IMAGE, IDENTITY, AND GENDER: THE SELF-CONSTRUCTION OF INDONESIAN FEMALE POLITICIANS ON INSTAGRAM

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Abstract

This study explores the construction of identity and image among female politicians in Indonesia through the use of Instagram. With the development of information and communication technology, social media has become a strategic tool for building image, especially in a male-dominated political context. The purpose of this study is to analyze the communication strategies employed by female politicians before and after the 2024 election. Using a qualitative approach and case studies, this research analyzes Instagram posts from figures such as Khofifah Indar Parawansa, Sherly Tjoanda Laos, Ratna Machmud, and Astrid Widayani. The results of the study show that female politicians utilize gender stereotypes in communicating with voters while adapting their self-image to societal expectations. This study emphasizes the importance of social media in shaping political narratives and increasing public engagement, as well as how female politicians can challenge stereotypes and inspire future generations to participate in the political process.

Keywords: Images, Identity, Gender, Female Politicians, Instagram

Introduction

Social media is a tool for accessing all forms of information and news from all aspects, including entertainment that is not available on television. Social media has now developed into a tool for building image, especially among female politicians. Instagram's role in politics has become a strategic instrument in branding for female politicians who still face various challenges in a male-dominated political arena.

Increasing women's participation in politics is crucial to achieving gender equality and ensuring that women's perspectives are represented in decision-making. The construction of identity through digital media on social media opens up a space for discussion about how women strategically shape their self-image in the digital space. The challenge faced by female politicians is how Indonesian female politicians can shape their image through social media, which influences the social, political, and cultural contexts in which they operate. Social media serves as a tool to equalize opportunities for women in politics, allowing them to communicate directly with voters and increase public engagement. By utilizing social media effectively, female politicians can increase their visibility, build a positive image, and inspire future generations to participate in politics.

The purpose of this study is to examine how the communication strategies used by female politicians in constructing their self-image can be aligned with their campaign objectives. This study also identifies political activities with patterns and communication strategies used by female politicians, as well as their effectiveness, which can provide a more comprehensive picture of how female politicians build symbolic and narrative power in the digital space.

The image of politicians on social media can be interpreted as propaganda for the buzzers who fill the comments section of their posts. Gender and political identity place women in a difficult

position to gain equal votes because they have a different starting point than men who have already entered the political arena. The role of the media in shaping public opinion can influence the public's perception of the news, whether it is a good or bad perception. The use of Instagram by politicians can be a campaign medium that can reach more people. Previous studies have revealed that effective political communication is key to increasing women's participation in decision-making. Female politicians need to utilize social media and other communication channels to build a positive image and reach voters. Although social media provides opportunities to convey messages directly to the public, female politicians still face challenges in the form of gender stereotypes and the risk of cyberbullying. Improving knowledge and skills in the use of social media is essential to overcome these obstacles. Training is needed for female legislators to optimize the use of social media in campaigns and when carrying out legislative duties. This can help them to be more effective in voicing women's aspirations and raising public awareness of gender issues.

The specific strategy used is branding through digital media, where female politicians portray their self-image through the content they share on their social media (Instagram). How the audience reacts depends on the content uploaded, for example, educational content or daily content that can show their character. The social context that influences the self-image of a female politician is the content she shares on social media. How that content can have a good or bad impact on consumers is a wise decision for a female politician to determine. The difference between male and female politicians lies in gender equality, which is a common stigma in society. The local aspect in the context of social media is when female politicians choose what kind of branding to use in order to gain sympathy from the public. Female candidates utilize gender stereotypes to attract voters' attention by emphasizing their feminine identity in their campaigns. This includes the use of symbols related to women, such as hashtags that refer to female identity. Female candidates have successfully used their female identity in their campaigns, but a broader change in public perception of women in politics is still needed.

The urgency of research on the representation of women lies in the importance of understanding how women are portrayed and represented in various contexts, such as the media, politics, and culture. This research aims to uncover gender stereotypes and identify efforts to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. Innovations in the approach to analyzing the Instagram social media content of female politicians can provide new insights into how social media can be a platform for self-branding. Despite awareness of the need for women's involvement in politics, voter preferences still tend to favor male candidates. However, new media can increase political awareness and women's participation. Several case studies show that new media projects can give women a voice and strengthen their networks, but challenges in achieving significant political results remain. Women's involvement in politics is essential to creating policies that reflect their needs. Without adequate representation, women's interests are often overlooked. New media provides women with the opportunity to build a public identity and strengthen their voice in political discussions. This can be an important first step in supporting their involvement in formal politics.

