

Voice of the voiceless: examining Bandungbergerak as local alternative media in Bandung

Dzikrifa Ningtyas Aliifa^{*)}, Ninis Agustini Damayani,
Edwin Rizal, Eni Maryani

Faculty of Communication Science, Universitas Padjadjaran
Raya Bandung Sumedang Street, Jatinangor, Sumedang, Indonesia
Email: dzikrifa16001@mail.unpad.ac.id, Phone: +62 22 7796482

How to Cite This Article: Aliifa, D.N. et al. (2026). Voice of the voiceless: examining Bandungbergerak as local alternative media in Bandung. *Jurnal Studi Komunikasi*, 10(1). doi: 10.25139/jsk.v10i1.10620
Received: 01-07-2025, Revision: 26-09-2025, Acceptance: 22-12-2025, Published: 22-03-2026

Abstract The dominance of mainstream media often sidelines the voices of marginalised groups, prompting the emergence of alternative media as a form of symbolic resistance. *Bandungbergerak*, a local alternative media outlet, consistently highlights progressive issues and amplifies the interests of vulnerable communities in Bandung. This study examined how Bandungbergerak represents minority groups in Bandung, how it curates and publishes related issues, and how it navigates the challenges of sustaining an alternative discursive space. The research employed a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews. The findings reveal that *Bandungbergerak* consistently provides a platform for marginalised voices, adopting humanistic and participatory journalistic practices. Issue selection is based on public urgency and is carried out in collaboration with local communities. Despite its contributions, the media faces structural challenges, including limited resources, social backlash and digital threats. This study emphasised that supporting a diversity of voices in alternative local media is not just about promoting inclusivity, but also about democratising media ecosystems at the local level.

Keywords: alternative media; Bandungbergerak; counter-public sphere

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, the mainstream media still plays a dominant role in the communication landscape. This is characterised by the centralisation of information production, with media discourse dominated by a few major capital owners concentrated in large urban areas. Media content has tended to predominantly represent the political elites in Jakarta and align with business interests since the democratic reform of 1998 (Lim, 2012). Studies have shown that media conglomerates focus their investments and operations not only in Jakarta, but also in other major cities such as Medan, Makassar and Surabaya, thus reinforcing urban media concentration across Java (Masduki et al., 2023). Consequently, narratives often reflect a centralised perspective, overlooking the diversity of local issues (Armando, 2014; Keller, 2009; Tapsell, 2017). This has led to a homogeneity of media discourse that prioritises popular and commercial issues with similar narratives, often neglecting diverse social realities (Nugroho et al., 2013). This constellation shows that the mainstream media isn't just about passing on information; it's also about setting the boundaries of what's considered important in public discussions.

^{*)}Corresponding Author

The dominance of the mainstream media is also reflected in its tendency to exclude marginalised groups, which often escape the spotlight in media reporting practices in Indonesia. According to the Inclusive Media Index (IMI) published by Remotivi, the media in Indonesia has not made sufficient effort to present marginalised voices. The 2020 IMI data shows that marginalised individuals accounted for only 18.7% of sources in the media, with most coverage dominated by non-marginalised individuals (Remotivi, 2020). The editorial direction of Indonesian media is currently shifting towards pragmatism, emphasising economic interests, political stability and dominant values instead of encouraging diversity of voices and public empowerment (Oktavianti, 2018). Furthermore, mainstream media coverage tends to prioritise government and political figures as sources in news reports (Adiprasetyo, 2020; Adiprasetyo et al., 2024; Aliifa et al., 2025). This signifies an imbalance in the representation of diverse groups within public discourse and limits the scope for political expression among those consistently marginalised by the prevailing power structure.

In a context dominated by mainstream media, alternative media can be seen as a form of symbolic resistance to their monopoly on representation in the public sphere. This includes various types of media that differ from traditional and mainstream media in terms of organisational and editorial structures, norms, values, news content and characteristics of the intended audience (Atton & Hamilton, 2008; Bailey et al., 2008). The essence of alternative media is not solely defined by its modest scale or its autonomous nature; rather, it is characterised by its profound capacity to challenge the prevailing structures of capitalism, patriarchy and other manifestations of inequality (Fuchs, 2010). It aims to open up a more inclusive space for discussion by providing a platform for groups marginalised by the mainstream media's coverage (Ibrahim & Akhmad, 2014). Alternative media are not only used to offer counter-narratives, but a different social order is also represented by them, which is often at odds with established social structures (Hamilton, 2000). While the mainstream media tend to cover a wider range of topics, alternative media present diversity in their own way by adopting a stance on issues considered important, either independently or through involvement in social movements or particular interests (Freudenthaler & Wessler, 2025). As critical media entities, alternative media articulate forms of journalism based on citizen participation and rooted in the community. They utilise unconventional distribution channels to disseminate information (Karasova, 2020).

