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Personal Political Branding to Increase Electability: Regional Head Candidates in Pemalang 2024

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Abstract

Social media's increasing impact on local politics has made personal political branding crucial to preserving democracy and raising political literacy. It is crucial for theory and practice to comprehend how such branding affects public perception in the context of regional elections. In this study, the impact of personal branding on Pemalang Regional Head candidates will be examined, with particular attention paid to the phenomenon of branding and political mediatization, in which non-political public figures run for office and acquire legitimacy through digital engagement and personal branding. The study used a qualitative-descriptive approach and gathered information from Vicky Prasetyo's official Instagram account. To evaluate public responses, interaction levels, and thematic content trends, Orange Data Mining software was used in conjunction with a Naïve Bayes sentiment analysis model. According to the findings, personal branding tactics that prioritize visual performativity, emotional intimacy, and endorsements from other public figures result in a preponderance of neutral feeling, which reflects the uncertainty of public perception. According to the study's findings, personal branding in this instance offers electability engagement and symbolic visibility, but it lacks a coherent and substantial policy program narrative. These results illustrate the potential of social media data as an alternate electability metric and lend theoretical support to local political communication research. In practice, the findings can help electoral management organizations, campaign consultants, and political practitioners create more focused digital campaign strategies and regulations that adapt to the dynamics of online political communication, enhancing the quality of democracy and raising citizen political literacy.

Keywords: personal branding, electability, social media analysis.

SDGs: Goal 3 (Quality Education), Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions)

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INTRODUCTION

The current strategy of the election contestation in Indonesia generated a new very complex dynamic of country politics with the emergence of the phenomenon of "personal branding" in politics. Personal branding has been more than a marketing instrument and become a multifaceted structure in forming the public perception of the potential leaders (Putri & Priso, 2022). It is in this same sense that developing a political identity is essential to engender political credibility as well as to make candidates more competitive when facing the voters. The discourse of personal branding is also increasingly getting through to the younger generations who have become more receptive to the symbol, image, and self-representation of the candidates through social media (Dewi, 2023; Novita, 2024). Several previous studies show that genuineness, discipline, and the capability to package political stories attractively are important factors in the formation of voters' perceptions (Anggarini, 2021; Sayidah, 2023).

In line with the times, various studies show that personal branding on social media makes a significant contribution in helping candidates' electability. According to (Aldapratiwi & Wahyono, 2024), personal branding

on digital platforms can improve engagement rates and strengthen emotional attachment between candidates and young voters. Research (Falah, 2023) also confirms that the electability of local candidates is also influenced by the self-image built through a communication style narrative that is close and entertaining to the public's daily life. In the context of electoral politics, the power of personal branding is proven to be able to create a high recognition effect, improve the vision of practical capabilities and even reduce the adverse effects of factual controversies that wander to protect personal branding (Bright, 2017). This phenomenon makes voters increasingly shift from program-based rational considerations to affective approaches based on emotional closeness to candidates, with the use of social media as a means of personal branding construction being an important variable that should be studied in the framework of increasing electability.

One of these phenomena is the candidacy of Vicky Prasetyo, a public figure who is trying to change his image from entertainment to local politics. Through social media, Vicky builds a personal political narrative that shows direct engagement with the community, despite his controversial track record (Agustin, 2024; Setyawan & Purwasito, 2024). For local politics, Vicky Prasetyo is an interesting case of a public figure, with a controversial public life, who can maintain his image as a politician through various media, including social media. Vicky's political narrative unfolds, through direct interactions with voters and addressing local party concerns, demonstrating a brand-based political communication strategy that can provide electoral visibility (Mariyanti, 2024; Plettenburg, 2021). Despite the presence of controversy, Vicky's power to survive under the spotlight is a testament to the power of narrative in creating a candidate's political identity (Agustin, 2024).

This event proves the evolution of local democracy as a sphere more controlled by political mediatization and personalization variables. The 2024 regional head elections become a historical problem indicating the evolution of regional political culture from programmatic to identity politics framed around personal narratives (Yunianto, 2024). But this movement has also been accompanied by public outrage due to increased embracement of the practices within political dynasties during candidate selection (Mustikasari, 2023). Instead, the personal brand machine constructed by some of the candidates like Vicky Prasetyo has been used as a strategy in ensuring the establishment of political legitimacy in the context of limited political access by people on that device of the nomination of regional leaders (Abda, 2024; Kannasto, 2020). This is reflective of the dilemma of the old political order being threatened by new societal expectations, of new leaders who are communicative, populist, and connect with the people's dreams.

