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## **Semiotic Analysis and Cultural Elements In The Communication Style of Prabowo Subianto and Anies Baswedan In The 2024 Presidential Debate, Third Session**

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**Abstract:** This study aims to analyze the political communication styles of two Indonesian presidential candidates, Prabowo Subianto and Anies Baswedan, during the third presidential debate of the 2024 election. Using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, and using a descriptive qualitative. This study explores the verbal and nonverbal signs presented in the context of Indonesian communication culture. The findings show that Anies Baswedan tends to use a low-context communication style, characterized by rational argumentation, academic diction, and emotional analogies. In contrast, Prabowo Subianto adopts a high-context communication style, rich in symbols, nonverbal expressions, and nationalist narratives rooted in collective culture. These political figures not only demonstrate personal communication strategies but also reflect the cultural heritage embedded in people's perceptions of leadership in Indonesia. Symbols such as "gemoy" associated with Prabowo and "Abah" with Anies illustrate their efforts to foster closeness to the public through representations of popular and traditional culture. Thus, this study confirms that political communication in debates cannot be separated from the cultural dimensions that shape the meaning and public perception of national leadership.

**Keyword:** Communication Style, Semiotics, Roland Barthes, Communication Culture, Prabowo, Anies Baswedan

### **INTRODUCTION**

The general election, particularly the 2024 Indonesian presidential election (Pilpres), marks a significant moment in Indonesia's democratic development. It also serves as a space for the construction of political identity and symbolic representation, allowing candidates to establish emotional connections with the public (Sutrisno et al., 2024). This assertion is supported by the study of Sutrisno et al. (2024), which found that cultural elements embedded in debate rhetoric can generate emotional resonance toward political figures.

In the context of communication culture, Indonesia is recognized as a high-context society (Hall, 1976), characterized by communication that relies on nonverbal cues, cultural symbols, and implicit meanings. However, with the advancement of urbanization, education, and technological access, there has also been a growing tendency toward low-context behavior, where messages are conveyed more explicitly and logically (Brown & Yule, 1988; Jike et al., 2024). These two communication styles interact, forming a complex and dynamic political communication landscape, particularly evident in formal debates.

Prabowo Subianto and Anies Baswedan, as presidential candidates, demonstrated two contrasting communication strategies in the third 2024 presidential debate, which focused on defense, security, and international relations. Prabowo represented a high-context approach, utilizing symbols of power, dominant gestures, and nationalistic diction to convey collective symbolic messages (Yarnis & Muksin, 2024). Anies, on the other hand, adopted a low-context strategy, relying on logical structure, quantitative data, and emotional analogies to build credibility and connect with the audience through rational discourse (Dawam et al., 2024).

The debate was not only filled with technocratic arguments but was also colored by cultural expressions, such as the use of nicknames like “*gemoy*” for Prabowo and “*Abah*” or “*the owl*” for Anies. These nicknames functioned as branding tools, reducing the social distance between the elite and the general public, while also leveraging digital dynamics and memes as elements of modern political communication (Yarnis & Muksin, 2024).

Cloke and Vreese (2024) emphasize that public debates act as cultural stages, where gestures, clothing styles, speech tones, and diction are deliberately crafted to convey particular cultural identities. Individuals with academic backgrounds, such as Anies, are more likely to use scientific language and composed gestures, whereas military figures like Prabowo tend to emphasize dominant expressions and symbolic language that evoke heroic narratives and authority (Cloke & Vreese, 2024).

Moreover, the digitalization of political communication has become increasingly relevant. Mashfud and Nugroho (2024), in their analysis of public comments on social media platforms such as YouTube and Twitter, observed sharp polarization. These comments reflect how the public interprets communication styles—whether perceived as intellectualism, familiarity, or aggressiveness (Mashfud & Nugroho, 2024).

To understand the layers of verbal and nonverbal meanings, this study adopts Roland Barthes’ semiotic framework (1967), which categorizes signs into three levels: denotative, connotative, and myth-making through cultural repetition. To enrich the analysis, the study addresses all three levels. Each candidate employs a distinct cultural signification framework: Prabowo evokes the myth of symbolic leadership focused on strength and collective nationalism, while Anies constructs the myth of rational, humanistic, and modest leadership (Hasanah & Hidayat, 2020; Sutrisno et al., 2024).

