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Emotional Political Branding and Hybrid Campaigning in a Young Democracy: Evidence from Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election

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Abstract

This study examines the personal branding strategies of Prabowo Subianto–Gibran Rakabuming Raka in Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election, focusing on the integration of digital campaigning and conventional political practices. The pairing is particularly significant due to Gibran's position as a millennial vice-presidential candidate, which situates the campaign within broader debates on political communication and youth electoral engagement. Employing a qualitative case study design, this research was conducted in Semarang City, Central Java. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation of digital campaign activities, and analysis of campaign-related documents and social media content, and were analyzed thematically using data and methodological triangulation. The findings demonstrate that Prabowo–Gibran's personal branding was constructed through a hybrid campaign strategy that combined digital media outreach with face-to-face political mobilization. The emotional “gemoy” narrative functioned as a key symbolic device to reposition Prabowo's political image as more approachable and inclusive for Millennial and Generation Z voters. At the same time, Gibran's candidacy embodied symbolic millennial representation in national politics, generating both enthusiasm and ambivalence regarding political competence and legitimacy. Social media—particularly the X (Twitter) platform—emerged as a central arena for shaping public perceptions and facilitating digital political engagement. This study argues that effective personal branding in contemporary electoral politics depends not merely on digital campaign intensity, but on the strategic integration of digital and conventional approaches and the management of generational representation within democratic processes.

Keywords: Personal Branding, Hybrid Campaign, Digital Political Communication, Millennial Voters, 2024 Presidential Election

1. Introduction

Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election marks a significant shift in national political dynamics, particularly in campaign practices and modes of political communication. One of the most publicly debated developments was

the nomination of Gibran Rakabuming Raka as the youngest vice-presidential candidate in Indonesia's electoral history. His candidacy was enabled by Constitutional Court of Indonesia Decision No. 90/PUU-XXI/2023, a ruling that generated diverse public responses, ranging from optimism regarding youth representation in national politics to critical concerns over political process and legitimacy.

At the same time, the 2024 election unfolded within a demographic context distinct from previous electoral cycles. Data from the General Elections Commission (KPU) indicate that Millennials and Generation Z constitute the majority of eligible voters nationwide. Given these generations' strong attachment to digital technologies and social media platforms, online spaces have increasingly become central arenas for political opinion formation, campaign information dissemination, and political engagement (Domínguez-García et al., 2025; Venus et al., 2025).

These developments have compelled political candidates and campaign teams to adapt their communication strategies. Political campaigns no longer rely solely on conventional, face-to-face mobilization but increasingly integrate social media, visual content, and popular narratives to resonate with younger voters (Syukur et al., 2025). Within this context, personal branding has emerged as a crucial strategy for constructing distinctive political images aligned with voters' preferences. While digital technologies offer opportunities to enhance political participation and electoral legitimacy, they also pose risks to electoral integrity when not governed by transparent and accountable practices (Borz & De Francesco, 2024).

Although scholarly attention to digital campaigning and political branding has grown, much of the existing literature continues to emphasize general patterns of social media use. Previous studies suggest that social media is particularly effective as a campaign tool for younger candidates (Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016) and plays a significant role in shaping public opinion and expanding political participation (Vera Hermawan, 2025). Research on the evolution of political branding in Indonesia has largely focused on shifts toward digital communication, often without in-depth engagement with emotional dimensions of personal branding (Adila & Eddyono, 2025). Empirical studies that specifically examine emotional personal branding within a hybrid campaign framework and youth representation at the local level remain relatively limited.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to analyze hybrid campaign strategies, emotional personal branding, and millennial representation in the Prabowo–Gibran campaign during Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election in Semarang City. By doing so, this research contributes to political communication scholarship by elucidating how political personal branding operates within hybrid campaigns and interacts with the dynamics of young voters in contemporary Indonesian electoral politics.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Campaign Strategy and Hybrid Campaigns in Political Communication

Studies on political campaign strategies have evolved alongside changes in the political communication landscape. Campaign strategies are no longer understood merely as technical efforts to win electoral contests, but as broader political communication processes involving the interaction of political actors, messages, media, and audiences in an integrated manner (Kioussis, n.d.). Political communication encompasses complex relationships between political communicators, the messages they convey, the channels through which communication occurs, and the resulting effects on public opinion formation and candidates' political images (Ray, 2022). Within this framework, campaign strategy functions as an organizing mechanism for managing political messages in ways that align with voters' characteristics and preferences.