Previous studies tend to focus more on national leaders or in the legislature, while studies on charismatic local celebrity candidates such as Vicky Prasetyo are still very limited (Putri & Prisanto, 2022; Siswanto, 2024). This digital data-driven approach has strong potential to monitor the dynamics of public opinion that emerge simultaneously in the virtual realm (Kurniawan, 2024). In line with that, the success of political candidates in building unique personal branding can increase voter electability and strengthen public perception. According to (Enli & Rosenberg, 2018), politicians who are able to personalize their communication by putting forward personal life narratives and building strong interpersonal connections through social media tend to gain higher public trust. In a more recent context, a study by (Van Aelst, 2017) explained that personal trends and figures in digital political campaigns emerged as a response to voters' closeness to political parties.

This research aims to reveal how Vicky Prasetyo's personal branding strategy on social media, especially Instagram, influences public perception in the 2024 Pemalang regional election contestation. The focus includes political narratives, digital communication techniques, and public sentiment reflected in online interactions. In the context of instant and transactional contemporary democracy, personal branding is not only an image, but also a narrative bridge between candidates and voters who lack ideological attachment.

METHOD

The method used in this study is qualitative, with a descriptive approach that aims to describe the personal branding strategies of regional head candidates in the digital context. This design was chosen to capture phenomena naturally and interpretively, particularly regarding the transformation of public image from celebrity to politician. The object of this study is the official Instagram account of Vicky Prasetyo as a candidate for the 2024 Pemalang Regency Head. This research design aims to explore the personal branding narrative that has been transformed from a public figure to the political realm by covering the research object through political campaign content uploaded by the candidate, including photos, videos, and text, as well as public interactions through comments and other features. The focus is on the personal branding narrative formed through visual and textual elements in the posts and how the public responds emotionally to the content.

The data collection procedure was conducted by downloading Instagram content through digital tools and then analyzed using Orange Data Mining software to extract engagement metrics, content themes, and public sentiment (Pich, 2024; Zaiter, 2023). The main instrument, Naïve Bayes-based analysis sentiment, can algorithmize emerging public opinions (Frasetya & Wibawa, 2024; López-Rabadán & Doménech-Fabregat, 2021). The analysis technique through confusion matrix classifies responses into positive, negative, or neutral categories and this quantitative approach is reinforced by visual images and narratives so that the symbolic meaning behind digital branding strategies can be captured more fully (Arya & Zufria, 2024; Molony, 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal branding has become a crucial component of political campaigns in the digital age, allowing candidates to create and present a carefully crafted image that appeals to target demographics. Beyond the limitations of traditional media, politicians can communicate values, interact directly with voters, and influence public opinion through social media platforms. With the use of digital campaigns' real-time interaction, quantifiable engagement data, and extensive visibility, politicians may carefully combine emotional appeals, visual appeals, and personal tales to increase their electability.

