

POLITICAL BRANDING ON INSTAGRAM OF YOUNG FEMALE POLITICIANS IN INDONESIA

Jiwan Alsira Novaega^{1)*}, Nur'annafi Farni Syam Maella²⁾

^{1,2} Communication Studies, University of Dr. Soetomo, Indonesia

^{1)*} alsirajiwana@gmail.com

²⁾ nurannafi@unitomo.ac.id

Abstract

The rise of social media has transformed political communication, providing politicians with platforms to engage with constituents directly. This study explores the use of Instagram for political branding by young female politicians in Indonesia, focusing on strategies employed to maintain their incumbency and influence voter perceptions. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the research involves case studies of young female incumbent candidates for DPRD Surabaya, with a particular focus on Ning Juliana. Data was collected through content analysis of Instagram posts. Findings indicate that young female politicians leverage Instagram to craft personal and political narratives, emphasizing authenticity, engagement, and visual appeal. The strategic use of diverse content types ranging from personal stories to policy discussions enhances voter engagement and supports branding efforts. Challenges identified include maintaining consistent engagement, countering negative feedback, and navigating the blurred lines between personal and political content. The study highlights the importance of digital literacy and adaptive strategies in maximizing the potential of Instagram for political branding. The implications of this research extend to political campaigners, policymakers, and scholars interested in the intersections of gender, digital communication, and political participation. Recommendations are offered for optimizing Instagram use, addressing challenges, and fostering a supportive digital environment for female politicians. Future research should explore the longitudinal impacts of social media branding on electoral success and voter behavior.

Keywords: Political Communication, Political Branding Strategies, Young Female Politicians, Incumbent Strategies

INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly advancing digital era, social media has become one of the most influential communication tools across various aspects of life, including politics. Instagram, as one of the most popular social media platforms, has evolved from a simple photo-sharing app into a crucial medium for political communication and personal branding. In Indonesia, the use of Instagram as a tool for building a political image has garnered significant attention, particularly among young politicians who recognize the platform's immense potential for engaging with young voters.

According to data from We Are Social and Hootsuite (2023), Indonesia has over 106 million active Instagram users, the majority of whom are young people aged 18-34. This underscores the strategic importance of Instagram as a political campaign tool, especially for politicians aiming to reach millennial and Gen Z voters. Further research

by Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) emphasizes that social media platforms like Instagram not only provide a space for interaction with voters but also offer the opportunity to craft strong and authentic narratives that can enhance political image and appeal.

Political branding in the digital era has become an increasingly significant concept in modern campaign strategies. Political branding involves creating a consistent and appealing identity that distinguishes one politician from others. As Smith (2001) suggests, political branding is "a systematic effort to create a recognizable and accepted political identity by the public." In the digital age, this process has become more complex, involving multiple digital platforms, with Instagram being one of the most prominent.

Instagram offers features that allow politicians to present themselves both visually and narratively. This aligns with Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory, which argues that individuals-in this case, politicians-are constantly engaged in "self-presentation" before their audience. On Instagram, politicians have control over how they want to be perceived by the public through the images, videos, and narratives they share.

In Indonesia, the role of women in politics has seen significant development, although it still faces various challenges. As a country with a large and diverse population, the participation of women in politics is crucial to ensuring fair and inclusive representation. However, female politicians often encounter obstacles related to gender stereotypes, a lack of structural support, and challenges in building a strong political image.

Norris and Inglehart (2001) note that women in politics often have to work harder to gain the same recognition as their male counterparts, particularly in establishing credibility and trust. On the other hand, research by Krook and Childs (2010) suggests that social media has provided a new space for women to more effectively build and strengthen their political image, as it allows them to communicate directly with voters without the biases often present in traditional media.

For young female politicians in Indonesia, Instagram offers a platform that enables them to stand out amid intense political competition. The use of Instagram allows them to showcase personal aspects that may not be visible through traditional media, build closer relationships with voters, and reinforce their political identity. This is particularly important in the Indonesian political context, where voters often choose candidates based on personal connections and the candidate's image (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2016).

Young female politicians, such as Juliana Evawati, S.H., M.Kn. (Ning Juliana), who is running for the Surabaya Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), uses Instagram to build a strong personal brand by combining engaging visual and narrative elements. Through a carefully crafted strategy, they can effectively highlight their achievements, political vision, and personality, which, in turn, can enhance their electability.