With the increasing penetration of digital technologies, campaign strategies have shifted toward more flexible and adaptive forms. A growing body of research suggests that contemporary political campaigns increasingly adopt hybrid approaches, combining digital campaigning through social media with conventional practices such as face-to-face meetings and grassroots outreach (Dewantari et al., 2025). Hybrid campaigns are considered effective because they allow candidates to reach diverse voter segments, including digitally active voters as well as groups

that still rely on direct interpersonal interaction. Nevertheless, much of the existing scholarship continues to emphasize the effectiveness of social media as a campaign tool, while the dynamics of integrating digital and conventional strategies—particularly within local political contexts—remain underexplored.

2.2. Political Personal Branding in Digital Campaigns

Within political communication literature, personal branding has become a key concept for understanding how political actors construct identity and differentiation in competitive electoral environments. Political branding functions as a mechanism for establishing emotional connections between candidates and voters through the strategic use of images, narratives, and symbols (Scammell, 2007). Through personal branding, candidates are not only recognized for their policy programs and ideas, but also for personal characteristics deliberately constructed and communicated in the public sphere.

The rise of digital media has further intensified the role of personal branding in political campaigns. Social media platforms provide candidates with opportunities to present themselves in more personal, visual, and interactive ways, thereby expanding the scope of political communication. Previous studies indicate that effective personal branding is often supported by emotional narratives, informal communication styles, and popular symbols that resonate easily with audiences (Fuaddah et al., 2025). However, much of the existing research still prioritizes candidates' visibility and popularity on social media, while the emotional dimension of personal branding—particularly within a hybrid campaign framework—has received relatively limited scholarly attention, especially in local electoral contexts.

2.3. Millennial and Generation Z Voters and Social Media

Changes in campaign strategies cannot be separated from shifts in voter demographics. Millennials and Generation Z are commonly understood as voter groups that have grown up in digital environments and maintain strong attachments to social media as primary sources of political information. Numerous studies suggest that young voters are more responsive to political messages delivered through digital platforms using visual, narrative, and interactive formats. Indeed, younger generations often develop their political orientations through digital media and social networks rather than through conventional political institutions (Loader et al., 2014).

The dominance of young voters in the national electorate has encouraged candidates and campaign teams to adjust their political communication strategies accordingly. Social media functions not only as a channel for information dissemination, but also as a space for political identity formation, public discussion, and political participation (Bossetta, 2018). Nevertheless, the literature also notes that increased political engagement among young voters does not necessarily correspond with deeper understanding of policy issues (Theocharis, 2015). This condition highlights an inherent tension between the symbolic representation of youth in politics and normative demands for candidates' competence and political legitimacy.

2.4. Research Gap and Study Positioning

Based on the review of existing scholarship, it can be concluded that studies on digital campaigning, political personal branding, and young voters have developed substantially. However, there remains a notable gap in research that specifically examines emotional personal branding within a hybrid campaign framework, particularly at the local level and in relation to millennial representation. Moreover, many studies tend to analyze digital and conventional campaigns as separate phenomena, without sufficiently addressing how these strategies interact in contemporary political practice (Bracciale & Cepernich, 2018).

This study positions itself to address these gaps by analyzing hybrid campaign strategies, emotional personal branding, and millennial representation in the Prabowo–Gibran campaign during Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election in Semarang City. By doing so, the research contributes to political communication scholarship by offering contextual insights into how political personal branding operates within hybrid campaigns and how such strategies are perceived by young voters at the local level.

2. Methods

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design to provide an in-depth analysis of the personal branding strategies employed by Prabowo Subianto–Gibran Rakabuming Raka in Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive understanding of political communication dynamics, campaign strategies, and voter perceptions that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement (Karpf et al., 2015). The case study design enables a contextualized and detailed examination of the phenomenon within a specific political setting.

The research was conducted in Semarang, Central Java Province. The selection of this site was based on three considerations. First, Semarang is an urban area with a substantial proportion of Millennial and Generation Z voters in the 2024 election. Second, as a provincial capital, the city exhibits relatively complex and strategic political dynamics. Third, Semarang has been identified as an area with relatively high electoral vulnerability, making it a relevant context for examining variations in campaign strategies and political engagement. In the 2024 Presidential Election, Semarang had 4,646 polling stations across 16 districts, with a total of 1,239,669 registered voters. Official vote recapitulation indicates that the Prabowo–Gibran ticket received the highest number of votes in the city compared to other candidates, reflecting a competitive electoral environment and reinforcing Semarang's relevance as a case study.