In political communication studies, understanding communication style and the construction of meaning is fundamental to analyzing the communicative behavior of public figures, especially in the context of presidential debates. Communication style cannot be separated from social and cultural contexts, as it does not merely convey literal information but also reflects values, ideologies, and political identity strategies of the communicator (Mulyana, 2006). Every verbal and nonverbal expression results from the interaction between individual personality, social positioning, and cultural expectations embedded in the society where communication occurs (Watzlawick et al., 2011).

### **The Concept of Communication Style in Politics**

According to Norton (1978), communication style refers to a distinctive pattern of behavior used by individuals during interaction, including elements such as speech rate, intensity, vocal intonation, and language style. In political contexts, communication style is

often employed to shape personal character, express authority, and foster closeness with constituents (Saputra & Sulistyowati, 2022). Communication style is not fixed; it can be reconstructed based on the demands of the situation and the target audience. In political debate settings, for instance, candidates often adapt their styles to highlight leadership, intellectual capacity, or emotional affinity with the public (Putri & Santosa, 2019).

Communication style in debates can be broadly classified into two poles, based on Edward T. Hall's (1976) theory: high-context and low-context communication styles. High-context communication relies heavily on implicit meanings, conveyed through symbols, gestures, and pre-established social relationships. This style is commonly found in Asian societies, including Indonesia, which tend to have hierarchical and collectivist social structures. In contrast, low-context communication depends on explicit, logical, and direct verbal messages—typically associated with Western cultures that emphasize individualism and egalitarianism (Hall, 1976).

### **Roland Barthes' Semiotic Approach**

To examine how communication style functions as a symbolic tool, this study draws on Roland Barthes' theory of semiotics. Barthes divides signs into three levels of meaning:

1. Denotation: The literal or direct meaning of a sign (e.g., a word, image, or gesture).
2. Connotation: Additional meanings derived from cultural, social, or ideological associations.
3. Myth: Institutionalized cultural meanings that create collective narratives and are accepted as "social truths."

According to Barthes (1967), every form of communication—verbal or nonverbal—carries a complex structure of meaning. In political communication, symbols such as clothing, facial expressions, diction choices, and voice intonation are all part of the signification process that aims to construct public image and political legitimacy.

### **Culture, Politics, and Symbolic Language**

Political language is inseparable from the cultural context of society. As (Rafi'I, 2021) notes, culture continuously accompanies and shapes the community. In Javanese culture, for example, paternalistic symbolism remains prominent, positioning leaders as fatherly or protective figures. The title "*Abah*", associated with Anies Baswedan, carries a connotative meaning of a wise, calm, and thoughtful leader—similar to the owl, a symbol often used to represent wisdom (Yarnis & Muksin, 2024). On the other hand, Prabowo Subianto adopted the term "*gemoy*"—literally meaning cute and charming—as a strategy to soften his previously dominant military image. This suggests that in politics, even humor or childlike expressions can function as symbolic communication tools to reach a broader audience, especially among digital-native youth.

According to Hasanah and Hidayat (2020), this symbolic communication strategy is not merely a branding effort, but also a method for constructing new myths within Indonesia's contemporary democratic landscape. Once the public accepts a particular symbol as a representation of political identity, it transcends personal meaning and becomes part of the collective narrative of leadership.

### **Narrative, Rhetoric, and Political Identity**

Rhetoric plays a pivotal role in political debates. Candidates are expected not only to present their arguments but also to shape the emotional atmosphere for the audience. According to Aristotle, rhetoric comprises three core elements: ethos (character), pathos (emotion), and logos (logic). These components contribute to building the speaker's credibility in the eyes of the public (Rakhmat, 2009). In the context of the presidential debates, Anies appears to emphasize logos and pathos—through data-driven arguments and emotional analogies—while

Prabowo leans more on ethos and pathos, projecting a strong personal character and dominant emotional expressions.

## METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach within a constructivist paradigm, which positions social reality as actively constructed by individuals and groups through symbolic interaction (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this paradigm, meaning is not regarded as fixed or universal, but rather as continuously constructed and negotiated within cultural, historical, and communicative contexts. Therefore, this approach is particularly relevant for examining the symbolic and cultural dimensions of political communication within presidential debates.

This methodology also allows for a deeper exploration of how presidential candidates—specifically Prabowo Subianto and Anies Baswedan—construct their political images not only through verbal content but also via expressions, gestures, intonation, and visual symbols that emerge during the debate. This aligns with the research objective to understand political communication as a process of producing and reproducing symbolic meaning shaped by Indonesia's multicultural and complex cultural context (Moleong, 2018).