Research Method
This research model applies a qualitative research design with a case study approach that focuses on social media analysis. The sample used consists of Instagram posts by female politicians, taken from the period one month before and one month after the election. In this study, the instruments used include content analysis to evaluate the themes, communication style, and audience response to each post.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach, in which researchers identified patterns and significant differences in interactions and images constructed on social media. This study aims to reveal whether there are differences in the way female politicians communicate before and after the election, as well as how the public responds to these changes. The results of this study are expected to provide a clear picture of the impact of the election on the image and involvement of female politicians on social media platforms, as well as their contribution to building public trust.

Discussion
This study will discuss topics that focus on several important aspects. First, we will examine the implications of the results for gender understanding and how this contributes to broader discourse. Next, we will examine the role of the media in politics and its impact on the image of female politicians. In addition, the challenges faced by female politicians will also be our focus, given the often unfavorable context.

In the context of the 2024 elections, public attention to the social media activities of female politicians has increased. Khofifah Indar Parawansa, Sherly Tjoanda Laos, Ratna Machmud, and Astrid Widayani are some of the figures who actively use digital platforms to communicate with voters. In the month leading up to the election, their communication strategies on social media became crucial in building their image and reaching a wider audience. We will discuss how each of these politicians used social media to convey political messages, respond to challenges, and garner support from the public. The content that will be part of the research includes content about campaigns, social content, educational content, as well as content related to personal or family matters during the month before and after the 2024 elections. These female politicians demonstrate how they use social media, especially Instagram, to build their image and identity in the public eye. This platform has become a strategic arena for conveying political messages while shaping narratives that support their presence in a male-dominated political world.

In the context of the upcoming elections, Indonesian female politicians are utilizing social media to reach voters and build their image. To gain a deeper understanding of the communication strategies they employ, it is important to analyze the types of content they post. The graph below shows the composition of the types of posts uploaded by the four female politicians one month before and after the 2024 elections, from October 1, 2024, to December 31, 2024. In this graph, we can see the percentage of content related to campaigns, personal content, and other types of posts. This analysis provides insight into the communication strategies employed by female politicians and how they adapt to changes in the political context.

By comparing the percentage of content before and after the election, we can identify shifts in focus in their narratives. Did they place more emphasis on campaign efforts leading up to the election, or did they reveal more of their personal side after the election results? This information is invaluable for understanding the role of social media in shaping public perceptions of female politicians in Indonesia.

Content on female politicians from October 1, 2024 to November 27, 2024

Khofifah Indar Parawansa

- Campaign 33,1%
- Personal Branding 62,2%
- Family 1,4%
- People POV content 3,4%

Sherly Tjoanda Laos

- Campaign 58,1%
- Personal Branding 34,8%
- Family 5,8%
- People POV content 1,7%