This research focuses on three main analytical dimensions. First, it examines the hybrid campaign strategies of the Prabowo–Gibran ticket, particularly the integration of digital campaigning via social media with conventional campaign practices in reaching diverse voter segments in Semarang. Second, it analyzes emotional personal branding, specifically the “gemoy” narrative disseminated through digital campaigns and its role in reconstructing candidates' political images to appeal to Millennial and Generation Z voters. Third, it explores millennial representation and patterns of young voter political engagement, focusing on how the presence of a millennial vice-presidential candidate is interpreted by young voters and how digital media shapes their political participation and preferences in the 2024 election.

Data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from open-ended responses collected from 20 young voters aged 18–23, all of whom were university students. Based on voting experience, the majority were first-time voters (16 respondents), followed by second-time voters (3 respondents) and voters with three or more voting experiences (1 respondent). Secondary data were drawn from official election documents, online media coverage, campaign materials, and social media content related to campaign activities. These sources were used to contextualize the analysis and enrich the interpretation of young voters' perceptions of campaign strategies.

Data collection was conducted through non-participant observation and documentation. Non-participant observation focused on digital campaign activities across multiple social media platforms, including X (Twitter), TikTok, and Instagram, as well as relevant online news coverage. Documentation involved the systematic collection of written, visual, and digital materials directly related to the research focus.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis within an interactive qualitative framework. The analytical process involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Observational and documentary data were systematically coded to identify recurring patterns and key themes related to hybrid campaign strategies, emotional personal branding, and political engagement among Millennial and Generation Z voters. These themes were subsequently interpreted to explain how political personal branding was constructed, disseminated, and understood by young voters in the context of the 2024 Presidential Election.

To ensure data credibility and validity, this study employed data triangulation and methodological triangulation (Patton, 1999). Primary data from young voters' open-ended responses were cross-checked with findings from non-participant observation and documentary analysis, allowing for verification across sources and methods. Data triangulation involved collecting information from multiple sources, including voter responses, official election documents, online media reports, campaign materials, and social media content across platforms. Methodological

triangulation was achieved by combining open-ended responses, non-participant observation, and documentation to examine the same analytical focus. This triangulated approach minimized researcher bias and strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Hybrid Campaign Strategies: Integrating Digital Media and Conventional Political Outreach

Based on field data, this study finds that campaign strategies in Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election exhibited a significant shift compared to previous electoral cycles, particularly through the intensified use of digital technologies and social media to engage Millennial and Generation Z voters. This transformation reflects a broader reconfiguration of political campaigning, in which traditional campaign practices are no longer abandoned but are strategically integrated with digital approaches. The 2024 campaign landscape was characterized by increased reliance on social media, more personalized and targeted political communication, and an emphasis on future-oriented issues relevant to younger voters, such as digitalization, post-pandemic economic recovery, and sustainability. These developments were reinforced by the demographic dominance of Millennial and Gen Z voters, as well as the presence of a millennial candidate within the presidential ticket.

Despite the growing prominence of digital campaigning, the findings indicate that conventional strategies—particularly *blusukan* (direct grassroots visits)—remained an integral component of the campaign. This approach was primarily maintained to reach segments of the population with limited access to digital media. The coexistence of these strategies demonstrates that campaigning in the 2024 election operated within a hybrid model, combining the extensive reach of digital platforms with the interpersonal proximity offered by face-to-face engagement. Digital campaigns, especially on platforms such as X (Twitter), were found to enhance political awareness and engagement among young voters, who not only consumed political information but also actively participated in online political discourse and voluntary campaign activities. In this sense, the 2024 election campaign functioned not merely as a mechanism for vote mobilization, but also as a space for expanding digital political participation.

At the same time, the continued reliance on *blusukan* underscores that contemporary political campaigns in Indonesia have not fully displaced traditional modes of political communication. Instead, digital tools are deployed alongside conventional strategies to accommodate heterogeneous voter segments. The effectiveness of the **Prabowo Subianto–Gibran Rakabuming Raka** campaign thus lay in its capacity to manage cross-generational communication through adaptive and inclusive campaign strategies.