Alternative media opens up space for marginalised voices, such as indigenous peoples, gender minorities, informal labourers, and believers, through participatory approaches and collaboration with citizens and communities. Alternative media plays an important role in supporting various social movements, such as the anti-war movement, counterculture, environmental activism, the rise of feminism, and other social initiatives (Groshek & Han, 2011). In Indonesia, the existence of alternative media such as Project Multatuli, Konde.co, and Flores.co have had a positive impact on the development of journalism (Sinombor, 2025). For instance, with regard to women's issues, studies indicate that media outlets like Konde.co actively provide a platform for women, support victims of sexual violence, and challenge the tendency of mainstream media to blame victims (Yoedtadi & Pribadi, 2020). Alternative media perform the function of women's advocacy by expanding women's access to information and raising awareness of various women's issues (Maryani & Adiprasetyo, 2017). Project Multatuli, for example, provides representation of marginalised groups in various conflicts while engaging in critical discourse about oligarchic domination (Achyansyah, 2022). In this context, alternative news media are not only channels of information, but also counter-discursive spaces that enable alternative narratives, criticisms and discourses, which are essential for a more substantive democracy.

At the local level, alternative media plays an important role in providing a space for discourse that reflects the reality of society, particularly in raising local issues often overlooked by mainstream media. One example of alternative media at the local level is *Bandungbergerak*, which seeks to address the limited representation of marginalised groups in the mainstream media. Located in Bandung, West Java, this alternative media is community-based and focuses on thorough journalism, giving particular attention to structural issues that are often forgotten, such as education, diversity, and the environment. *Bandungbergerak* also practises participatory journalism, collaborating with marginalised groups in the public sphere (Bandungbergerak,

2023). In line with this mission, *Bandungbergerak* strives to develop local narratives that are more inclusive and critical of the dominant structures that are rarely covered by the mainstream media.

The *Bandungbergerak* positioning suggests that this media outlet functions not only as an alternative news source, but also as a discursive arena in which marginalised voices can be articulated. The idea of a counter-public sphere, as described by Nancy Fraser, is used in this research to understand the importance of a counter-discursive space for the articulation of the interests of subordinate groups in an unequal society (Fraser, 1990).

Nancy Fraser's concept of the 'counterpublic sphere' is a critique of Jürgen Habermas's model of the 'bourgeois public sphere'. According to Fraser, the bourgeois public sphere is exclusive and only represents the interests of dominant groups. In Fraser's opinion, the voices of subordinate groups, such as women, the working class and minority communities, are often marginalised (Fraser, 1990). Therefore, introduced the term 'subaltern counter-publics', which constitutes an alternative discursive space through which marginalised groups can establish a collective identity, articulate their own political interests and formulate strategies of resistance to the dominance of mainstream discourse. Fraser emphasises that a plurality of public spheres is a prerequisite for inclusive democracy, particularly in socially stratified societies. The counter public sphere functions not only as a place of internal consolidation, but also as a base for political intervention in the wider public sphere (Bailey et al., 2008). The presence of this public sphere enables more egalitarian participation and encourages the redefinition of the boundaries between public and private issues. These boundaries have previously been used ideologically to limit the access of marginalised groups to the deliberative sphere (Acton, 2019; Fraser, 1990). In this context, local alternative media can be viewed as part of an effort to create a counter-discursive space that enables progressive discourse and fairer representation of marginalised groups (Astuti & Irwansyah, 2022; Karasova, 2020).

According to Negt & Kluge, the alternative media production process can be part of the counter-public sphere as long as the media represent and fight for the interests of oppressed groups (Sholle, 1995). Alternative media are characterised by citizen journalism, critical content, a grassroots organisational structure, non-commercial distribution and critical audience interpretation (Fuchs, 2010). Unlike mainstream media, alternative media provide space for participation and counter-narratives to dominant discourse.

