

POLITICAL BRANDING STRATEGY OF RANO KARNO THROUGH THE TIKTOK ACCOUNT @H.RANOKARNO DURING THE 2024 JAKARTA REGIONAL ELECTION

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Abstract. Political branding has become an increasingly important strategy in digital political communication, particularly on algorithm-driven social media platforms such as TikTok. This study aims to analyze the political branding strategy employed by Rano Karno through the TikTok account @h.ranokarno during the 2024 Jakarta Regional Election campaign. A qualitative approach with a netnographic method was adopted. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with five key informants and digital observation of campaign content, while audience responses were examined through the analysis of 1,563 TikTok comments using RapidMiner. The analysis was guided by the Political Branding framework proposed by Pich and Newman (2021), encompassing the dimensions of tangible, intangible, brand trinity, and symbolic communication and trust. The findings reveal that Rano Karno's long-established "Si Doel" persona functioned as the dominant intangible asset, strengthening his emotional connection with audiences while reinforcing Betawi cultural identity through authentic visual representation. The strategy also deliberately reduced the visibility of party branding in favor of strengthening leader branding and delivering policy messages through interactive and entertaining content. Audience comment analysis further indicates that responses associated with the intangible dimension (7.7%) were substantially more prevalent than those related to the tangible dimension (2.2%), highlighting the greater influence of symbolic identity and personal authenticity in shaping public engagement. This study concludes that effective political branding on TikTok depends not only on symbolic communication but also on the authenticity of content and the candidate's ability to adapt personal identity to the communicative culture of the platform, thereby extending the applicability of the Political Branding framework within contemporary digital political campaigns.

Keywords: Political Branding; TikTok; Regional Election; Digital Political Communication; Political Campaign

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed political communication by shifting campaign practices from conventional mass media toward interactive digital platforms. Social media is no longer merely a channel for disseminating political messages but has evolved into a strategic arena where political identities are constructed, public narratives are negotiated, and relationships between political actors and citizens are continuously developed through participatory communication. This transformation has altered the logic of political campaigning, requiring candidates not only to communicate political programs but also to establish authentic, emotionally engaging, and recognizable political identities within increasingly competitive digital environments [1][2][3]. Consequently, political branding has become an essential component of contemporary political communication, enabling candidates to differentiate themselves while strengthening public trust and voter engagement.

Among the various social media platforms, TikTok has emerged as one of the most influential platforms for political communication in Indonesia. Unlike conventional social networking platforms that primarily depend on follower networks, TikTok employs an algorithm-driven recommendation system through its For You Page (FYP), allowing content to be distributed according to users' viewing behaviour, interaction patterns, and engagement rather than existing social relationships[4]. This algorithmic mechanism substantially changes the dynamics of political communication because campaign messages can rapidly reach broader audiences beyond established supporter communities. As a result, political actors increasingly compete not only through persuasive political messages but also through visual storytelling, emotional narratives, entertainment-oriented content, and audience interaction that are more compatible with TikTok's platform logic[3].

Indonesia represents one of the largest TikTok markets globally. According to Dataloka, Indonesia recorded approximately 126.8 million TikTok users aged over 18 years

during the 2024 electoral period, exceeding the number of Instagram users within the same demographic category. Similarly, the Digital 2024 Indonesia Report published by We Are Social and Meltwater identifies TikTok as one of the country's most actively used social media platforms, indicating its growing importance in shaping information consumption and public communication. The rapid expansion of TikTok usage demonstrates that the platform has evolved beyond entertainment purposes into a strategic digital space where political communication, public opinion, and civic engagement increasingly occur.

Unlike many politicians whose public image is primarily developed through long political careers, Rano Karno entered the Jakarta Regional Election with a strong symbolic identity established through his portrayal of "Si Doel" in the television series *Si Doel Anak Sekolahan*. Over several decades, this character evolved beyond popular entertainment into a cultural symbol associated with simplicity, authenticity, and Betawi identity[6]. Rather than abandoning this symbolic identity during the election campaign, Rano Karno strategically adapted it into digital political communication by integrating nostalgic narratives, local cultural values, and everyday interactions within TikTok content. This adaptation demonstrates that political branding in digital environments extends beyond promoting political programs; it also involves transforming cultural symbols and collective memories into communicative resources capable of strengthening emotional attachment and public recognition among voters[7][8].

The present study adopts the Political Branding framework proposed by Pich and Newman, which conceptualizes political branding as the strategic application of branding principles within political competition[9]. Unlike personal branding, which primarily focuses on the characteristics and image of individual political figures, Political Branding offers a more comprehensive analytical perspective by integrating multiple dimensions that collectively shape voters' perceptions. The framework consists of four interconnected dimensions, namely Tangible, referring to observable physical appearance and campaign communication media; Intangible, encompassing values, personality, and emotional identity; Brand Trinity, describing the relationship between candidate, political party, and policy; and Symbolic Communication and Trust, emphasizing symbolic meaning, authenticity, and public trust. These four dimensions enable a more holistic understanding of how political identities are strategically constructed and communicated within contemporary digital campaign environments[9].

The growing importance of political branding has encouraged researchers to investigate how digital platforms reshape campaign communication and voter engagement. Recent studies demonstrate that political campaigns in Indonesia have undergone a substantial transformation from conventional campaigning toward digitally mediated political performances characterized by algorithmic visibility, emotional narratives, influencer participation, and audience interaction[3]. Within this transformation, TikTok has become a strategic communication platform because its algorithm encourages viral dissemination, participatory engagement, and continuous interaction between political actors and audiences,

allowing candidates to establish closer relationships with voters through informal and entertaining content rather than relying exclusively on conventional political communication.