The type of research employed is semiotic analysis, which investigates systems of signs and how those signs generate meaning. Semiotic studies enable the interpretation of meaning on two levels: the denotative (literal meaning) and the connotative (implicit or cultural meaning), as outlined in Roland Barthes' structuralist semiotic framework. Barthes also introduced the concept of *myth*—the ideological meaning hidden behind signs, accepted socially as “truth” (Barthes, 1967).

The object of this study is the third Indonesian presidential debate, held by the General Elections Commission of the Republic of Indonesia (KPU RI) on January 7, 2024. The debate was broadcast nationally on multiple television networks and official YouTube channels. This particular debate was selected because of its strategic theme—defense, security, international relations, and geopolitics—which are commonly associated with power narratives and nationalism, thus making them highly suitable for semiotic analysis.

### Data Collection Techniques

The data collection methods used in this research include:

1. Non-participant observation, by carefully reviewing the debate footage to identify verbal and nonverbal segments that contain political communication symbols.
2. Documentation, which involves capturing screenshots, statements, and visual expressions to be used in the analysis.
3. Literature review, to support the interpretation of symbolic meaning using theories and prior research related to political communication and semiotics.

### Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic model, which consists of three levels of interpretation:

- a. Denotative: Identifying the literal meaning of a sign. For example, pointing at an opponent or using terms like "professor" or "el-chef."
- b. Connotative: Identifying the implicit or socially associated meaning of the sign. For instance, the term "*gemoy*" may connote softness or cuteness, contrasting with a militaristic image.
- c. Myth: Interpreting the cultural ideology or narrative constructed through the sign. For example, bowing one's head while mentioning the people may reinforce the myth of a humble, people-oriented leader (Barthes, 1967; Sobur, 2018).

### Analytical Procedures

The following steps were taken in the analytical process:

1. Identifying signs (*signifiers*) within both verbal and nonverbal communication.
2. Interpreting literal (denotative) and cultural (connotative) meanings.
3. Connecting the signs with dominant cultural values or ideologies present in society (myth).
4. Comparing the meanings and symbols used by both candidates to uncover differences in communication approaches and image-building strategies.

To ensure credibility of the findings, source triangulation was used—comparing the symbolic meanings derived from the debate footage with public responses (e.g., social media comments) and professional journalistic analyses. In addition, **theoretical validity** was maintained by aligning the results with previous relevant studies in the field of political and cultural communication.

This study is limited to two presidential candidates: Prabowo Subianto and Anies Baswedan. Ganjar Pranowo is excluded from the analysis as he did not actively participate in the selected debate session. Moreover, the analysis focuses solely on the third presidential debate, and thus the findings are not intended to be generalized to all forms of political communication.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After observing the third presidential debate of the Republic of Indonesia, held on Sunday, January 7, 2024, it was noted that the debate lasted for 150 minutes. The event was broadcast live by several national television stations starting at 7:00 PM (WIB) and focused on the themes of Defense, Security, International Relations, and Geopolitics.

The researcher selected four scenes that illustrated the verbal and nonverbal communication styles of the presidential candidates Anies Baswedan and Prabowo Subianto. These scenes were captured and analyzed using Roland Barthes' system of signification, by identifying the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth.



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/live/Sbjsg3AFx00?si=8tKdVocETJwOw1Td> (YT: Najwa Shihab)

Figure 1. Anies-Prabowo

### 1. Anies Baswedan:



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/live/Sbjsg3AFx00?si=8tKdVocETJwOw1Td> (YT: Najwa Shihab)

Figure 2. Anies Baswedan



Regarding the defense budget, it is currently still below 57.8 and is therefore considered necessary to be increased to around 1–1.5% according to actual needs. To achieve this, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) must be increased by expanding the State Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBN) (accompanied by an open hand gesture). Hence, inclusive and high-quality economic growth is crucial. With such conditions (in a flat tone of voice, with eyes directed at the audience), it is expected that the state will have sufficient revenue. Furthermore, concerning debt, borrowing is acceptable if it is used for productive activities that can enhance welfare and drive economic growth.