Empirical studies show how this role is performed in various contexts. Harcup's (2003) research found that local alternative media outlets in the UK not only offered different content, but also employed different sources and established more horizontal relationships between producers, sources and audiences. In Brazil, alternative media outlets succeeded in maintaining coverage of local issues such as evictions, police violence, and political crises during the 2016 Rio Olympics, despite the dominant Olympic narrative (Levy & Sarmiento, 2020). In Turkey, alternative media acts as a platform for opposition groups, reconstructing conventional journalistic practices by broadening the scope of news, adopting values that are more context-specific for its audience and changing the way information is gathered (Gurleyen, 2017). In Indonesia, *Konde.co* and *Magdalene.co* challenge patriarchal culture in mainstream media by providing feminist perspectives and inclusive narratives, which are often marginalised (Yoedtadi & Pribadi, 2020). These studies demonstrate that alternative media acts as an alternative public sphere, maintaining its critical role and empowering marginalised groups to tell their own stories.

While studies in other countries have demonstrated how alternative media can function as counter-public spheres, research in Indonesia has primarily focused on national or Jakarta-based outlets such as *Konde.co* and *Magdalene.co*. Little is known about how local initiatives such as *Bandungbergerak* in Bandung, West Java, embody these principles within their communities. This study has looked at *Bandungbergerak* to see how it can show the ideas of the counter-public sphere in the Indonesian situation. This study has looked at *Bandungbergerak* to see how it can show the ideas of the counter-public sphere in the Indonesian situation. This is particularly important for articulating the perspectives of marginalised groups and creating counter-narratives that challenge the dominance of mainstream media discourse. For this reason, the research questions are formulated as follows: 1) How does *Bandungbergerak* address the issues of marginalised groups? 2) How is the process of curating issues and publishing coverage of

marginalised groups carried out in *BandungBergerak*? 3) What challenges does Bandungbergerak face in maintaining an alternative discursive space?

METHODOLOGY

This study employec a qualitative research methodology with a focus on case study analysis. A case study involves the examination of a case (or multiple cases) within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Creswell, 2017). The focus of the research in this context is on an alternative media case study, namely *Bandungbergerak*, to understand the dynamics of alternative media work. The main method of data collection in this study is in-depth interviews with two key informants: the Editor-in-Chief and the Community Programme Manager of *Bandungbergerak*. This method was chosen because it allows the exploration of the perspectives, experiences and personal narratives of individuals who are directly involved in alternative media practices, including editorial decision-making and community work.

Table 1. Informant background

Interviewees code	Gender	Age range	Position in Bandungbergerak	Area of responsibility
TJ	Male	35-40	Editor-in-chief	Newsroom management
TA	Male	25-30	Community and Programme Manager	Program management, community engagement, campaign strategies

Source: Authors' compilation (2025)

The interviewees selected for their involvement in *Bandungbergerak's* development and for representing the main structures of its media work, from both the editorial (discourse production) and community programme (interaction with the public and grassroots communities) sides. The background of the key informants is summarised in Table 1, which presents their gender, age range and professional role. The number of interviewees is not the main consideration in case studies, as the focus is on the depth and relevance of the data rather than generalisations (Patton, 2015). As emphasised by Denzin and Lincoln (2018), descriptive case studies aim to develop a comprehensive and contextualised understanding through the narrative exploration of subjects who possess direct knowledge of the phenomenon being studied. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and was conducted in Indonesian. All in-depth interviews were recorded with the informants' consent. These recordings were then transcribed verbatim, with any irrelevant conversations removed.

The data analysis technique used in this study is the qualitative coding process proposed by Saldana (2016). According to Saldana, codes are words or short phrases that symbolically represent the essence of language-based or visual data, such as interview transcripts, field notes, or documents. In the first stage of coding, researchers use descriptive coding to assign simple labels to each piece of data. This helps to summarise the main topics. In the second stage, these codes are grouped into categories, which are then developed into themes. These themes are then interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework used in the research. Throughout the analysis process, researchers also write analytical memos to record their reflections, suspected relationships between codes and emerging ideas. These memos help to make sure that the analysis is consistent and thorough. To ensure trustworthiness, this study employed data source triangulation. This technique enhances the credibility of the findings by cross-checking information from multiple sources and allowing the researcher to identify possible inconsistencies that may generate new insights into the phenomenon being studied (Miles et al., 2014). This approach validates the results from different perspectives rather than relying on a single viewpoint. In this study, this was achieved by comparing interview data with observations and documentation, and by cross-checking the perspectives of the two informants (Patton, 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Representation of marginalised groups in the news