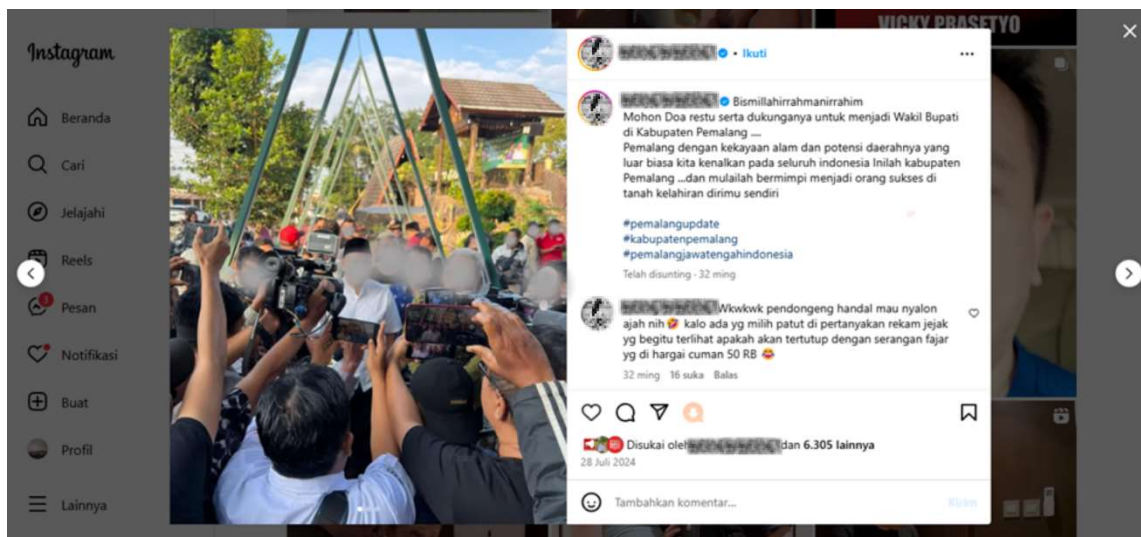


Figure 1. The First Time Arrival for Was Greeted
Source: Instagram, 2024

Vicky Prasetyo's campaign was characterized by a significant branding strategy to transform his image from a controversial entertainer to a credible political figure, as explained (Arya & Zufria, 2024) ; (Utami, 2022). This phenomenon is in line with the findings (Yulianti, 2024) which show that the use of revolutionary narratives in political campaigns can build strong emotional resonance with voters, especially in the context of public identity transition. The transformation from an entertainment figure to a political actor in this context is an effort to create a balance between emotional closeness and formal credibility, to mitigate negative perceptions from the past (Badran, 2024). In his first post on his official Instagram account, Vicky introduced the campaign slogan "Revolusi Pemalang" (Pemalang Revolution), which became the main foundation of his political narrative. This is in line with the findings of, (Sartikasari, 2021), who noted that the use of slogans has emotional appeal in increasing community engagement and building closeness between candidates and voters. The use of white, often associated with trust and stability, further reinforces his seriousness in the local political contest as he stands before a large crowd. According to (Rohmawati, 2024), color symbolism in campaign visuals can influence voter perceptions by triggering psychological associations that reinforce a candidate's credibility as shown in Table 1.

Furthermore, from the results of data processing using Orange Data Mining, it was found that Vicky Prasetyo has a large fan base throughout the country. The momentum of the announcement of his candidacy was utilized by presenting a visual contrast to his previous image, where he appeared in formal clothing and was accompanied by a professional team. His communication style also underwent a significant transformation, with the use of more structured language in conveying the vision and mission of regional

development, thus aiming to build public perception that he was not just an entertainment figure, but also a real candidate leader for Pemalang Regency.

Table 1. Sentiment Classification by Naive Bayes Model

	Predicted NEGATIVE	NEUTRAL	POSITIVE	Σ
Actual NEGATIVE	13	0	0	13
NEUTRAL	0	60	0	60
POSITIVE	0	0	27	27
Σ	13	60	27	100

Source: Processed by research Orange Data Mining

The first strategy used in Vicky Prasetyo's digital campaign was to introduce himself more formally through social media, especially Instagram. The sentiment analysis results showed that most of the responses from the public were neutral, as many as 60 out of 100 comments. This is influenced by the diverse backgrounds and characteristics of the audience, which causes them to tend to give comments that are not too emotional or partial (Raditia Vindua, 2024; Shweta Gupta, 2024).

This finding can be seen in the number of comments containing words such as “fire”, “hilarious”, or “wkwk”, which although they contain expressions, do not clearly indicate a positive or negative attitude towards the candidates. Such comments tend to be entertaining or neutral, and do not express direct support or opposition.

The authors consider that although the Naïve Bayes model succeeded in classifying the data with numerically high accuracy (100% in the confusion matrix), the results need to be interpreted with caution, as many other forms of interaction such as likes, shares, or emoji usage can actually indicate public opinion, but were classified in this analysis focusing on the comment text. In the field of political communication, a candidate's media portrayal and communication style are significant factors that impact public opinion. The relationship between a candidate's self-presentation and media representation has become more dynamic in the digital era, as social media allows for direct audience involvement while also subjecting messages to immediate public examination.