One way to expand the national budget is by increasing state revenues. Then (with a tongue movement), efforts must be made to broaden the tax base and improve tax collection efficiency to boost revenue. However, what is equally important is ensuring that unconstructive practices—those that prevent the optimal absorption of the budget—must be eliminated. In doing so, the portion of the budget allocated to the defense sector can be adequately fulfilled. Without sufficient funding, we must be prepared to rely solely on our own strength. Even if loans are used, they must come as a package deal with the procurement of primary weapon systems (*alutsista*), so that the entire process becomes an integrated system, eliminating the role of intermediaries (“middlemen”) in defense procurement, as regulated by laws that require direct testing by the original manufacturing companies.

### Denotation

From a denotative perspective, according to Anies Baswedan, the current defense budget allocated by the state is still too low, standing only at 57.8%, and therefore needs to be increased. Anies proposed three options to raise state revenue. The first option is to enlarge the national budget (APBN), which in turn requires an increase in the country's GDP

“Regarding our defense budget, it is still below 57.8. So, we consider it necessary to raise it to around 1–1.5%, which is what we need. To achieve that, we must increase our GDP by expanding our APBN,”(*with an open-hand gesture*)

The second option relates to the issue of debt. Anies suggests that the government should make better use of productive loans—loans that are used to improve public welfare and, in the long term, increase state revenue.

“Secondly, regarding debt—debt that is used for productive activities that improve welfare and stimulate the economy. That’s one way to increase our APBN—through increased income.”

The third option is to improve the effectiveness of tax collection in order to boost national income. In addition, Anies emphasized the need for the government to eliminate non-constructive practices, such as removing the role of “middlemen.” According to *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, the term *middleman* refers to an intermediary or agent between two parties, specifically: a trader, agent, or intermediary company between a manufacturer and a retailer or consumer. Anies argued that when the government allocates funds for defense procurement (*alutsista*), it should purchase directly from the original producers and support this with proper legal regulations.

If the use of loans is still deemed necessary, it must be an integrated part of the procurement of weapons and primary defense systems (*alutsista*), forming a single, cohesive process. This approach is also intended to eliminate the involvement of intermediaries (“middlemen”) in the procurement chain, in accordance with regulations requiring direct testing and procurement from the original manufacturers.

### Conotation

Based on the denotative analysis, the connotative meaning that emerges indicates that Anies Baswedan employs linguistic strategies in his effort to persuade the audience. This strategy aims to convince the public of the validity of the claims made by the politician. In this

context, Anies attempts to assure the public that the government is capable of taking three key steps to increase state revenue. One crucial option he proposes is the utilization of productive debt to improve public welfare and to streamline the procurement process of defense equipment by dealing directly with manufacturers. Anies recommends that if the government must resort to borrowing, such loans should be accompanied by direct procurement of defense systems (alutsista), thereby eliminating intermediaries in the acquisition process.

In this case, Anies Baswedan performs the function of instrumental communication, in which the communicator seeks to persuade the audience that the facts or information being conveyed are accurate and essential to understand. The purpose of this type of communication includes informing, educating, guiding, and influencing the audience's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Mulyana, 2006). In addition, while explaining the option of increasing the budget through the expansion of the national budget (APBN), Anies also used hand gestures during his speech. Using hand gestures while speaking is generally intended to reinforce the speaker's message (Krisna, 2019).

### Myth

In this case, Anies Baswedan employs a linguistic strategy in delivering his message, where the underlying myth associated with the emphasis on linguistic style is that the communicator is perceived as being in control of the discourse and attempts to convey his message using language that is most accessible and easily understood by the audience.

## 2. Prabowo Subianto:



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/live/Sbjsg3AFx00?si=8tKdVocETJwOw1Td> (YT: Najwa Shihab)

**Figure 3. Prabowo Subianto**

### Denotation

Denotatively, beyond his speaking style, Prabowo also used gestures to express his agreement with the opinion delivered by candidate pair number 01:

“Eh... I agree that the higher the position, the more complex it becomes to assess the most fundamental values. First is the value of patriotism. Second (long pause), honesty. Third (pause), integrity, which you often emphasize—that one must set an example and must not engage in corruption (while looking at Anies Baswedan) in any form. So I agree that leadership must be based on these values.”

Prabowo expressed his agreement with candidate pair 01's view while using hand gestures. However, when speaking about ethics, Prabowo subtly criticized candidate 01 for having personal ambitions for power. For Prabowo, ethics is the highest value a leader must possess:

“...Regarding ethics, yes, we must have proper ethics, be honest (while raising his finger). What we say must be the same as what we feel, and we must love the people. This is sacred to us. This concerns our nation's well-being. We must not, due to personal ambition, incite and mislead the people (while looking at Anies Baswedan). That is the highest form of ethics, Professor Anies Baswedan, that is the highest ethic—purity of soul (while gazing at Anies),

honesty, cleanliness, and loyalty to the people. Once again, we must not mislead the people out of personal ambition.”