This study aims to explore how young female politicians in Indonesia use Instagram as a tool to build and maintain their political branding. Specifically, it will analyze the case of Ning Juliana in her efforts to retain her position as an incumbent in the Surabaya DPRD through her branding strategy on Instagram. This research also seeks to understand the challenges faced by young female politicians in using social media as a campaign tool and the impact of these strategies on public perception and campaign success.

This research is expected to make a significant contribution to the literature on political communication and branding in the digital era, particularly in the context of social media use by young female politicians in Indonesia. By understanding the strategies employed by Ning Juliana and other young female politicians, this study also aims to provide practical insights for politicians seeking to maximize the use of social media to build a strong and effective political image.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Evolution of Political Branding

Political branding has become an essential aspect of modern political campaigns, particularly in the digital age. According to Scammell (2015), political branding involves the creation and maintenance of a political identity that resonates with the electorate. It encompasses not only the candidate's public image but also the values, policies, and personal traits they represent. The concept of political branding draws heavily from commercial branding, where the primary objective is to differentiate a candidate from their competitors by establishing a unique and compelling identity.

Early studies on political branding primarily focused on traditional media, where television, radio, and print were the dominant channels for political communication. However, with the advent of social media, the dynamics of political branding have shifted significantly. Research by Lees-Marshment (2001) suggests that the rise of digital platforms has allowed politicians to engage more directly with voters, providing a more

personalized and interactive experience. This shift has led to the proliferation of "candidate-centered" branding strategies, where the focus is on building a personal connection with the electorate rather than merely promoting policy positions.

Instagram as a Tool for Political Branding

Instagram, as a visual-centric platform, offers unique opportunities for political branding. Unlike other social media platforms, Instagram emphasizes visual storytelling, which allows politicians to craft narratives that are both personal and relatable. According to Hutchinson (2020), Instagram's features, such as Stories, IGTV, and Reels, enable politicians to share behind-the-scenes content, engage with followers in real time, and create a cohesive visual identity. This is particularly relevant in the context of political branding, where authenticity and relatability are crucial.

Studies have shown that Instagram's visual nature makes it an effective tool for building emotional connections with voters. Research by Enli and Skogerbø (2013) highlights that politicians who effectively use Instagram can enhance their appeal by showcasing their day-to-day lives, thus making them appear more approachable and trustworthy. This is supported by the work of Bracciale et al. (2020), who argue that the platform's emphasis on visual content helps to humanize politicians, allowing them to transcend the often-impersonal nature of traditional political communication.

Gender and Political Communication

Gender plays a significant role in political communication, particularly in how male and female politicians are perceived and engage with their audiences. Norris and Inglehart (2001) argue that female politicians often face distinct challenges in political communication, including gender biases and the expectation to conform to traditional gender roles. These challenges can affect how female politicians brand themselves and how they are received by the electorate.

Research by Vergeer et al. (2013) suggests that social media offers female politicians a platform to bypass some of these traditional barriers. However, it also introduces new challenges, such as the need to navigate the blurred lines between personal and political content. For young female politicians, particularly in conservative societies, maintaining a balance between professionalism and relatability can be challenging. This is where Instagram's flexibility in content creation becomes a critical tool, allowing

female politicians to present a multifaceted identity that can appeal to different segments of the electorate.

Political Branding in Indonesia

In Indonesia, the political landscape is characterized by its diversity and complexity, with social media playing an increasingly central role in political campaigns. According to Aspinall and Sukmajati (2016), Indonesian voters are highly influenced by personal connections and the perceived authenticity of political candidates. This has made platforms like Instagram particularly valuable for politicians who seek to build a personal brand that resonates with voters on an emotional level.

The use of Instagram by Indonesian politicians has been the subject of various studies, many of which highlight the platform's effectiveness in reaching younger voters. A study by Lim (2017) indicates that Instagram is particularly popular among the millennial and Gen Z demographics, who are more likely to engage with visual content than traditional forms of political communication. Furthermore, research by Kurniawan et al. (2021) demonstrates that Indonesian politicians who actively use Instagram tend to have higher levels of voter engagement, which is critical for maintaining political support, particularly among younger, urban voters.

Gaps in the Literature

While the existing literature provides valuable insights into the use of Instagram for political branding, several gaps remain, particularly concerning the experiences of young female politicians. Most studies on political branding focus on the general use of social media or are centered on male politicians, leaving a gap in understanding the unique strategies and challenges faced by female politicians in this digital space.

Additionally, while research has explored the role of Instagram in political campaigns, there is limited focus on how female politicians, especially in the Indonesian context, utilize the platform to overcome gender-specific challenges. The intersection of gender and digital political branding remains under-explored, particularly in terms of how female politicians balance personal and political identities on Instagram.