Existing studies examining political communication on TikTok generally fall into several major themes. First, previous research has investigated TikTok as a platform for viral political communication, demonstrating that entertaining campaign strategies successfully attract Generation Z audiences and contribute to political engagement among young voters[10]. Second, several studies have focused on symbolic and semiotic representation, explaining how political actors employ visual symbols, language, gestures, and cultural narratives to construct favourable political images on TikTok[11]. Third, recent research has analysed personal political branding through TikTok by examining how political leaders construct public images based on personality, leadership characteristics, and digital interaction[12]. Collectively, these studies confirm that TikTok has evolved beyond an entertainment platform into a significant medium for political communication and image construction.

Research specifically examining Rano Karno has likewise demonstrated the strategic role of the "Si Doel" persona in strengthening political identity and emotional attachment among audiences. Previous studies consistently conclude that the symbolic representation of Si Doel functions as an effective cultural resource for reinforcing Betawi identity and improving political communication through digital media[7]. However, these studies primarily examine political branding through Instagram, personal branding perspectives, political marketing approaches, or symbolic interpretation of cultural identity. Consequently, existing scholarship provides limited understanding of how Rano Karno's political branding is strategically adapted within TikTok's algorithm-driven communication environment, where audience participation, content recommendation, and interactive engagement substantially influence political visibility.

Despite the increasing number of studies investigating digital political communication, several important research gaps remain. First, previous studies predominantly analyse TikTok from the perspectives of viral communication, semiotic representation, or personal branding, while relatively little attention has been devoted to examining political branding using the comprehensive framework proposed by Pich and Newman[9]. Second, existing studies on Rano Karno primarily focus on Instagram and symbolic cultural identity, providing limited explanation regarding how his political branding strategy operates within TikTok's distinctive communication environment. Third, previous research generally concentrates on campaign content produced by political actors, whereas audience interaction and public responses reflected through TikTok comment sections remain underexplored. Considering that TikTok's communication ecosystem is strongly influenced by algorithmic recommendation and participatory engagement, understanding audience responses constitutes an essential component for explaining how political branding is constructed, interpreted, and reinforced through digital interaction.

Accordingly, this study offers three principal contributions to the literature on digital political communication. First, it

extends the application of the Political Branding framework proposed by Pich and Newman by examining its implementation within TikTok as an algorithm-driven social media platform[9]. Second, it enriches existing studies on Rano Karno by analysing political branding through TikTok rather than Instagram, thereby providing a broader understanding of political communication across different digital platforms. Third, this study integrates qualitative netnographic observation, in-depth interviews, and audience comment analysis to examine not only how political branding is constructed by campaign actors but also how it is interpreted and responded to by audiences within a participatory digital environment. Through these contributions, the study advances current discussions on political branding by positioning audience interaction as an integral component of contemporary digital political communication.

Therefore, this study aims to analyse how Rano Karno constructed and managed his political branding through the official TikTok account @h.ranokarno during the 2024 Jakarta Regional Election campaign. Specifically, the study investigates how the four dimensions of Political Branding proposed by Pich and Newman—Tangible, Intangible, Brand Trinity, and Symbolic Communication and Trust—were represented within campaign content and interpreted through audience interaction, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of political branding practices in contemporary algorithm-driven social media environments.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using the netnographic method developed by Kozinets to examine political branding practices within an online community. Netnography was selected because it enables researchers to observe naturally occurring interactions, communication patterns, and cultural practices that emerge in digital environments without directly intervening in participants' activities. Considering that political campaigns on TikTok rely heavily on user-generated content, audience engagement, and algorithm-driven communication, the netnographic approach was considered appropriate for exploring how political branding was constructed, communicated, and interpreted throughout the campaign.

The object of this study was the political branding strategy implemented through the official TikTok account @h.ranokarno during the official campaign period of the 2024 Jakarta Regional Election, from 25 September to 23 November 2024. During this period, the account uploaded 200 campaign videos, all of which were initially observed to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the campaign communication strategy. The unit of analysis comprised visual elements, verbal narratives, textual components such as captions, hashtags, and on-screen text, audio elements including background music and trending sounds, as well as audience interactions represented through comments posted on each campaign video.

Research Participants

This study employed purposive sampling to select participants who possessed direct knowledge and experience

relevant to the research objectives. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because qualitative research emphasizes the richness and relevance of information rather than statistical representation.

Five key informants participated in this study. Two informants were members of the Pramono Anung–Rano Karno campaign team consisting of the TikTok content administrator and the social media specialist responsible for planning and managing digital campaign activities. One informant was a political communication expert who provided an independent interpretation of political branding practices within the digital campaign. The remaining two informants were Generation Z TikTok users selected to represent audience perspectives regarding the reception and interpretation of campaign content. The combination of campaign insiders, an academic expert, and platform users enabled the researcher to obtain multiple perspectives and strengthen data triangulation.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected through digital observation, digital archiving, and semi-structured in-depth interviews. Digital observation was conducted throughout the official campaign period by systematically examining all 200 campaign videos uploaded on the official TikTok account @h.ranokarno. The observation focused on various communication elements, including visual appearance, body language, campaign attributes, verbal narratives, captions, hashtags, audio components, audience engagement, and interaction patterns within the comment sections.

Following the initial observation, all campaign videos were categorized into three dominant content types based on recurring communication characteristics identified throughout the campaign. These consisted of Generation Z administrator interaction videos, community visitation (blusukan) videos, and Si Doel nostalgia videos. The categorization emerged from the preliminary observation of the complete dataset and reflected the three most prominent political communication strategies consistently employed throughout the campaign.