One of the main findings of this research, derived from in-depth interviews with the editorial team at *Bandungbergerak*, is that the organisation consistently upholds its ethos of '*Bercerita dari pinggir*' (telling stories from the sidelines) by positioning marginalised groups as the main

subjects in its media discourse. This representation practice is inseparable from the editorial stance of the media, which favours vulnerable groups by presenting a more humanist and participatory representation. The representation of marginalised groups by *Bandungbergerak* is reflected in the way they construct narratives, select issues and determine who deserves a voice. Four key aspects emerge from these findings:

Firstly, from an editorial standpoint, *Bandungbergerak* was established in response to the current state of the online media landscape, which is characterised by a proliferation of online media outlets producing uniform and unverified content. The media landscape is increasingly dense but shallow in substance. This publication positions itself as an alternative media that prioritises quality coverage.

"When we founded the company in March 2021, it was clear that the prevailing circumstances were still characterised by the ongoing impact of the pandemic. Although online media increased, it became more homogeneous. Some important points began to disappear, such as verification. Much of the news only pursues quantity, but the quality is doubtful." - Community Programme Manager (interview conducted on 14 June 2025).

Secondly, *Bandungbergerak's* commitment to partisanship is reflected in its editorial choices, which are not aimed at mass audiences or popular content. The main focus is on the quality of the coverage and the positioning of characters within the narrative. This editorial stance informs how marginalised groups are represented: not merely as objects of coverage, but as subjects with voices, experiences and important roles in the public narrative.

"Bandungbergerak is here to provide a space for vulnerable and marginalised friends to share their voices, while other media (for example) cover officials as central figures, Bandungbergerak instead places marginalised people at the forefront" - Community Program Manager (interview conducted on 14 June 2025).

Thirdly, *Bandungbergerak* sets a standard for the selection of sources in its representational practices. *Bandungbergerak's* scope is determined not only by information needs, but also by the principle of favouring vulnerable groups. The main sources in every scope particularly those concerning marginalised issues, are prioritised from among victims or individuals directly affected. This approach aims to include the perspectives of individuals who are not usually highlighted in mainstream media narratives. Furthermore, they are committed to including the perspectives of women and vulnerable groups in all situations.

"In (establishing) the circle of news sources, we divided it into several circles. In the smallest circle (which must be present) it is usually the victim and the perpetrator. Then, in the next circle, there must be witnesses or experts who are relevant to the issue being covered [...] we also emphasise the importance of having women sources and voices from vulnerable groups. If there are none, we will look for experts who are women. Anyway, there must be a female perspective in every coverage." - Community Programme Manager (interview conducted on 14 June 2025).

Fourthly, *Bandungbergerak* takes a unique storytelling approach that moves beyond the conflict-based framing often seen in mainstream media coverage. Instead of highlighting tensions or sensationalised events, *Bandungbergerak* focuses on the daily experiences, life values and identity struggles of vulnerable groups that are often ignored in public discourse.

"At Bandungbergerak, we invite readers to get to know our friends from minority groups by presenting stories that do not focus solely on conflict... We make personal stories, which are more humanistic and portray their humanity. So, the approach is that regardless of what religion they are, what gender they are, they are still human beings whose lives, their daily lives, are actually not much different from the rest of us." - Community Programme Manager (interview conducted on 14 June 2025).

Collectively, these four practices illustrate how *Bandungbergerak* creates a media discourse that focuses on marginalised groups and is resistant to mainstream patterns of representation. Taken together, they illustrate an editorial orientation, source selection and partisanship, as well as a storytelling approach, which are all consistently aligned with the '*Bercerita dari pinggir*'

ethos. These practices align with Fraser's (1990) concept of subaltern counter-publics, whereby marginalised voices gain legitimacy within alternative discursive spaces. *Bandungbergerak* provides marginalised groups with a space in which to express their needs and identities collectively. For example, the report '*Lika-liku Jalan Penghayat Kepercayaan di Bandung Raya untuk Mendapatkan Pengakuan dari Negara*' (The Twists and Turns of the Path of Belief Adherents in Greater Bandung to Gain Recognition from the State)- (Muharam, 2024) features local adherents of minority faiths as key speakers, enabling them to express their daily challenges and identity claims. This also aligns with Atton's (2002) concept of alternative media as self-managed, democratic spaces, as well as with Buyens and Van Aelst's (2022) observation that alternative media broaden perspectives by rejecting the dominant narrative structure.