Ratna Machmud

- Campaign 68,4%
- Personal Branding 31,6%
- Family 0%
- People POV content 0%

Astrid Widayani

■ Campaign 30,7%　　■ Personal Branding 69,2%　　■ Family 0%　　■ People POV content 0%
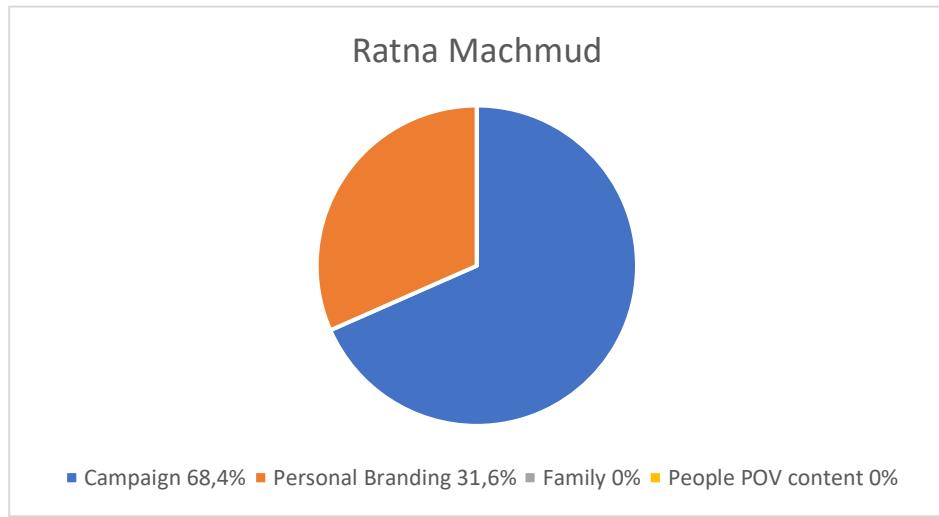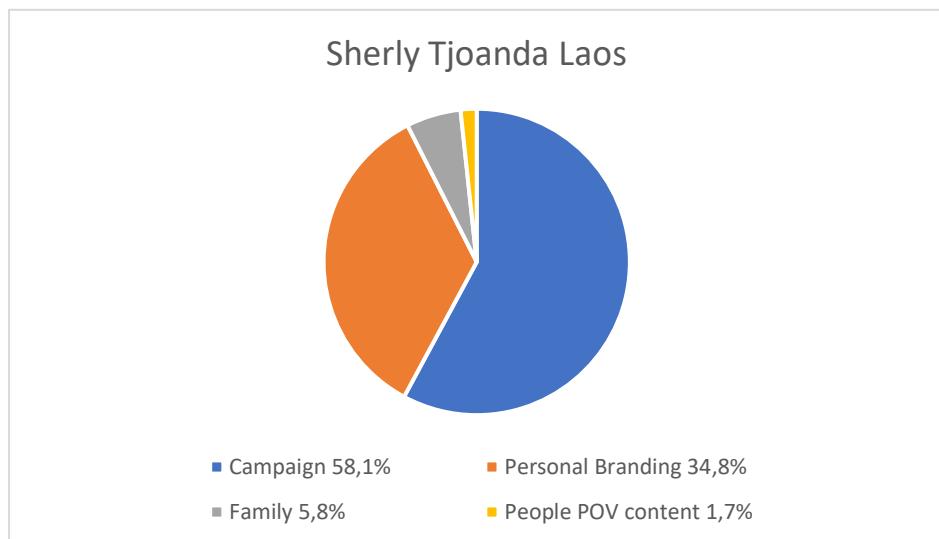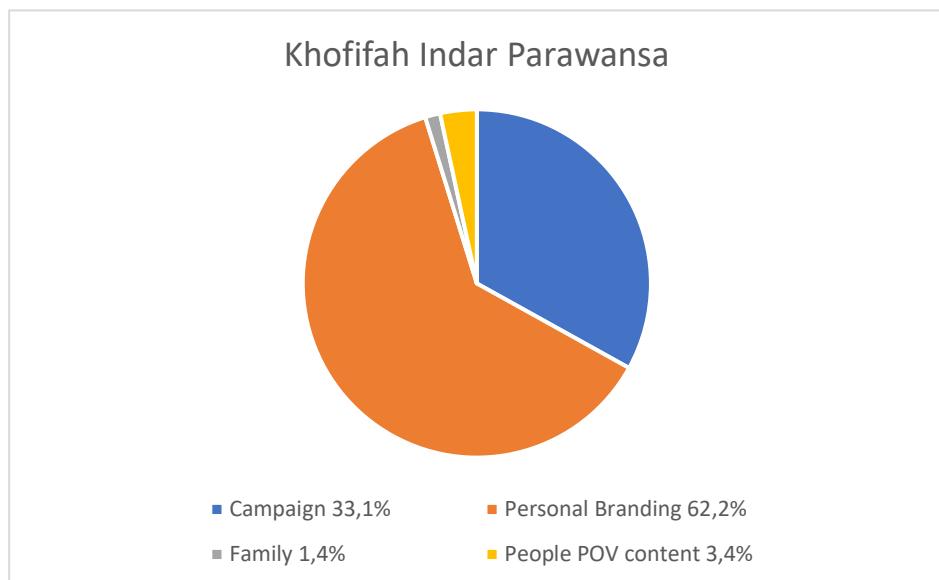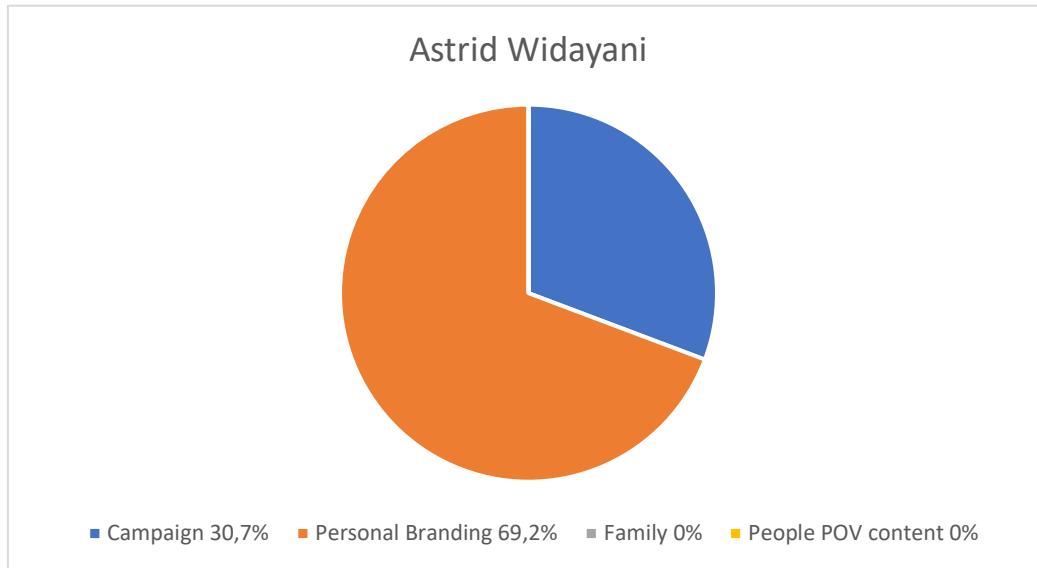
Content on female politicians from November 28, 2024 to December 31, 2024