To obtain representative audience responses across the three content categories, a purposive sampling strategy was applied. For the Generation Z administrator interaction and community visitation (blusukan) categories, the researcher selected the three videos with the highest number of views and the three videos with the lowest number of views. However, the Si Doel nostalgia category contained fewer campaign videos than the other categories. Consequently, only two highly viewed videos and three low-viewed videos were available and included in the analysis. This sampling procedure resulted in a total of 14 selected videos, representing variations in both communication strategy and audience reach. The inclusion of highly viewed and low-viewed videos enabled the researcher to compare audience responses across different levels of content visibility while ensuring representation from each major campaign content category.

Audience responses were collected from the comment sections of the selected videos. Approximately 100–120 comments were collected from each sampled video, depending on the availability of relevant audience responses. Following the data cleaning process, which involved removing duplicate comments, spam, promotional content, emoji-only responses,

hyperlinks, and comments unrelated to the research focus, a final dataset consisting of 1,563 comments was obtained for further analysis.

To complement the findings obtained through digital observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with selected informants to explore campaign planning, content production, political branding strategies, and audience interpretations that could not be fully identified through content observation alone. Secondary data were collected from academic books, journal articles, government reports, media publications, official regulations, and statistical publications issued by institutions such as the General Election Commission (KPU) and Statistics Indonesia (BPS).

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the spiral model proposed by Creswell and Poth, consisting of data organization, repeated reading and memoing, coding, thematic categorization, interpretation, and presentation of findings. Throughout the analytical process, the researcher continuously compared findings derived from digital observation, interviews, and audience comments to identify recurring patterns of political branding practices.

The coding process was guided deductively using the Political Branding framework proposed by Pich and Newman. The analysis focused on four dimensions of political branding, namely Tangible, Intangible, Brand Trinity, and Symbolic Communication and Trust. Each observed campaign activity, communication strategy, and audience response was interpreted according to these four dimensions to explain how Rano Karno constructed and communicated his political identity throughout the campaign period.

The credibility of the findings was strengthened through source triangulation by comparing evidence obtained from three different sources, namely TikTok content observation, semi-structured interviews, and audience comments. Rather than treating each source independently, the researcher integrated the three datasets during the interpretation stage to identify consistent patterns across different forms of evidence and minimize subjective interpretation.

Audience Comment Classification Using RapidMiner

RapidMiner was employed as a supporting analytical tool to facilitate the systematic classification of audience comments collected from the selected campaign videos. Prior to analysis, all archived comments were exported into Microsoft Excel and underwent data cleaning to remove duplicate entries, advertisements, hyperlinks, emoji-only responses, and comments unrelated to the research objectives. This preprocessing stage ensured that only meaningful textual data were included in the subsequent analysis.

The cleaned dataset was then imported into RapidMiner to assist in identifying comments associated with the Tangible and Intangible dimensions of Political Branding proposed by Pich and Newman. Comments referring to observable physical attributes, campaign appearance, clothing, visual identity, and other visible campaign characteristics were categorized under the Tangible dimension. Meanwhile, comments expressing emotional attachment, authenticity, symbolic identity, cultural representation, personality, nostalgia, and the Si Doel persona were classified under the Intangible dimension.

The RapidMiner classification was employed as a complementary analytical tool rather than as the primary basis for interpretation. Consequently, the classification results were interpreted together with findings obtained from digital observation and interviews. This integrated analytical approach enabled quantitative patterns identified through audience comments to support, validate, and enrich the qualitative interpretation of political branding practices observed throughout the study.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The netnographic observation of the official TikTok account @h.ranokarno during the official campaign period of the 2024 Jakarta Regional Election identified three dominant categories of campaign content, namely Generation Z administrator interaction videos, community visitation (blusukan) videos, and Si Doel nostalgia videos. These categories emerged from the preliminary observation of all campaign videos uploaded between 25 September and 23 November 2024 and represented the principal communication strategies consistently employed throughout the campaign. Although each category emphasized different forms of political communication, they collectively functioned to construct, reinforce, and communicate Rano Karno's political branding within TikTok's algorithm-driven environment. This categorization subsequently served as the analytical framework for examining how the four dimensions of Political Branding proposed by Pich and Newman were manifested through campaign content and interpreted by audiences[9].

The findings further reveal that the campaign strategy evolved substantially throughout the official campaign period. During the initial stage, audience interaction was predominantly generated by users aged between 30 and 40 years, with comments largely referring to the television series Si Doel Anak Sekolahan rather than discussing political issues or the Jakarta Regional Election. Consequently, the account had not yet reached its intended voter segment, namely young voters aged 17–35 years. According to the campaign administrator (MW), the campaign team subsequently adjusted its communication strategy by introducing conversational dialogue, humorous interactions, contemporary digital language, and a Generation Z administrator who actively interacted with audiences in the comment section. Within approximately one month, these adjustments successfully shifted the demographic profile of the account, with Generation Z users accounting for nearly 60% of active audience engagement. This transition indicates that the campaign effectively adapted its communication style to TikTok's participatory culture while simultaneously aligning digital engagement with its intended electoral target. Rather than functioning merely as content dissemination, TikTok became an interactive communication space where audience participation contributed to strengthening Rano Karno's political branding.

To complement the qualitative findings obtained through digital observation and interviews, audience responses were further examined through comment classification using RapidMiner. The analysis was conducted on 1,563 comments

collected from the 14 sampled campaign videos, representing the three dominant content categories identified during the observation process. Prior to classification, all comments underwent data cleaning to remove duplicate entries, spam, promotional content, emoji-only responses, hyperlinks, and comments unrelated to the research objectives. The cleaned dataset was subsequently classified according to the Tangible and Intangible dimensions of Political Branding proposed by Pich and Newman[9].