Bandungbergerak's production and practices

The way in which *Bandungbergerak* curates and covers issues reflects an editorial stance that favours marginalised groups, as well as a selective process for choosing topics that considers public urgency and potential community impact. Local communities are also actively involved in this process as discourse producers, making *Bandungbergerak* a collaborative platform that has prioritised public interest and strengthened the narratives of vulnerable groups.

One of the key aspects of the production process is how *Bandungbergerak* decides which issues to raise. As a local alternative media platform, *Bandungbergerak* has paid particular attention to diversity issues that are often marginalised by the mainstream media. Its focus is not only on daily events, but also on structural issues that are often overlooked by the mainstream media, such as education, diversity, and the environment. *Bandungbergerak* builds close ties with the community to give them a platform to share their stories.

"Alternative media, because of its small scale, can focus more on certain issues, such as Bandungbergerak. We are locally based in Bandung, but that's what allows us to pay special attention to issues of diversity - such as religious minorities, gender, economics, and so on. Those are the issues we focus on." - Editor-in-Chief (interview conducted on 23 June 2025).

In addition, *Bandungbergerak* prioritises issues of urgency and relevance to the public interest. Issues deemed to have a direct impact on society, especially vulnerable groups, are prioritised for immediate publication. Interviews revealed that *Bandungbergerak* prioritises urgent cases with a direct social impact for publication, such as the conflict in Dago Elos, where residents fought against the land mafia. This editorial stance is also evident in the published content: throughout 2024, *Bandungbergerak* produced a significant number of special reports on Dago Elos. Based on an analysis of articles published on the official *Bandungbergerak* website, around 29 articles were specifically dedicated to the Dago Elos issue, reflecting the media's ongoing commitment to raising awareness of issues affecting vulnerable communities. This approach is fundamentally different from the way the mainstream media operates, which is often driven by the speed and quantity of news production.

"The general criteria is that all issues can be included, but the priority is news that has a big impact on the public and is directly related to public interests. That's what we prioritise. So, what we consider first is how strong the impact is for the public. [...] We also assess the urgency of the coverage-what needs to be covered immediately and what can be postponed. [...] Bandungbergerak considers rhythm and momentum-if the moment is urgent (like the Dago Elos case), we cover it immediately, but if it can still be postponed, we will arrange the time." - Community Programme Manager (interview conducted on 14 June 2025)

Bandungbergerak's commitment to marginalise groups is reflected in its strict ethical reporting standards. All Bandungbergerak journalists have passed the Journalist Competency Test (UKJ), which forms part of the professional certification process overseen by the Association of Independent Journalists (AJI). This certification confirms that each reporter understands and can consistently apply the journalistic code of ethics, including when covering sensitive issues such as gender, religion, and minority identity.

"All reporters in Bandung have undergone journalist certification, namely the Journalist Competency Test (UKJ). Since almost all journalists in Bandung who are members of AJI also follow this process through PWI, we also follow the UKJ as a standard of competence."
- Editor-in-Chief (interview conducted on 23 June 2025).

In addition, all the journalists involved have been provided with journalistic guidelines from AJI and other NGOs and organisations, particularly with regard to the coverage of vulnerable groups, such as women, gender minorities, and religious communities. While these guidelines have not yet been fixed as standard operating procedure, they contribute to the creation of a safe and fair reporting environment, thereby preventing vulnerable groups from experiencing trauma again. This shows *Bandungbergerak's* commitment to ethical and advocacy principles.

"We follow the guidelines from AJI Bandung and AJI Indonesia (regarding journalistic ethics). But for sensitive coverage, for example, related to gender or vulnerable groups, we also use guidelines compiled by NGOs such as Setara. In addition, we also refer to guidelines from the Press Council, although most of them are still general in nature and have not been formalised in the form of SOPs." - Community Programme Manager (interview conducted on 14-06-2025).