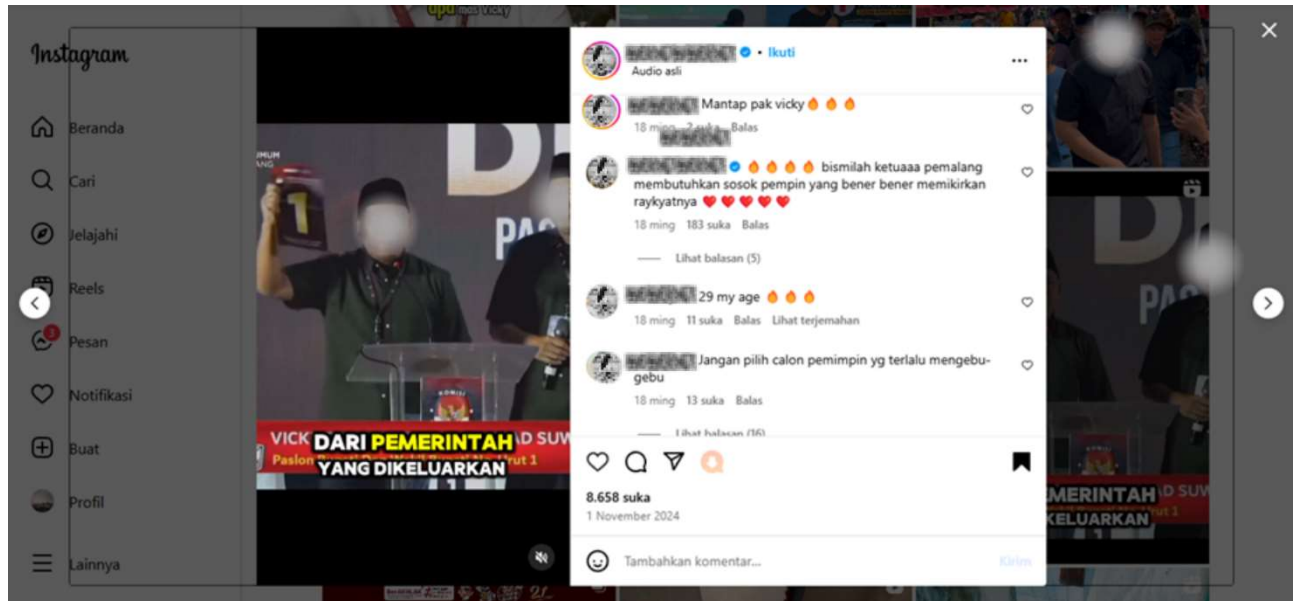


Figure 2. The Public Debate in candidates

Source: Instagram, 2024

At one of the key moments in the open campaign event at Hotel R-Gina, Pemalang, on October 31, 2024, Vicky Prasetyo appeared confidently under the slogan “Revolusi Pemalang”. He wore a green shirt and a black peci, two strong symbolic attributes he stood on stage framed by formal

campaign backdrops, projecting gestures that emphasized confidence and authority. This symbolic representation was not merely aesthetic but part of a calculated strategy to evoke emotional resonance with the electorate. According to (Ismail & Yahya, 2024), the use of party-associated colors and religious elements enhances candidate recognition and establishes ideological alignment in voters. Through this strategy, Vicky tried to instill a symbol of political loyalty while forming a narrative of siding with the aspirations of citizens as in Table 2.

In terms of visual communication, this upload shows the consistency of Vicky's campaign style that combines religious symbols (Peci), simplicity (non-formal clothing), and populist spirit (firm gestures and anti-status quo narratives). This communication style leads to self-imaging as a “people's leader” who is close to public aspirations, as well as being part of a strategy to build strong personal branding in the midst of local political contestation.

This interaction illustrates the character of the Instagram platform as a semi-dialogical space that allows the strengthening of political images as well as a test field for real-time public perception. The visualization of campaigns shared in the form of short videos with original audio orations adds an element of authenticity that is often sought after by social media users. This is in line with the findings of (Adib, 2024), which states that political communication on social media is more effective when emphasizing visual and emotional elements, because it is able to reach users in a short time with a strong impact.

Table 2. Sentiment Classification by Naïve bayes Model

	Predicted NEGATIVE	NEUTRAL	POSITIVE	Σ
Actual NEGATIVE	18	0	0	18
NEUTRAL	0	52	0	52
POSITIVE	0	0	30	30
Σ	18	52	30	100

Source: Processed by research Orange Data Mining

The results of data processing using Orange Data Mining with the Naïve Bayes classifier approach showed limitations in detecting subtle emotional sentiments in the text. The selection of the Naïve Bayes method in this study was based on considerations of processing efficiency, ease of use in the Orange Data Mining platform, as well as resource and time limitations. These limitations indicate the need to develop analysis methods that are more adaptive to the context of expressing and understanding the language expressed, for example through the integration of deep learning or advanced semantic analysis, to describe public reactions more accurately (Luthfiansyah & Wasito, 2023).

Neutral sentiment is not the end of political hope; it holds electoral potential that can be processed into real support through the offer of concrete programs that suit the needs of the community. But for that, candidates need to take a more personal and substantial approach to delivering their vision and mission so that emotional attachment with the public can be built progressively. Public personalities' endorsements have developed into a tactical advantage in contemporary political campaigns, acting as a type of social proof that can raise a candidate's profile and increase their audience reach. Public personalities, from well-known influencers and celebrities to well-respected local leaders, provide their own existing networks, devoted fan bases, and perceived authority, all of which can be used to support a candidature. Such support frequently takes the form of joint content, public appearances, and social media amplification in digital campaigns, which multiplies the visibility of the message and audience interaction.