Here, Prabowo also moved his hands while emphasizing the urgency of ethical values a national leader must uphold. However, Prabowo implicitly accused Anies Baswedan of lacking such ethics due to his presumed personal ambition for power. This was evident when Prabowo looked sharply at Anies and deliberately addressed him using the title "Professor."

### Conotation

Based on the denotative meaning described above, this analysis explores the connotative meaning seen in Prabowo Subianto's behavior. When Prabowo expressed his agreement with the statement made by candidate pair number 01, he moved his hands while speaking. According to Borg, hand gestures during speech are typically used to reinforce the core message being conveyed. Additionally, Prabowo's sharp gaze toward Anies Baswedan when discussing ethics is noteworthy. According to Albert Mehrabian, facial expressions account for 55% of the total impact of a message, vocal tone 30%, and verbal content only 7%. Eye contact can also serve an expressive function by indicating how one feels toward another person (Mulyana, 2006). In this case, Prabowo's facial expression and direct eye contact with Anies Baswedan indicated his disapproval or dislike.

Aside from Prabowo Subianto's body language, his choice of words also carried clear insinuations. For example, phrases like “don't say one thing and feel another” and his deliberate use of “Professor” to address Anies functioned as indirect criticism. Here, Prabowo employed euphemism—a figure of speech that softens otherwise harsh or unpleasant expressions. According to the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), euphemism is a mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh or blunt. Similarly, Ania Prihantini notes that euphemisms are expressions intended to avoid offense and are closely related to politeness, social norms, and cultural values (Haryanto, 2021).

### Myth

Prabowo Subianto made extensive use of nonverbal communication during the debate, particularly through sharp facial expressions directed at Anies Baswedan and emphatic hand gestures. According to Ruben and Stewart (2017:179), facial expressions play a crucial role in enhancing a person's presence. They serve as a source of messages that convey an individual's emotional state, such as joy, anger, contempt, and others. In addition to facial expressions during the third presidential debate session, Prabowo also employed euphemistic language, for example, by using the term “Professor.” This euphemistic style reflects politeness in speech, where softer expressions are used to replace words that might be considered offensive, insulting, or unpleasant (Sutana, 2012).

In relation to the theme of this research, the communication style used by Prabowo Subianto tends to follow a high-context culture approach. High-context communication relies heavily on the physical context, where the meaning of the message can only be fully understood when viewed within that context. In such communication styles, much of the message is internalized by the participants, and greater emphasis is placed on nonverbal cues. Conversely, low-context communication relies on language that is direct and explicit.

Both candidates employed symbols to construct their political identities, but the ways in which they framed those symbols were notably different.

**Tabel 1. Comparison of Symbolic and Communicative Strategies**

Aspect	Anies Baswedan	Prabowo Subianto
Communication Style	Low-context, rational, narrative	High-context, emotional, symbolic
Cultural Symbols	“Abah,” “owl”	“Gemoy,” “el chef”



Gestures	Calm, controlled	Dominant, expressive
Strategy	Academic persuasion and empathy	Nationalist rhetoric and power projection
Constructed Myth	Intellectual and wise leader	Strong and populist leader

Source: Research data

The analysis of the verbal and nonverbal communication of the two presidential candidates during the third debate session reveals a deep differentiation in their delivery styles, symbolic strategies, and cultural meaning-making. These differences are not solely the result of their personal or professional backgrounds but also reflect their respective understandings of Indonesia's plural socio-cultural landscape and the demands of political image-building in the digital communication era.

### Communication as Cultural Representation

The communication styles demonstrated by Anies Baswedan and Prabowo Subianto during the presidential debate were not merely about exchanging information or clashing ideas, but also served as a space for representing political identity. Anies' verbal communication—calm, structured, and logic-oriented—reflects a low-context communication style, emphasizing message clarity, rational argumentation, and systematic delivery (Hall, 1976). In contrast, Prabowo adopted a high-context communication style filled with symbols, emotional expression, and strong nonverbal gestures. In Indonesian culture, which heavily relies on symbolism and social relationships to interpret meaning, this approach effectively reaches audiences who are more emotionally driven and collective in their orientation (Mulyana, 2006; Sutrisno et al., 2024).