Bandungbergerak's work is not restricted solely to providing reports; it also involves direct collaboration with the community. One way this is achieved is by opening an essay section where the community and the general public can express their opinions. The rubric is available in three formats: opinion, narrative and column. In the opinion format, writers present their personal views or attitudes, supported by solid arguments. Columns contain regular articles by specific columnists that combine opinion, reflection, storytelling, interpretation, and a unique perspective. The narrative format presents stories which are woven together in an interesting and captivating way, and which are usually based on real experiences, field observations or interviews with credible sources. According to sources, the composition of articles in the essay section is more substantial than in *Bandungbergerak's* reports, but all articles submitted still require a selection and curation process by *Bandungbergerak's* editors.

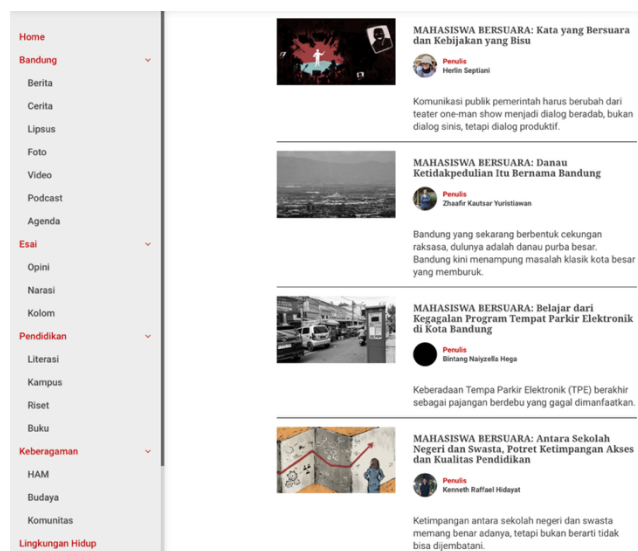


Figure 1. A view of the Bandungbergerak website essay - opinion section
Source: Screenshot taken by the author from Bandungbergerak.id (accessed on 26 October 2025).

In addition, *Bandungbergerak* is open to collaborate with communities, for example by organising training in writing, photography, and data processing (See Figure 1). This strategy is *Bandungbergerak's* way of building collaborations with grassroots communities and is in line with its principle of growing alongside the movement from the ground up.

"Bandungbergerak wants to grow with communities and audiences. We don't want to be alone. For example, through them sending writing, or learning together about photos,

writing, data, and social media. [...] For example, the essays in Bandungbergerak are divided: some are student submissions that are usually sent once, while others are regular submissions such as those from Aksi Kamisan, Lingkar Literasi Cicalengka, once a week or fortnight. [...] Bandungbergerak provides space for friends (communities) if they want to write about their activities, (and opens opportunities) if they need help with writing, they can contact Bandungbergerak" - Community Programme Manager (interview conducted on 14 June 2025).

In line with this, *Bandungbergerak* actively facilitates citizen advocacy, particularly on issues concerning the rights and survival of vulnerable groups. According to our sources, *Bandungbergerak* builds collaborative networks with groups that are often ignored by the media, such as indigenous faith groups and gender minority communities. This collaborative approach has earned *Bandungbergerak* the trust of these communities, who rely on them to report on their activities.

"For vulnerable friends, the media seems scary; they just cover it, and that's it. Regardless of whether the coverage creates conflict or the community's goals are not fulfilled. Therefore, the presence of Bandungbergerak, which covers and accompanies the community, is very much appreciated. Even now, Bandungbergerak is still the only media invited to several important events of the indigenous faith community" - Community Programme Manager (interview conducted on 14 June 2025).

This media presence in community circles increases the visibility of counter-narratives and reinforces the role of alternative media in providing a platform for marginalised groups. In this context, *Bandungbergerak* has implemented participatory parity, successfully facilitating a form of cultural participation that challenges structural exclusion in the dominant public discourse (Fraser, 1990). This approach is similar to the principles of participatory democracy, which aim to address inequalities in access to democratic processes and spaces for discussion (Harcup, 2011).