The classification results indicate that 1,408 comments (90.1%) could not be categorized into either the Tangible or Intangible dimensions because they primarily consisted of expressions of political support, encouragement, greetings, prayers, or general campaign slogans that did not specifically refer to branding attributes. Among the comments reflecting perceptions of political branding, 121 comments (7.7%) were classified under the Intangible dimension, whereas only 34 comments (2.2%) were associated with the Tangible dimension. Although the proportion of branding-related comments appears relatively limited, these comments constitute the most analytically relevant subset because they directly reflect how audiences interpreted Rano Karno's political identity rather than simply expressing electoral support. The predominance of the Intangible dimension further suggests that audiences responded more strongly to symbolic identity, authenticity, personality, emotional attachment, and cultural familiarity than to observable visual characteristics or campaign appearance alone.

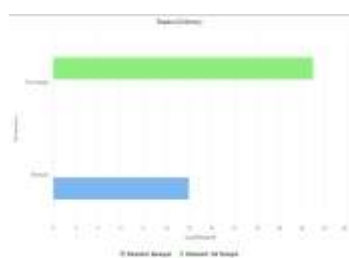


Figure 1. Classification of Tangible and Intangible Dimensions Using RapidMiner

Figure 1 presents the distribution of audience comments classified according to the Tangible and Intangible dimensions of Political Branding. The figure clearly demonstrates that comments associated with the Intangible dimension substantially outnumber those referring to the Tangible dimension. This pattern indicates that audience engagement within TikTok was primarily shaped by symbolic meanings and emotional identification rather than by visible campaign attributes. Interview findings support this interpretation, as informants consistently emphasized that Rano Karno's authenticity, familiarity as "Si Doel," and close interaction with audiences were perceived as considerably more influential than clothing, physical appearance, or other visual campaign elements.

These quantitative findings also reinforce the qualitative evidence obtained through digital observation. Throughout the campaign, visual representation functioned primarily as an entry point for attracting audience attention, whereas symbolic

identity and authentic interpersonal communication sustained audience engagement over time. Consequently, political branding on TikTok cannot be understood solely through visual presentation but should instead be interpreted as an interactive process in which audiences actively construct political meaning through participation, interpretation, and communication within the platform. This finding supports the argument of Pich and Newman that effective political branding extends beyond physical representation by integrating emotional attachment, symbolic communication, and public trust into a coherent political identity[9]. Accordingly, the following discussion examines each of the four dimensions of Political Branding—Tangible, Intangible, Brand Trinity, and Symbolic Communication and Trust—to explain how these dimensions collectively shaped Rano Karno's political branding throughout the 2024 Jakarta Regional Election campaign.

Tangible Dimension

The Tangible dimension of Political Branding refers to the observable attributes through which political candidates are visually recognized and differentiated by the public, including physical appearance, clothing, communication media, and other visible campaign elements[9]. Within TikTok's highly visual and algorithm-driven communication environment, these tangible attributes function not merely as aesthetic representations but also as communicative cues that shape audiences' first impressions and facilitate political recognition. The netnographic observation revealed that this dimension was most prominently represented through the Generation Z administrator interaction and community visitation (blusukan) videos. Across both categories, Rano Karno consistently combined casual everyday attire with Betawi cultural attributes, creating a visual identity that simultaneously projected familiarity, authenticity, and local cultural identity throughout the campaign.

According to MW, the Generation Z administrator responsible for managing the campaign's TikTok account, the visual appearance presented throughout the campaign was not entirely designed as a political performance. Casual clothing, particularly a plain T-shirt and sarong, reflected Rano Karno's everyday lifestyle and therefore represented his genuine personal identity rather than an image deliberately constructed by the campaign team. Nevertheless, several cultural attributes, most notably the traditional *cukin*, were intentionally incorporated during *blusukan* activities to reinforce Betawi cultural identity when interacting with local communities. This distinction demonstrates that the campaign strategically combined naturally occurring personal characteristics with selectively employed cultural symbols, enabling authenticity to be maintained while simultaneously strengthening political differentiation.

Figure 2 demonstrates how visual appearance functioned as a tangible political branding strategy throughout the campaign. Rather than adopting highly formal attire commonly associated with electoral campaigns, Rano Karno consistently appeared wearing simple clothing that reflected his everyday lifestyle. This visual consistency reduced the perceived social distance between the candidate and audiences while simultaneously reinforcing the long-established public identity associated with

the "Si Doel" persona. Within TikTok's communication environment, where authenticity and spontaneity are generally perceived as more credible than highly scripted political performances, such visual representation strengthened audience trust and enhanced the candidate's recognizability. Consequently, clothing functioned not merely as a physical attribute but as a communicative symbol through which political identity became culturally meaningful and easily identifiable.



Figure 2. Visual Representation of Rano Karno's Authentic Appearance During Campaign Activities

Interview findings further reinforce this interpretation. Dr. Evie Ariadne Shinta Dewi argued that the transition from conventional political communication toward informal interaction represented an important adaptation to contemporary digital media culture. Instead of emphasizing formal speeches or ceremonial appearances, TikTok content highlighted spontaneous gestures, relaxed conversations, and direct interaction with community members. Such communication patterns are considerably more compatible with social media environments, where audiences generally perceive informal behaviour as more genuine and trustworthy than highly scripted political performances. This finding indicates that authenticity in digital political communication is constructed not only through what political actors communicate but also through how they visually present themselves within platform-specific communication cultures. Consequently, the effectiveness of tangible political branding depends on the consistency between visual representation and audiences' existing perceptions of the candidate.