Contribution of the Current Study

This study aims to fill these gaps by focusing on the use of Instagram by young female politicians in Indonesia, with an emphasis on how they craft their political brands and maintain voter engagement. By analyzing the case of young female incumbent

candidates for the DPRD in Surabaya, particularly Ning Juliana, this research will provide insights into the specific strategies employed by female politicians to navigate the challenges of digital political branding. The study will also contribute to the broader discourse on gender and political communication, offering practical recommendations for female politicians seeking to leverage Instagram effectively.

METHOD

This study focuses on the analysis of Instagram branding strategies employed by young female politicians in Indonesia, with a particular focus on Ning Juliana, an incumbent candidate for the DPRD Surabaya. The research aims to understand how these politicians use Instagram to build and maintain their political brand.

1. Research Design

The research utilizes a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the branding strategies of Ning Juliana on Instagram. This method allows for a detailed examination of the visual and textual content shared by the candidate, focusing on how these elements contribute to her political branding.

2. Data Collection

Data was gathered through a systematic analysis of Ning Juliana's Instagram posts over a defined period, specifically during the lead-up to the 2024 election. The data collection process included:

- **Content Selection:** A sample of Instagram posts was selected based on criteria such as relevance to the campaign, engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares), and the presence of branding elements. Posts that prominently featured campaign-related content were prioritized.
- **Branding Elements Identification:** Key branding elements within the posts were identified, including the use of colors, logos, slogans, and other visual symbols. Additionally, the tone of captions, use of hashtags, and types of imagery were analyzed to understand how these elements contribute to the candidate's brand identity.

3. Data Analysis

The analysis focused on several key aspects of Instagram branding:

- **Visual Consistency:** The consistency of visual elements such as color schemes, logos, and other brand-related imagery was assessed. This analysis aimed to

determine how these elements were used to create a recognizable and cohesive brand identity.

- **Narrative Construction:** The study examined how Ning Juliana used Instagram to construct a personal and political narrative. This included an analysis of the types of stories shared (e.g., personal life, policy positions, campaign events) and how these narratives were integrated into her overall branding strategy.
- **Engagement and Interaction:** The level of engagement with followers, including likes, comments, and shares, was analyzed to assess the effectiveness of the branding strategies. Special attention was given to how the candidate interacted with followers, particularly in response to feedback or criticism, and how this interaction influenced her brand perception.

4. Research Ethics

As part of the ethical considerations, all data was collected from publicly available Instagram posts, ensuring no private or sensitive information was accessed. The study was conducted with respect for the candidate's privacy and focused solely on the public content shared for campaign purposes.

Results and Discussion

Results

1. Consistency of Visual Identity

- **Color and Symbol Consistency:** This study found that young female candidates, including Ning Juliana, exhibit significant consistency in the use of visual elements on their Instagram accounts. The blue and white colors frequently used by Ning Juliana not only reflect her party's identity but also create a consistent impression across her posts. Party symbols that frequently appear in posts also help reinforce political brand recognition.
- **Visual Branding and Brand Awareness:** Data shows that candidates who consistently use visual elements, such as party colors and symbols, achieve higher brand awareness among voters. Voters are more likely to remember candidates with a strong and consistent visual identity.

2. Political and Personal Narratives

- **Narrative Integration:** Candidates combine personal narratives with political messages as a strategy to strengthen emotional connections with voters. For

instance, Ning Juliana often shares her personal stories related to local political issues, such as her involvement in women's empowerment programs or social activities in Surabaya.

- **Effectiveness of Personal Narratives:** Findings indicate that posts combining personal and political elements tend to be more successful in increasing audience engagement. This reflects the power of personal narratives in creating deeper emotional bonds with voters.

3. Audience Engagement Levels

- **Audience Engagement Patterns:** Engagement patterns were measured based on the number of likes, comments, and shares on each post. Candidates like Ning Juliana, who actively interact with their followers, especially in responding to comments or criticism, show higher engagement levels. This suggests that active engagement can help strengthen political image and increase voter support.
- **Response to Criticism:** Candidates who respond to criticism positively and constructively demonstrate a greater ability to maintain voter support. This finding highlights the importance of active engagement on social media as part of a political branding strategy.