Ratna Machmud

■ Personal Branding 100%　　■ Family 0%　　■ People POV content 0%

Khofifah Indar Parawansa

■ Personal Branding 93,5%　　■ Family 6,5%　　■ People POV content 0%

Astrid WIdayani

- Personal Branding 88,5%   - Family 11,5%   - People POV content 0%

Sherly Tjoanda Laos

- Personal Branding 80%   - Family 20%   - People POV content 0%
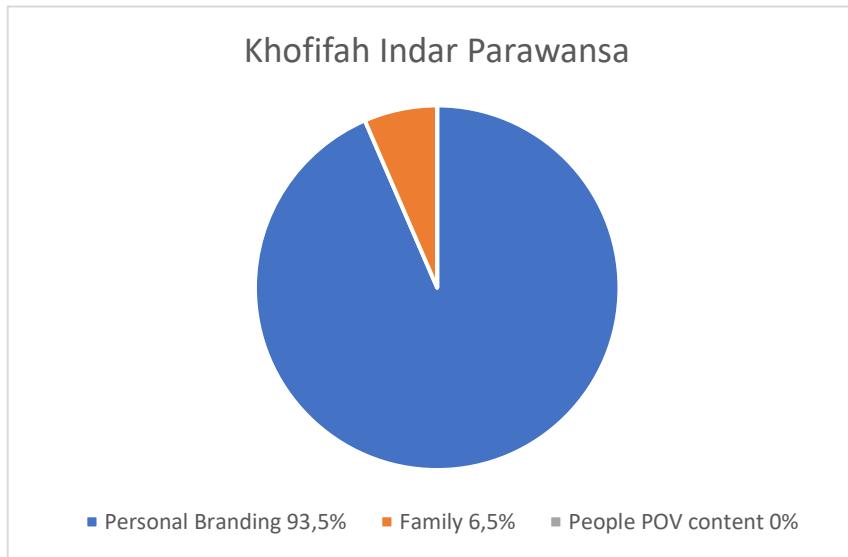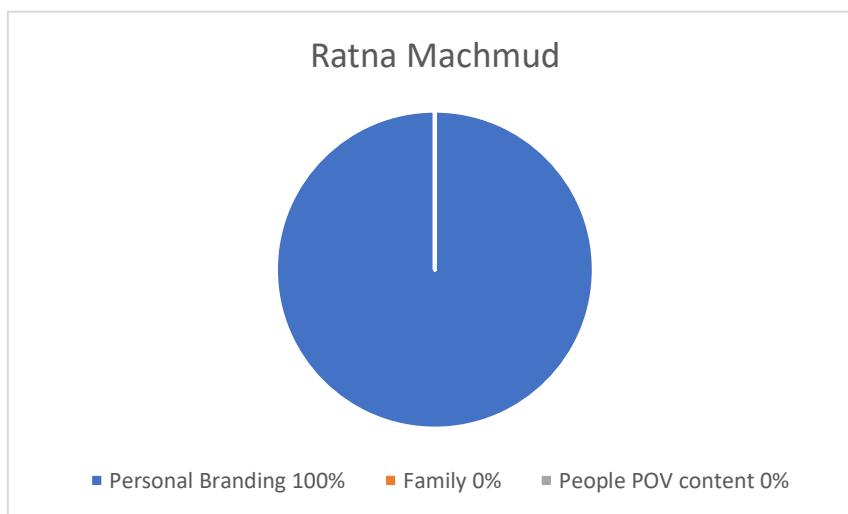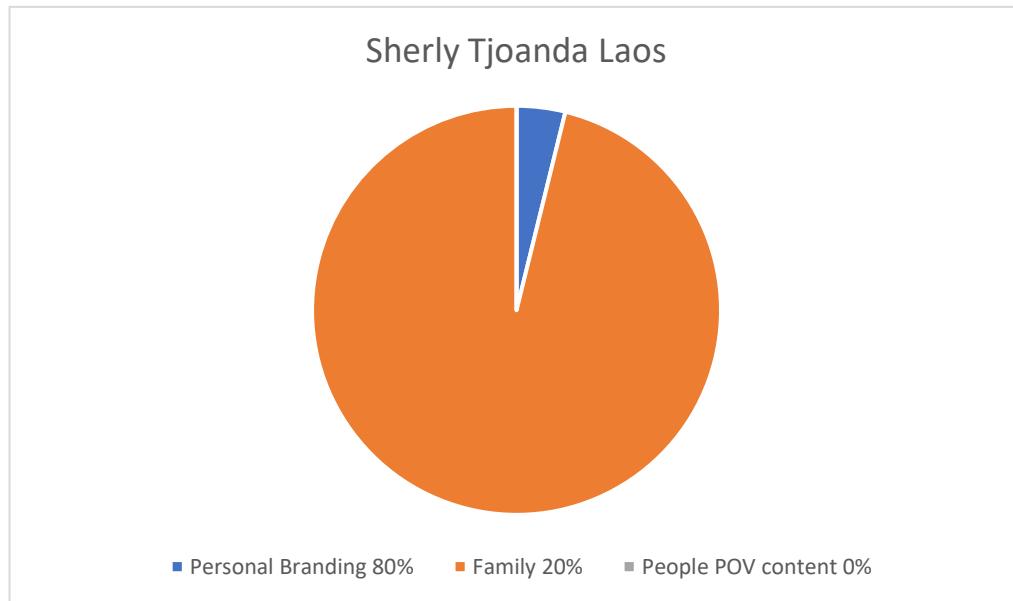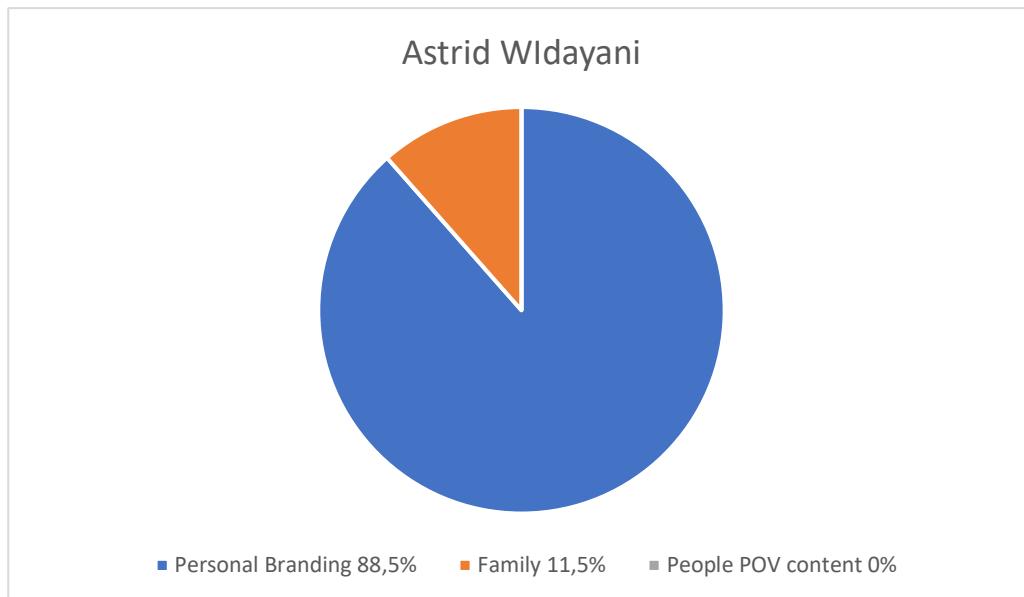
An analysis of content posted by female politicians in the month before and after the election shows a significant shift in focus in their communication strategies.