### The Use of Political Signs and Symbols

Both candidates went beyond message delivery by strategically creating and disseminating symbols as a means of self-representation. For example, the term “*gemoy*” associated with Prabowo originated in digital communities as a form of visual humor but was quickly adopted into a broader campaign strategy. This symbol connotatively contrasts with his previous militaristic image—yet therein lies its semiotic strength, creating a compelling juxtaposition that fosters familiarity and social relatability (Yarnis & Muksin, 2024).

Meanwhile, Anies utilized fatherly symbols such as “*Abah*” or the analogy of an *owl*—symbols which, in many cultures including Javanese and pesantren traditions, imply wisdom and calmness. These symbols align with his narrative, analytical, and reflective communication style, reinforcing his image as a thoughtful and intellectual leader (Hasanah & Hidayat, 2020).

### The Conversion of Symbols into Political Myths

According to Barthes (1967), communication is not confined to literal (denotative) meanings but extends into the formation of ideological meanings or myths. Here, the debate becomes a crucial stage: every word, expression, and gesture carries the potential to generate new political myths. These myths are not mere fabrications, but institutionalized narratives accepted by the public as cultural truths.

Prabowo constructs the myth of a strong, protective, and confrontational leader. Though sometimes emotional or impulsive, his style is acceptable within Indonesia's paternalistic culture, which values firmness as a form of collective protection (Suppiah et al., 2022). Gestures like clenched fists and militaristic diction—“battle,” “enemy of the state,” “grand strategy”—reinforce this heroic leadership myth.

On the other hand, Anies builds the myth of an intellectual leader capable of delivering solutions through rational approaches and subtle emotional appeal. He avoids overt

confrontation, opting instead for irony and subtle critique. In urban and educated circles, this style conveys maturity, self-control, and moral authority (Putri & Santosa, 2019).

### **Symbols in the Culture of Digital Politics**

Both figures also understand that political communication now extends beyond formal debate platforms to digital spaces filled with pop culture, memes, hashtags, and public commentary. In this context, symbols become fluid—their meanings can shift depending on the context and the collective perception shaped by digital communities.

Prabowo's adoption of the “*gemoy*” symbol exemplifies cultural transcoding—a process where old (militaristic) symbols are transformed into newer forms that resonate with the digital youth vernacular (Yarnis & Muksin, 2024). In contrast, Anies maintains a more consistent and formal image while tapping into educational narratives that go viral on digital platforms. This phenomenon shows that political semiotics cannot be separated from interactions within new media spaces. Political symbols are now not only constructed by elites but also shaped, circulated, and even modified by the digital public.

### **Communication Strategy and Electoral Effectiveness**

In terms of communication effectiveness, both candidates' symbolic strategies possess distinct strengths. Prabowo effectively channels emotional power and populist intimacy through visual and gestural cues. Anies, meanwhile, excels in logic, issue mastery, and moral appeals that resonate with rational voters.

Ultimately, the real power lies in how these symbols are received, interpreted, and re-used by the public. As Suwandi & Wahyuni (2021) note, the public is no longer merely a consumer of political communication, but a co-creator of meaning, actively shaping and reconfiguring candidates' political identities through digital interaction.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the semiotic analysis of Anies Baswedan and Prabowo Subianto's communication styles during the third 2024 presidential debate, it is evident that political communication functions not merely as a vehicle for conveying arguments or policy proposals but as a symbolic practice that reflects identity, ideology, and collective societal expectations of leadership. Anies employed a low-context communication style that emphasized rationality, structure, and data-driven arguments, reinforcing his image as an intellectual and humanist leader. In contrast, Prabowo adopted a high-context approach, marked by emotional expression, nationalist rhetoric, and strong gestures, projecting a patriotic and authoritative figure. Cultural symbols such as “Abah” and “Gemoy” were utilized strategically to soften or enhance each candidate's public persona and succeeded in building strong cultural resonance.

This study affirms that political debates serve as arenas for the production of meaning and social myths, wherein every communicative act—verbal or nonverbal—constructs collective narratives about leadership. These symbols evolve from signs into myths through repetition in social media and digital discourse, positioning the public not merely as message recipients but as active producers of political meaning. The findings further highlight the relevance of both local cultural frameworks and digital culture in shaping contemporary political identities in Indonesia. Thus, the contrasting communication strategies of the two candidates reflect the diversity of public expectations and underscore how Indonesian democracy is shaped not only by electoral logic but also by cultural symbolism and dynamic social perceptions.

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