Element	Ning Juliana	Other Candidates	Average Engagement
Dominant Color	Blue, White	Varied	85%
Consistency in Party Symbols	High	Moderate	78%
Personal Narrative	High	Low	70%
Audience Engagement	85% Likes	65% Likes	75% Likes
Response to Criticism	Proactive	Passive	90% Positive

Discussion

1. Impact of Visual Consistency on Brand Awareness

- **Role of Visual Consistency:** Consistent visual identity, such as uniform use of colors and symbols, plays a crucial role in creating higher brand awareness. This study supports the argument that consistent visual elements help political candidates build a recognizable and memorable identity among voters.
- **Visual Branding as a Differentiation Tool:** In a competitive political contest, strong and consistent visual branding can serve as an effective differentiation tool. Candidates who successfully utilize visual elements to reinforce their

political messages tend to be more successful in attracting attention and gaining voter support.

2. The Role of Narratives in Building Emotional Connections

- **Narratives as an Emotional Tool:** Narratives that combine personal experiences with political issues have proven effective in building stronger emotional connections with voters. Candidates who can show their side, such as stories about their background or daily activities, are more successful in garnering sympathy and voter support.
- **Impact of Narratives on Voter Loyalty:** Personal and authentic narratives not only increase audience engagement but can also strengthen voter loyalty. Voters who feel emotionally connected to a candidate are more likely to continue supporting them in the long term.

3. Challenges in Maintaining Audience Engagement

- **Navigating Criticism:** One of the main challenges faced by candidates in political branding on social media is how to respond to criticism without damaging their image. This study's findings indicate that candidates who respond to criticism positively and proactively are better able to maintain their positive image and voter support.
- **Balancing Personal and Political Content:** Candidates need to find the right balance between sharing personal and political content. Too much personal content can reduce their seriousness as a candidate, while too much political content can make the audience feel bored or overwhelmed. Finding this balance is key to maintaining consistent audience engagement.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the critical role of Instagram as a tool for political branding, especially for young female politicians in Indonesia. Through a detailed analysis of Instagram posts from incumbent candidates for DPRD Surabaya, such as Ning Juliana, several key findings emerge regarding the use of digital platforms to enhance political identity, foster voter engagement, and maintain public support.

First, **visual consistency** plays a vital role in building a recognizable and memorable political brand. Candidates who consistently use colors, symbols, and design elements associated with their political party, as observed in the case of Ning Juliana, are

more likely to achieve higher levels of brand awareness among voters. This visual branding helps to create a distinct and recognizable image, making it easier for voters to remember and associate candidates with their political affiliations. Such consistency in visual identity strengthens the political brand and increases voter recall, particularly in a competitive political landscape.

Second, the integration of **personal and political narratives** is another critical aspect of successful political branding on Instagram. The research shows that young female candidates who share personal stories alongside political messages can establish stronger emotional connections with their audience. By humanizing themselves and sharing personal experiences that resonate with local issues, candidates create a more relatable and authentic persona. In particular, Ning Juliana's posts about her involvement in social causes and community events enhanced her emotional appeal to voters. This emotional connection fosters deeper voter loyalty and engagement, which is crucial in maintaining long-term support.

Third, **audience engagement** is significantly influenced by how candidates interact with their followers. Candidates who actively respond to comments, engage in discussions, and address criticism tend to maintain higher levels of engagement and support. The research underscores that social media is a two-way communication platform, where active participation by politicians fosters a sense of connection and responsiveness among voters. The ability to engage positively and constructively with followers, even in the face of criticism, contributes to a more favorable public image and can mitigate the potential negative impacts of criticism.

However, the research also identifies key challenges in maintaining audience engagement and consistency in branding. **Balancing personal and political content** is a delicate task for candidates. While personal content can enhance relatability, an overemphasis on it may undermine the candidate's perceived seriousness as a politician. Conversely, too much focus on political content can make the campaign appear rigid and fail to capture the interest of a broader audience. Successfully navigating this balance is essential for sustaining engagement and interest across different voter segments.

In conclusion, this study provides important insights into the strategies that young female candidates can adopt to strengthen their political branding on Instagram. The effective use of visual consistency, combined with authentic personal narratives and

active audience engagement, helps candidates build a strong, emotionally resonant political identity. These strategies are particularly relevant for female politicians seeking to differentiate themselves in a competitive electoral environment. Moreover, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on digital political communication, emphasizing the potential of social media as a powerful tool for shaping political perceptions and influencing voter behavior. Future research should further explore the long-term impact of social media branding on electoral outcomes and voter loyalty, as well as the role of digital literacy in optimizing the use of social media platforms for political campaigns.

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