Audience responses also demonstrate that visual appearance substantially influenced how Rano Karno's political identity was interpreted. Informant AA stated that the candidate's casual clothing further strengthened the public perception of Rano Karno as "Si Doel," a fictional character that has remained deeply embedded within Indonesian popular culture for decades. Meanwhile, informant HP emphasized that personal interest was primarily generated by the visible representation of Betawi cultural identity rather than by casual clothing itself. These findings suggest that audiences did not evaluate clothing as an isolated visual attribute. Instead, visual appearance functioned as a symbolic representation that

activated pre-existing cultural memories associated with the Si Doel character. Consequently, the effectiveness of tangible branding was largely determined by the symbolic meanings attached to visual appearance rather than by the clothing itself.

The qualitative findings were further supported by quantitative evidence obtained through RapidMiner. Word-frequency analysis revealed that the words "Doel" and "Dul" appeared in 537 comments, making them the most frequently occurring expressions throughout the dataset. By comparison, the word "Betawi" appeared in 55 comments, suggesting that audiences also recognized the candidate's cultural identity, although references to the iconic "Si Doel" persona were considerably more dominant. The predominance of the words "Doel" and "Dul" indicates that audiences interpreted visual appearance through previously established symbolic identity rather than through isolated campaign attributes. In other words, the candidate's tangible characteristics became meaningful because they continuously evoked collective cultural memories already embedded within public consciousness.

These findings are consistent with the Political Branding framework proposed by Pich and Newman, which argues that tangible political branding encompasses not only physical appearance but also every visible element that facilitates public recognition and differentiation. The consistent use of Betawi cultural attributes throughout the campaign demonstrates that visual identity functioned as a strategic branding resource capable of strengthening authenticity while simultaneously distinguishing Rano Karno from competing candidates within the Jakarta Regional Election[9].

The present findings also support previous studies conducted by Pratiwi et al. and Aji et al., both of which concluded that Rano Karno's "Si Doel" persona constitutes an important symbolic resource in constructing political identity[6][8]. However, unlike those studies that primarily examined Instagram, this study demonstrates that TikTok's algorithm-driven communication environment amplifies the effectiveness of tangible political branding through interactive audiovisual content and active audience participation. Rather than passively consuming campaign messages, TikTok users actively reinterpret visual symbols within the comment section, thereby continuously reinforcing the candidate's cultural identity through participatory digital interaction.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the effectiveness of the Tangible dimension is determined not solely by the visibility of cultural symbols but also by the extent to which those symbols are perceived as authentic and consistent with the candidate's long-established public identity. Within TikTok's participatory ecosystem, visual representation evolves beyond physical appearance into an interactive process of symbolic meaning-making in which audiences actively reproduce and strengthen political identity through engagement. This finding extends the applicability of the Political Branding framework proposed by Pich and Newman by demonstrating that, within algorithm-driven social media environments[9], tangible political branding is co-constructed by campaign actors and audiences rather than communicated through one-way visual representation alone.

Intangible Dimension

The Intangible dimension of Political Branding refers to the non-physical attributes through which political candidates are recognized and evaluated, including personality, values, emotional appeal, authenticity, and symbolic identity[9]. Unlike the Tangible dimension, which emphasizes observable campaign attributes, the Intangible dimension focuses on the emotional and psychological relationships established between political actors and voters. The present study found that the Intangible dimension constituted the strongest component of Rano Karno's political branding strategy throughout the 2024 Jakarta Regional Election campaign. This finding is consistent with the RapidMiner classification, which revealed that comments associated with the Intangible dimension (7.7%) substantially outnumbered those categorized under the Tangible dimension (2.2%). The predominance of this dimension suggests that audiences were influenced more strongly by authenticity, symbolic identity, and emotional familiarity than by physical appearance or visual campaign attributes alone.

According to MW, several personal characteristics naturally possessed by Rano Karno became central to the campaign strategy, including his willingness to listen, openness toward younger generations, and responsiveness to public concerns. Rather than creating an entirely new political image, the campaign emphasized these existing characteristics through conversations with the Generation Z administrator and spontaneous interactions with TikTok users. Consequently, the campaign relied on authenticity instead of image fabrication, enabling audiences to perceive Rano Karno as approachable, responsive, and emotionally connected with ordinary citizens. This finding demonstrates that authenticity functioned as a strategic political resource because the personality presented through TikTok reflected behaviours that audiences perceived as consistent with the candidate's long-established public identity.

This finding reflects the Intangible dimension proposed by Pich and Newman, which argues that effective political branding is achieved by consistently communicating personal values and personality characteristics that distinguish one political candidate from another[9]. Rather than relying on abstract political slogans or persuasive campaign rhetoric, the TikTok campaign emphasized everyday interpersonal behaviour that audiences could directly observe through informal digital interaction. Consequently, political branding was constructed through repeated demonstrations of authenticity rather than through explicit promotional communication.

The same communication pattern was also evident in the blusukan videos. During community visits, Rano Karno consistently greeted residents, engaged in casual conversations, listened attentively to community concerns, and embraced elderly women encountered during campaign activities. According to MW, these interactions were not deliberately staged for electoral purposes but reflected communication habits that had developed naturally throughout Rano Karno's long career as a public figure, during which frequent interaction with fans became an integral part of his everyday behaviour. The continuity between personal conduct

and political communication strengthened audience perceptions that the campaign presented an authentic individual rather than a carefully manufactured political persona.