This perception was consistently reflected in informant responses. Most participants emphasized that campaigns in the 2024 Presidential Election no longer relied exclusively on conventional methods but combined digital and face-to-face approaches. Social media was viewed as particularly effective for engaging young voters, while direct outreach remained relevant for other segments of society. As one informant noted:

“Campaigns nowadays mostly take place through social media, but there are still grassroots visits so that people who are not active on social media can also get to know the presidential candidates.” (Informant A)

This statement illustrates how hybrid campaigning was understood by voters as a pragmatic combination of digital outreach and direct interaction. Social media functioned as the primary channel for digitally active voters, while *blusukan* ensured inclusivity by reaching communities with limited digital access. These findings align with existing scholarship on hybrid campaigning, which highlights the strategic integration of online and offline practices as a defining feature of contemporary electoral politics. In the Indonesian context, this integration appears particularly salient in managing generational diversity and uneven digital access, reinforcing the adaptive nature of political communication in the 2024 Presidential Election.

3.2. Emotional Personal Branding and the Reconstruction of Political Image through the “Gemoy” Narrative

The findings indicate that the personal branding of the Prabowo Subianto–Gibran Rakabuming Raka ticket in the 2024 Presidential Election was strongly constructed through an emotional narrative popularly referred to as “gemoy.” Field data suggest that this branding strategy effectively differentiated the ticket from competing candidates, particularly in attracting the attention of Millennial and Generation Z voters. The “gemoy” narrative was widely perceived as symbolizing approachability, simplicity, and a more relaxed orientation toward politics. This emotional framing was disseminated through a variety of visual and digital formats, including memes, cartoon-style illustrations, short videos, and easily recognizable campaign symbols that were highly shareable across social media platforms.

Informants consistently reported that such content was more accessible and engaging for young voters than formal or policy-oriented campaign messages. Social media platforms—especially TikTok and X (Twitter)—emerged as the primary channels for circulating and reinforcing this emotional image. These findings align with broader arguments in political communication scholarship that emphasize the growing importance of affective appeals and visual storytelling in contemporary electoral campaigns.

Importantly, the “gemoy” branding contributed to a notable reconstruction of Prabowo Subianto’s political image. Previously perceived as stern, militaristic, and socially distant, Prabowo was re-presented through this emotional narrative as a more approachable and relatable political figure. Informants interpreted this shift as a deliberate strategy to soften his public persona and align it more closely with the sensibilities of younger voters. As one participant explained:

“The ‘gemoy’ campaign feels more relaxed and closer to young people, not as rigid as political campaigns usually are.” (Informant B)

This perception suggests that emotional personal branding succeeded in creating symbolic proximity between the candidates and young voters through informal communication styles and consistent visual and performative expressions across both online and offline campaign activities. Moreover, the effectiveness of the “gemoy” narrative was amplified by the involvement of public figures, social media influencers, and digital volunteers who voluntarily reproduced and circulated campaign content. This indicates that personal branding during the 2024 election was not solely orchestrated by official campaign teams but also evolved organically through participatory dynamics within digital supporter communities.

3.3. Youth Representation, Digital Political Engagement, and Ambivalent Voter Perceptions

The study further reveals that the presence of **Gibran Rakabuming Raka** as a millennial vice-presidential candidate was widely perceived by young voters as a form of generational representation in national political contestation. Field data show that Gibran’s age distinction relative to other candidates attracted the attention of Millennial and Generation Z voters and generated expectations of renewed political communication styles and policy agendas more attuned to youth concerns. This sentiment is reflected in one informant’s statement:

“As a young person, I feel represented, but I still expect leaders to genuinely have the capacity—not just be young.” (Informant C)

This response illustrates that generational representation was largely understood in symbolic terms, while simultaneously accompanied by rational expectations regarding competence, experience, and leadership quality. Age alone was not regarded as a sufficient basis for political support.

At the same time, the findings highlight ambivalent perceptions among young voters. While Gibran’s candidacy was viewed as an opportunity for greater youth representation, it also elicited skepticism concerning political competence and the legitimacy of the nomination process. Some informants explicitly linked these concerns to public controversies surrounding Constitutional Court of Indonesia Decision No. 90/PUU-XXI/2023, which enabled his candidacy. This ambivalence suggests that generational representation does not automatically translate into political legitimacy in the absence of perceived independence, merit, and institutional credibility.

The findings also demonstrate that young voters' political engagement during the 2024 election was predominantly mediated through digital spaces. Informants reported that Millennials and Gen Z primarily accessed political information via social media and short-form digital content, such as brief videos, memes, and viral campaign narratives. This mode of engagement fostered high levels of online political participation, including discussion, critique, support, and content redistribution. However, such engagement was not always accompanied by in-depth understanding of policy platforms.