This kind of media approach supports and encourages the growth of a participatory culture in society. Furthermore, participatory media is a form of conscious and critical citizen engagement. This framework is similar to Clemencia Rodríguez's concept of citizens' media, in which participation is considered a process that transforms individuals into active participants in social life (Gurleyen, 2017). For example, *Bandungbergerak* organised an open discussion forum called 'Kelas Liar' in collaboration with *Mahasiswa Bersuara* and *Jaringan Kerja Antar Umat Beragama*, under the theme 'Jawa Barat Paling Intoleran? Cara Merangkul Persaudaraan dalam Perbedaan' (Bandungbergerak, 2025). The forum took place at Pasewakan Saka Binangun in Lembang, the centre of social and cultural life for the *Komunitas Penghayat Kepercayaan Budi Daya*. This collaborative relationship between the *Bandungbergerak* editors and the community is reflected in the forum's organisation. This relationship enables marginalised groups, such as members of minority religious communities (*Penghayat Kepercayaan*), vulnerable gender groups and persons with disabilities, as well as vulnerable residential communities such as the Dago Elos community, to play an active role in shaping public narratives. It provides a participatory space in which they can negotiate their positions and experiences within the wider social discourse.

Challenges in maintaining alternative discursive spaces

Despite *Bandungbergerak's* dedication to preserving a platform for alternative discourse for marginalised communities, it faces various challenges in the form of internal structural issues, external pressures, social resistance to sensitive issues, and digital attacks. These challenges indicate that managing alternative media involves more than just producing critical reports; it also requires the ability to survive in a media ecosystem that is still not fully supportive of freedom of expression and diversity of voices.

One of the fundamental challenges for *Bandungbergerak* is its limited human resources and financial sustainability. With only three reporters and an overall team of eight, the media outlet must be selective in choosing which issues to cover and how to distribute content. Legally, *Bandungbergerak* is registered as a Limited Liability Company (PT). It relies on grants,

merchandise sales and monthly reader donations for financial support. *Bandungbergerak* also seeks collaboration opportunities, but it has no affiliation with the government or political parties, which ensures its editorial independence. This situation is inseparable from its funding model, where *Bandungbergerak* explicitly rejects funding from the government, political parties and the tobacco industry.

"Bandungbergerak has a principle not to accept support from the government, political parties, or certain products such as cigarettes. We really try to find other ways to keep this media running. Because indeed, one of the biggest challenges of alternative media is sustainability." - Community Programme Manager (interview conducted on 14 June 2025).

On the other hand, *Bandungbergerak* faces the challenge of maintaining an alternative discursive platform due to negative reactions and social resistance to coverage highlighting vulnerable groups, such as transgender groups, Ahmadiyah and Shia Muslims. Reporting on these issues often provokes comments of rejection, stigmatisation, and accusations that the media is promoting beliefs or identities which some members of the public consider to be deviant.

"Indeed, there is also opposition from the public when we are talking about transgender groups or Ahmadiyah and Shia groups. However, because Bandungbergerak reminds readers from the beginning (about Bandungbergerak's positionality), if someone disagrees with it and chooses not to follow the organisation on social media for that reason, we simply accept that - it's okay [...] Some people comment, 'We support human rights, but we don't support deviance,' or if it's (coverage of) Ahmadiyah and Shia, they say, 'This is a media that promotes heresy'" - Community Program Manager (interview conducted on 14 June 2025).

In the face of resistance to sensitive issues, *Bandungbergerak* relies on a strategy of journalistic work that upholds ethical principles and maintains high levels of discipline. They recognised that risks are always present but can be minimised through careful planning. Every story is carefully organised; from the planning stage, issue selection, risk mapping and approaching sources, to ensure the process is accurate and safe for all parties.

"One of the ways we anticipate potential threats is by carrying out our journalistic work diligently and with discipline. This preparation is our strongest asset [...] Because we realise, many of the topics we raise are sensitive, such as: Dago Elos, Taman Sari, or issues about Ahmadiyah and Shia, which are still likely to provoke a reaction from the community. So, careful planning is the key." - Editor-in-Chief (interview conducted on 23 June 2025).

As an alternative media platform with a critical editorial stance, *Bandungbergerak* is vulnerable to suppression, which could diminish its ability to represent the public interest when addressing the issues that challenge the established power structures. The decimation of the space for the articulation of criticism and the pursuit of alignment not only reduces the effectiveness of journalistic endeavours but also has the potential to undermine the fundamental purpose of alternative media as a counter-public sphere.

"Because many alternative media take a critical stance, very critical even to the government. So, when there is a threat to freedom of expression, it directly impacts our work. We can no longer speak critically or tell stories freely, can no longer give voice to our (marginalised) friends, because the threat is too great" - Editor in Chief (interview conducted on 23 June 2025).