Figure 3. Interpersonal Interaction with Local Communities Representing the Intangible Dimension of Political Branding

Figure 3 illustrates how interpersonal interaction became a primary mechanism for communicating the Intangible dimension throughout the campaign. Instead of emphasizing speeches, policy explanations, or formal campaign activities, the uploaded videos consistently highlighted emotional expression, spontaneous conversations, physical proximity, and direct engagement with community members. These interactions reduced the psychological distance between the candidate and citizens while reinforcing perceptions of warmth, empathy, and sincerity. Within TikTok's participatory communication environment, such interpersonal encounters functioned as emotionally meaningful content that encouraged audiences not only to observe the candidate but also to emotionally relate to his personality. Consequently, interpersonal communication became an essential component of political branding because it transformed everyday interactions into symbolic representations of authenticity and trust.

Beyond interpersonal communication, the "Si Doel" persona emerged as the most influential symbolic asset supporting the Intangible dimension. Dr. Evie Ariadne Shinta Dewi explained that many citizens tend to support public figures whom they psychologically feel they already know despite having never interacted with them directly. She described this phenomenon as parasocial familiarity, comparing Rano Karno with other Indonesian actors such as Dede Yusuf and Dedi Mizwar, whose fictional television characters similarly contributed to the construction of their subsequent political identities. This finding indicates that symbolic familiarity established through popular culture substantially reduced the psychological distance normally separating political candidates from voters, particularly those encountering political content through digital platforms.

MW further explained that nostalgic references were deliberately incorporated after internal observations indicated that many Generation Z audiences already recognized Rano

Karno as "Si Doel", despite never having watched the original television series in its entirety. Consequently, nostalgic elements were carefully adapted into contemporary TikTok content without relying excessively on older cultural references that might create communicative distance from younger audiences. Rather than functioning solely as retrospective cultural memories, nostalgic representations became an emotional entry point through which younger audiences could establish familiarity with Rano Karno while simultaneously engaging with contemporary campaign narratives.

Audience perceptions strongly supported this interpretation. Informant AA acknowledged that initial familiarity with Rano Karno originated primarily from his career as a film actor before recognizing him as a political figure. This finding demonstrates that symbolic identity developed through popular culture significantly facilitated political recognition by providing audiences with an existing emotional framework through which political communication could be interpreted. Consequently, the campaign did not construct emotional attachment from the beginning but instead activated symbolic meanings that had already been embedded within public memory.

These findings strongly support the Political Branding framework proposed by Pich and Newman, which argues that effective political branding is fundamentally constructed through emotional values, symbolic identity, authenticity, and consistent personality projection rather than through physical campaign attributes alone[9]. Within TikTok's interactive communication environment, authenticity became the principal mechanism through which these intangible characteristics were translated into meaningful political communication. Rather than functioning solely as viewers, audiences actively interpreted, reproduced, and reinforced these symbolic meanings through comments, humour, and ongoing digital interaction.

The present findings are also consistent with previous research conducted by Wahid and Martianto, which concluded that the "Si Doel" persona functions as a strategic symbolic resource capable of strengthening emotional attachment between Rano Karno and the public[13]. However, unlike previous studies that primarily examined symbolic identity from broader digital communication perspectives, this study demonstrates that TikTok's algorithm-driven communication environment enables symbolic identity to evolve through continuous interaction, audience participation, and algorithmically amplified engagement. Consequently, symbolic identity functions not merely as nostalgic representation but as an active communicative resource through which audiences continuously construct and negotiate shared political meanings.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the effectiveness of the Intangible dimension depends primarily on the successful communication of authenticity, symbolic familiarity, and emotional connection. Within TikTok's participatory ecosystem, political identity is continuously reinforced through interaction rather than one-way message dissemination. This finding extends the applicability of the Political Branding framework proposed by Pich and Newman by demonstrating that, in algorithm-driven social media

environments[9], the Intangible dimension functions not only as a symbolic identity but also as a participatory mechanism through which audiences actively reproduce, validate, and strengthen a candidate's political image through their own digital interactions.

Brand Trinity

The Brand Trinity dimension refers to the strategic interaction between Party Brand, Leader Brand, and Policy Brand, which collectively shape how political actors communicate their political identity and electoral agenda to the public[9]. Rather than functioning independently, these three branding components continuously influence one another in forming public perceptions of political candidates. The findings of this study reveal that Rano Karno's TikTok campaign deliberately positioned Leader Brand as the dominant branding element while intentionally reducing the visibility of Party Brand. At the same time, Policy Brand remained present but was communicated indirectly through interactive and entertaining digital content rather than conventional campaign messages. This strategic configuration reflects an adaptation to TikTok's communication environment, where audiences generally engage more readily with individual personalities than with political institutions.

Interview findings indicate that this branding configuration was deliberately designed by the campaign team rather than emerging incidentally during the campaign. According to MW, the decision to minimize the visibility of political party attributes reflected careful consideration of the broader political context following the 2024 Presidential Election. Similarly, informant AQ explained that explicit political party symbolism, particularly references to PDI Perjuangan, was intentionally reduced because public sentiment toward political parties had become increasingly polarized after the presidential contest. Consequently, strengthening Rano Karno's personal identity was considered a more effective strategy for reaching broader segments of TikTok users while avoiding unnecessary political polarization. These findings indicate that political branding on TikTok required continuous adaptation to contemporary political conditions rather than relying solely on traditional party-centered campaign strategies.

The reduction of Party Brand did not imply the absence of political communication. Instead, the campaign strategically strengthened Leader Brand, allowing Rano Karno's long-established public persona to become the principal reference point through which audiences interpreted campaign messages. Rather than evaluating the candidate through institutional party affiliation, audiences were encouraged to recognize him through his personality, cultural identity, interpersonal communication, and symbolic familiarity. This strategy proved particularly compatible with TikTok's participatory communication environment, where users generally establish stronger engagement with individual content creators than with formal political organizations. Consequently, the campaign shifted the emphasis of political branding from institutional legitimacy toward personal authenticity.