Taken together, these findings indicate that political participation among Millennial and Generation Z voters in the 2024 election was highly active in digital terms but remained strongly influenced by imagery, symbols, and generational representation rather than systematic policy evaluation. Digital media thus functioned not merely as channels of political information, but as central arenas for the formation of political identity and preference among young voters. This dynamic underscores the growing significance of affective and representational politics in shaping youth engagement within contemporary electoral democracies.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election represents a significant transformation in political communication, particularly through the adoption of hybrid campaign strategies that integrate digital media with conventional political practices. These results reinforce the argument that digitalization does not fully replace traditional forms of political engagement but instead complements them in reaching heterogeneous voter segments. Digital campaigns proved effective in engaging Millennial and Generation Z voters, who are commonly characterized as digital natives. At the same time, the persistence of *blusukan* (grassroots, face-to-face outreach) underscores the continued relevance of interpersonal political communication, especially for communities with limited access to digital technologies. This finding aligns with prior studies emphasizing that campaign effectiveness in developing democracies is shaped by candidates' capacity to combine modern communication tools with locally embedded political practices (Bracciale & Cepernich, 2018).

The discussion of the "gemoy" personal branding strategy further demonstrates that contemporary political campaigns increasingly rely on emotional and symbolic dimensions in constructing candidate images. Rather than functioning solely as a differentiation strategy, emotional branding serves as a mechanism for reconstructing political identity to align with the cultural preferences of younger voters. The use of memes, cartoon-style visuals, and lighthearted narratives reflects a shift from programmatic, policy-centered communication toward affective political communication. These findings support arguments that political personal branding becomes more effective when embedded in popular culture and digital communication practices, particularly among younger voters who tend to respond more strongly to visual cues and simplified narratives (Izzeldin Malik, 2011). Informants' perceptions of the "gemoy" campaign as relaxed and approachable suggest that emotional branding operates not only as a campaign tactic, but also as an adaptive response to the affective orientations of Millennial and Generation Z voters in digital environments.

The presence of Gibran Rakabuming Raka as a millennial political figure reflects an effort to symbolically represent younger generations within national politics. However, the findings reveal that symbolic representation alone does not automatically generate strong political legitimacy. While young voters expressed a sense of generational representation, they simultaneously articulated critical assessments of candidates' competence and the nomination process. Moreover, political participation among Millennial and Gen Z voters during the 2024 election was largely digitally mediated and highly active online, yet not consistently oriented toward substantive policy evaluation. This pattern highlights a paradox of digital political participation: high levels of online engagement do not necessarily correspond with deeper political understanding. Social media thus functions not only as an information channel, but also as a key arena for shaping political identity and preference through imagery, symbols, and affective cues. These findings suggest that youth representation in contemporary campaigns is inherently ambivalent—capable of fostering emotional proximity while remaining contingent on perceptions of competence, leadership capacity, and political autonomy.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the personal branding strategy of the Prabowo Subianto–Gibran Rakabuming Raka ticket in Indonesia’s 2024 Presidential Election was constructed through a hybrid campaign model that integrated digital media with conventional campaign practices. This integration enabled the candidates to engage diverse voter segments, particularly Millennial and Generation Z voters active in digital spaces, while maintaining interpersonal proximity with communities facing limited access to digital technologies. The findings confirm that emotional personal branding, articulated through the “gemoy” narrative, played a central role in reconstructing Prabowo Subianto’s political image as more inclusive, approachable, and relevant to younger voters. This narrative functioned not only as a strategy of candidate differentiation, but also as a medium for fostering affective closeness, amplified by the participation of digital communities, volunteers, and social media influencers.

Furthermore, the presence of Gibran Rakabuming Raka as a millennial vice-presidential candidate created symbolic representation of youth within national political contestation. However, the study also reveals ambivalent perceptions among young voters, indicating that generational representation does not automatically translate into political legitimacy without accompanying perceptions of competence, independence, and leadership capacity. Political participation among Millennial and Generation Z voters in the 2024 election was predominantly digitally active, yet remained more strongly influenced by imagery, symbols, and visual narratives than by systematic policy evaluation.

Conceptually, this study contributes to political communication scholarship by underscoring that the effectiveness of personal branding in contemporary elections is not determined solely by the intensity of digital campaigning. Rather, it depends on candidates’ ability to manage the interaction between digital strategies, conventional political practices, and the dynamics of generational representation. These findings open avenues for future research to further examine the long-term implications of emotionally driven, digitally mediated campaigns for democratic quality and voter behavior in Indonesia and other emerging democracies.

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