermediaries whose selection of guests, framing of questions, conversational responses, and editorial practices shape electoral discourse. At the same time, podcasts blur the boundaries between journalism, commentary, entertainment, political branding, and commercial communication. This hybridization is not inherently detrimental to democracy, but it requires greater transparency. Disclosure of sponsorship and political affiliation, clear editorial positioning, substantive questioning, and factual verification are

necessary conditions for ensuring that perceived conversational intimacy does not obscure the persuasive interests underlying political communication.

Future research should move from qualitative analysis of podcast discourse toward comparative empirical studies examining audience interpretation and electoral consequences. Subsequent research could compare journalist-produced, independent, influencer-led, and candidate-owned podcasts to determine how ownership and production structures affect political framing and credibility. Research should also investigate how long-form episodes are transformed into short-form clips on TikTok, Instagram, and other platforms, including whether decontextualized excerpts have greater electoral influence than complete episodes. Audience research is equally necessary to determine whether podcast consumption actually improves political knowledge, increases political participation, strengthens candidate trust, or instead reinforces partisan identification. Such research would provide a stronger empirical foundation for understanding political podcasts as an emerging component of Indonesia's hybrid democratic media system.

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