At the same time, Policy Brand remained an integral component of the campaign but was communicated through a soft-selling approach. According to MW, many discussion topics presented in the Generation Z administrator videos

originated from questionnaires distributed among young people to identify issues they considered most relevant, including catcalling, the increasing cost of marriage, flooding, and teacher welfare. Instead of presenting policy proposals through lengthy political speeches or formal campaign materials, Rano Karno addressed these issues through casual conversations, humour, and his distinctive Betawi speaking style. This communication strategy enabled policy messages to be naturally integrated into entertaining TikTok content while maintaining audience engagement. Rather than separating political education from entertainment, the campaign successfully embedded policy communication within everyday digital interaction.

Audience responses further demonstrate the effectiveness of this communication strategy. Informant AA explained that knowledge regarding several of Rano Karno's policy programmes was primarily obtained through entertaining TikTok videos rather than through formal campaign materials or official policy documents. This finding suggests that digital political communication can effectively increase public awareness when policy information is delivered through content that aligns with the communication culture of social media platforms. Within TikTok's algorithm-driven environment, policy communication became more accessible because audiences encountered political information through content they voluntarily consumed and shared rather than through direct political persuasion.

Nevertheless, the findings also reveal important limitations regarding the influence of digital political branding on electoral decision-making. Informant HP acknowledged that although TikTok increased familiarity with several campaign programmes, such information did not substantially determine his final voting decision. Instead, electoral choice remained strongly influenced by broader considerations, including the candidate's previous political experience, credibility, and overall public reputation. This finding indicates that while TikTok effectively strengthens political awareness and candidate recognition, digital political branding should be understood as one component of a broader electoral decision-making process rather than as the sole determinant of voting behaviour.

From a theoretical perspective, Dr. Evie Ariadne Shinta Dewi interpreted the reduction of Party Brand as reflecting the broader trend of political personalization within contemporary digital democracy. Referring to the concept of connective action proposed by Bennett and Segerberg, they argued that political participation within digital environments increasingly revolves around individual political figures rather than political organizations[2]. Social media platforms facilitate decentralized political participation by encouraging audiences to establish direct psychological relationships with candidates while reducing the relative importance of institutional party identities. This interpretation explains why Leader Brand became considerably more influential than Party Brand throughout Rano Karno's TikTok campaign.

These findings strongly support the Brand Trinity framework proposed by Pich and Newman, which conceptualizes political branding as the dynamic interaction between political parties, political leaders, and policy

communication rather than the dominance of a single branding component[9]. However, the present study further demonstrates that this interaction becomes considerably more flexible within algorithm-driven social media environments. Rather than maintaining equal visibility among the three branding components, TikTok enabled the campaign to strategically reposition Leader Brand as the primary communicative resource while selectively integrating Policy Brand into highly interactive digital content and minimizing Party Brand according to prevailing political circumstances.

The present findings also extend previous studies conducted by Cahyaningrum and Zamzamy and Aji et al[7][8]. Although both studies highlighted the importance of Rano Karno's personal image in political communication, neither examined how Party Brand was deliberately minimized while Policy Brand was reconstructed through participatory TikTok content. Consequently, this study contributes additional empirical evidence demonstrating that political branding strategies on algorithm-driven platforms differ substantially from those observed on more static social networking platforms such as Instagram. The findings suggest that political branding on TikTok requires greater flexibility, continuous audience adaptation, and stronger integration between leadership identity and participatory communication.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the effectiveness of the Brand Trinity dimension depends on the campaign's ability to balance leadership identity, policy communication, and institutional affiliation according to the characteristics of the communication platform and the surrounding political context. Within TikTok's participatory ecosystem, Leader Brand functioned as the central interpretative anchor through which audiences understood policy messages while Party Brand assumed a comparatively supportive role. This finding extends the applicability of the Political Branding framework proposed by Pich and Newman by demonstrating that, in algorithm-driven social media environments, the relative prominence of each branding component is dynamic rather than fixed, allowing political campaigns to strategically reconfigure the relationship between leader, party, and policy in response to changing patterns of audience engagement[9].

Symbolic Communication and Trust

The final dimension of the Political Branding framework proposed by Pich and Newman concerns Symbolic Communication and Trust, which emphasizes how political actors establish credibility, authenticity, and emotional attachment through symbolic interaction with audiences[9]. Within TikTok's algorithm-driven communication environment, this dimension extends beyond visual representation by incorporating communication style, audience participation, and continuous interaction that collectively strengthen public trust. The findings of this study indicate that symbolic communication functioned as the integrative dimension connecting the Tangible, Intangible, and Brand Trinity dimensions into a coherent political branding strategy. Rather than serving solely as a channel for campaign dissemination, TikTok became an interactive communication space where audiences actively participated in constructing and reinforcing political meaning.

According to MW, one of the most distinctive communication strategies implemented during the campaign involved maintaining the anonymous identity of the Generation Z administrator. Rather than immediately revealing the administrator's identity, the campaign deliberately encouraged audiences to speculate about who was managing the account, transforming ordinary campaign communication into an interactive participatory experience. This strategy successfully generated curiosity, stimulated sustained discussion within the comment section, and increased audience engagement beyond conventional political messaging. As interactions accumulated, the demographic composition of followers gradually shifted from users aged between 30 and 40 years to approximately 60% Generation Z within only one month of the official campaign period. This finding demonstrates that symbolic communication was intentionally designed not only to increase campaign visibility but also to reshape audience participation and demographic reach, effectively connecting Rano Karno's long-established public persona with the communicative culture of TikTok.