Bandungbergerak has encountered digital threats targeting its media and editorial infrastructure directly. In 2022, *Bandungbergerak's* website suffered a DDoS attack and was inaccessible for 24 hours, an incident which the editor-in-chief stated it was part of a series of digital threats targeting the organisation's media and editorial infrastructure. The attack coincided with the publication of articles about the ongoing land dispute in Wadas, a politically sensitive issue that often causes friction between local residents, the authorities, and corporate interests. Journalists have also been targeted directly, as have their production processes. In certain situations, this pressure can take the form of personal intimidation; the editor-in-chief of

Bandungbergerak, for example, received dozens of unknown phone calls a day. This indicates that engaging in alternative journalism is socially and personally dangerous, particularly when reporting challenges to establishment interests. To address this issue, *Bandungbergerak* collaborates with NGOs such as SAFENet to implement comprehensive safety measures.

"Institutionally, Bandungbergerak has worked with and received assistance from SAFENet. On a personal level, I regularly send my team to various training sessions, including digital safety training. Most of them already understand the basics of digital safety. In addition, institutionally, we also build networks with various parties working on this issue, such as LBH, AJI, and SAFENet" - editor in chief (interview conducted on 23 June 2025).

Bandungbergerak faces various challenges, such as limited resources, money, and social pressure when dealing with sensitive issues, as well as digital attacks. This shows that oppositional voices are not alone but are always restricted by those in power who try to limit their expression. Alternative media often struggle to survive because they don't have a regular source of funding and don't have enough people or equipment (Coyer et al., 2007). The problem of whether to tell the truth or keep going with what you're doing is a real problem for people in politics. This is especially true when politicians don't like it when the media questions their actions (Aslan Ozgul & Veneti, 2022). Alternative media often works in dangerous situations and doesn't have enough support or protection from the official department. This risk can be many things (Downing, 2001). It can be when an armed group are threatening its media. It can be when the law says the platform media can't do something. It can also be when they're very stressed because of the work they're doing. Despite facing complex economic and political pressures, *Bandungbergerak* continues to show its commitment to fairness, community participation, and journalistic ethical standards that include everyone. This shows how strong alternative media is in its fight for a better, fairer representation.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that *Bandungbergerak* is a public sphere that actively provides a place for marginalised groups to speak out, build their own narratives and challenge the dominance of representations present in the mainstream media. *Bandungbergerak* uses a humanist, interactive and inclusive approach to journalism, focusing on marginalised communities. This finding serves to further develop Fraser's idea of subaltern counter-publics by showing that participatory parity is not only achieved through oppositional discourse but also through community-based narrative strategies that are collaborative, personal, and humanistic. *Bandungbergerak* shows how groups that are marginalised can create and keep going their own public spaces. In these spaces, these groups actively shape the conversation rather than just being represented.

The process of packaging and publishing issues of marginalised groups is done in a way that is fair and based on what is important to the public and is urgent in society. When they are making their news, *Bandungbergerak* treats the community not just as the subject of their stories, but also as part of the conversation, working together and speaking up as part of their journalistic work. But these places can only exist if they are used by lots of people. Initiatives like *Bandungbergerak* can only do their job as a counter-public if they have their own financial independence, keep their editorial teams independent, get the community involved and deal with digital and social risks.

This study looks at how other types of media can make big changes by getting people involved in journalism and by focusing on the local community. This will show that they are standing up to the current dominant media narrative and the unfair way the Indonesian media is set up. *Bandungbergerak* is a local public sphere that allows groups to come together, find their own identities and stand up for what they believe in. In the context of local alternative media becoming more widespread, this finding confirms that strengthening alternative media is not only about supporting a diversity of voices but also about maintaining the critical spaces needed in a democratic society.

At the same time, this study acknowledges its limitations. The analysis has focused primarily on internal media practices and editorial perspectives. This study has not yet included the views of readers and community members, who are also very important to *Bandungbergerak*. Future studies should therefore include a wider range of stakeholders, such as the public and local

partners, to gain a better understanding of the wider impact of alternative media in supporting different viewpoints. This would show that community groups are not just ideas, but real ways of life that help make public spaces in Indonesia more open to everyone.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the editor-in-chief of *BandungBergerak* and the Community Programme Manager for their gracious allocation of time, profound insight, and facilitated access to the organisation. Their willingness to share their experiences and collaborate with the research team was of significant value to this study, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of alternative media practices at the local level.

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