a. Improvement of campaign content

Before the election, there was an increase in the proportion of campaign content reflecting their efforts to reach voters and build their political image. This shows that female politicians are active in promoting their vision and mission to attract support.

b. Focus on personal content after the election

After the election, there was a clear shift toward more personal and interactive content. Female politicians began sharing their daily experiences and social activities that showed their closeness to the community, reinforcing their image as caring leaders.

c. Adaptive communication strategy

This shift reflects adaptation to changes in the political context and audience response. Female politicians have demonstrated the ability to tailor their content to remain relevant and attract voters' attention at various stages of the political process.

The overall strategy of using social media, especially Instagram, has become a strategic tool for female politicians to not only build their image, but also strengthen their relationship with the public in a dynamic context.

Self-Image and Gender Representation

Female politicians often have to fight to build a positive image that reflects their abilities and leadership. Khofifah and Astrid, for example, actively upload content that shows their closeness to the community through visits and direct interactions. This creates an image of leaders who care and are close to the people. On the other hand, Sherly Tjoanda Laos, despite being in recovery, continues to show resilience and dedication through posts about her campaigns and social activities. This emphasis on resilience not only strengthens her self-image, but also challenges the gender stereotypes that often attach to female politicians.

1.   Cultural and Local Identity

Political identity is also influenced by cultural and local contexts. For example, Ratna Machmud, who actively campaigns in small villages, demonstrates her efforts to connect with the local community. This activity not only builds her identity as a regional leader, but also affirms her presence in a wider environment. Meanwhile, Astrid Widayani uses daily interactions and relatable content, such as listening to residents' complaints, to strengthen her identity as a leader who listens to the aspirations of the people.

2.   Gender in Political Communication

Gender plays an important role in how female politicians communicate on social media, as they often face challenges in balancing their professional image with their personal side. The content they upload, such as Mother's Day posts or social activities, creates the impression that they are figures who are not only focused on politics, but also care about social and humanitarian issues. This helps them gain acceptance among a wider range of voters, including younger generations who are more sensitive to gender issues. Greater support is needed for female politicians to develop effective perception management strategies and utilize new media as a tool to increase public engagement and advocate for women's issues. Female politicians are aware of the conflicting expectations they must fulfill and use adaptive strategies to navigate these challenges. Perception management is not only a tool for maintaining public image, but also a way to negotiate gender identity in the political sphere. Effective female politicians are able to balance social demands and the courage to show leadership.

Conclusion

Overall, Instagram is not just a platform for campaigns, but also a tool for building a strong image and identity for female politicians in Indonesia. Through effective communication strategies, they can challenge gender norms and show that leadership can come from various backgrounds. By utilizing social media, female politicians are not only fighting for their voices in politics, but also inspiring future generations to participate in the political world.

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