MW further explained that symbolic communication also extended to the management of negative comments and coordinated attacks from online buzzers. Instead of responding defensively or confrontationally, the administrator consistently adopted a relaxed, humorous, and conversational tone that reflected the overall communication identity established throughout the campaign. Rather than escalating political disagreement, this approach maintained the informal atmosphere expected by TikTok users while reinforcing perceptions that the campaign remained approachable, authentic, and emotionally accessible. These findings indicate that symbolic communication was strategically maintained not only during positive interactions but also when responding to criticism, thereby strengthening public trust through communication consistency.

Audience perceptions further reinforce this interpretation. Informant AA explained that the presence of the Generation Z administrator made Rano Karno appear considerably closer to younger audiences. Rather than functioning merely as an account manager, the administrator became an important symbolic intermediary who translated political messages into language, humour, and communication styles familiar to Generation Z users. Consequently, campaign messages were interpreted less as formal political persuasion and more as everyday digital conversations, increasing audiences' willingness to participate through comments, discussions, and content sharing. This finding demonstrates that symbolic communication on TikTok is co-produced by political actors and intermediary communicators who facilitate interaction between candidates and digital audiences.

Nevertheless, the findings also reveal important limitations regarding the role of symbolic communication in developing political trust. Dr. Evie Ariadne Shinta Dewi argued that TikTok primarily functions as a trigger capable of stimulating public curiosity and encouraging audiences to seek additional information about political candidates. However, she emphasized that long-term political legitimacy and interpersonal trust cannot be established exclusively through digital interaction. Genuine political trust continues to require

direct face-to-face encounters in which voters are able to evaluate sincerity, leadership, and personal credibility beyond mediated communication. This finding suggests that social media should be understood as an important component of political branding rather than as a complete substitute for conventional political engagement.

When findings from all sources are considered collectively, a clear relationship emerges among the four dimensions of Political Branding. The Intangible dimension, represented through Rano Karno's enduring "Si Doel" persona, functioned as the primary emotional entry point encouraging audience familiarity. The Tangible dimension subsequently reinforced this familiarity through authentic Betawi visual identity and everyday appearance. The Brand Trinity dimension strategically positioned Leader Brand above Party Brand while embedding Policy Brand within entertaining and interactive content. Finally, Symbolic Communication and Trust integrated these dimensions into a participatory communication process that transformed passive viewers into active contributors to the campaign. Rather than functioning independently, the four dimensions collectively reinforced one another throughout the campaign, producing a coherent political branding strategy adapted to TikTok's communication environment.

The findings also reveal that audience engagement does not automatically translate into electoral preference. Informant HP acknowledged that although TikTok content successfully increased familiarity with Rano Karno and introduced several policy programmes, digital communication alone was insufficient to determine final voting decisions. Electoral preferences remained influenced by broader considerations, including political experience, credibility, leadership track record, and personal evaluation of competing candidates. This finding reinforces Dr. Evie's observation that symbolic communication effectively generates initial engagement but should not be interpreted as the sole determinant of long-term political trust or electoral behaviour.

These findings strongly support the Political Branding framework proposed by Pich and Newman, which argues that symbolic communication functions as an integrative mechanism connecting visual identity, personal values, and political messaging into a coherent political brand[9]. However, the present study further demonstrates that within TikTok's algorithm-driven communication environment, symbolic communication is continuously reproduced through audience participation rather than transmitted solely by political actors. Consequently, trust should be understood as a dynamic social process emerging from continuous interaction between candidates and audiences instead of a one-way outcome of campaign communication.

The findings also reinforce the concept of connective action proposed by Bennett and Segerberg, which explains that contemporary digital political participation increasingly develops through personalized communication networks rather than institutional political structures[2]. The present study extends this perspective by demonstrating that personalized political communication operates not only through political leaders themselves but also through secondary communicators, such as the Generation Z administrator, who function as

symbolic intermediaries connecting candidates with digital audiences. This mechanism has received limited attention in previous studies examining Rano Karno's political branding, particularly those focusing on Instagram, thereby providing an important empirical contribution to the literature on political branding in algorithm-driven social media environments.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that effective political branding on TikTok is achieved not merely through attractive visual content or entertaining campaign messages but through the successful integration of authentic personality, culturally meaningful symbolism, participatory interaction, and adaptive communication strategies that correspond to platform culture. This study therefore extends the applicability of the Political Branding framework proposed by Pich and Newma by demonstrating that, within algorithm-driven social media ecosystems, trust is co-constructed through continuous symbolic interaction between political actors, intermediary communicators, and audiences rather than produced through one-directional campaign communication alone[9].

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that political branding on TikTok is constructed through the interaction of visual identity, symbolic meaning, leadership positioning, and participatory communication rather than through isolated branding elements. Among the four dimensions of Political Branding, the Intangible dimension emerged as the most influential, indicating that authenticity, emotional familiarity, and symbolic identity generated stronger audience engagement than visual campaign attributes alone. The findings also show that TikTok's participatory communication environment enables audiences to actively contribute to the construction and reinforcement of political branding through continuous interaction.

This study contributes to the literature by extending the application of the Political Branding framework to an algorithm-driven social media environment. The findings demonstrate that political branding on TikTok is not only produced by political actors but is also co-constructed through audience participation, highlighting the importance of interaction as an integral component of digital political branding.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that political campaigns should prioritize authentic communication, culturally meaningful symbolism, and sustained audience engagement rather than relying primarily on institutional party identity or one-way campaign messaging. Campaign strategies that align with platform culture are more likely to strengthen political branding, particularly among younger digital audiences.

This study is limited to a single case and one electoral campaign, which may restrict the transferability of the findings to different political contexts. Future research is encouraged to examine other candidates, elections, and social media platforms using comparative or mixed-methods approaches to further explore how political branding influences audience engagement and electoral behaviour across different digital environments.

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