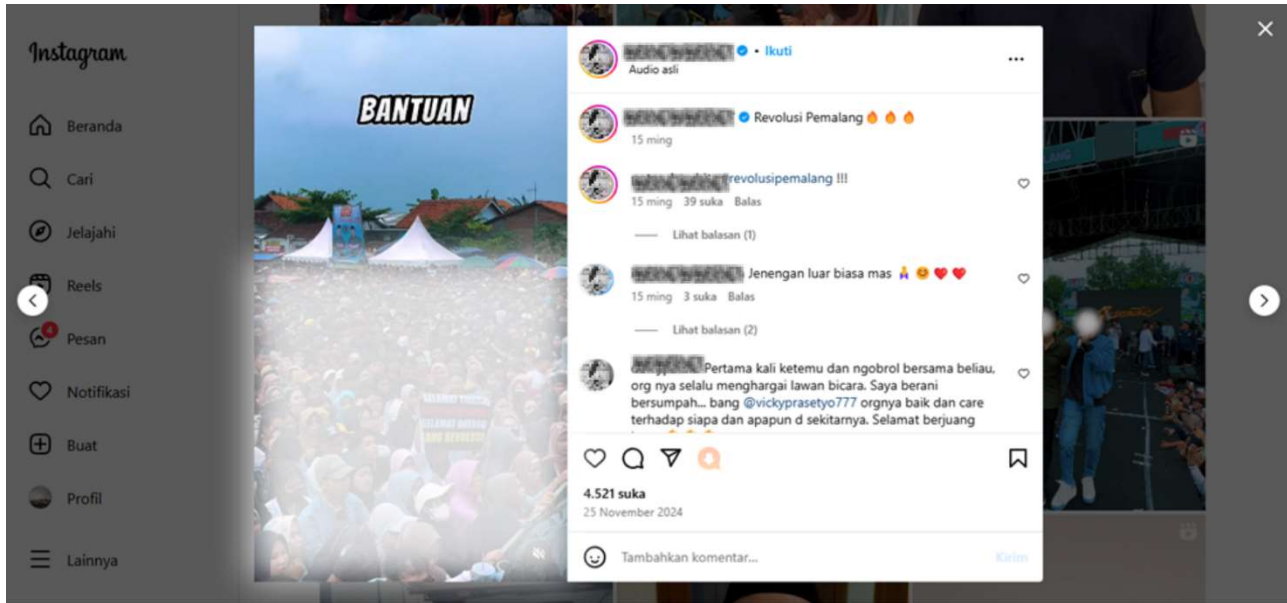


Figure 3. The Pemalang Revolution People's Party
Source: Instagram, 2024

Vicky Prasetyo's Instagram posts during the Pemalang 2024 Pilkada campaign period show that the branding strategy is not done independently, but is strengthened through the support of public figures who already have national and local reputations. Vicky actively shared moments of togetherness with well-known figures, artists, and local community leaders. This strategy forms a narrative of a positive association between her and figures who already have credibility in the eyes of the public.

From a branding point of view, figure support is used to fill a political identity that has not been strongly formed in the minds of local voters. As a figure who comes from the entertainment world, Vicky faces challenges in building an image as a bureaucratic leader. Personal branding that integrates endorsements has a higher success rate in expanding the Pemalang 2024 political contest (Wahyuningtyas, 2025).

Table 3. Sentiment Classification by Naïve Bayes Model

	Predicted NEGATIVE	NEUTRAL	POSITIVE	Σ
Actual NEGATIVE	17	0	0	17
NEUTRAL	0	56	0	56
POSITIVE	0	0	27	27
Σ	17	56	27	100

Source: Processed by research Orange Data Mining

The final result of the confusion matrix shows the dominance of neutral sentiment in the classification of public opinion towards candidates. This dominance does not reflect public satisfaction, but can be an indication of public ignorance, indifference, or even confusion towards the direction of political policies promoted by Vicky Prasetyo (Arya & Zufria, 2024). In this case, neutrality is not a positive signal, but can actually be a serious obstacle to increasing the electability of candidates, especially if it is not delivered transparently or does not focus on substantive issues that are relevant to public needs.

The use of Naïve Bayes algorithm as a sentiment analysis tool, although efficient, is still not widely used due to its limitations. As stated by (Arya & Zufria, 2024), this algorithm has weaknesses in detecting sarcasm, irony, and complex emotional nuances in text. This can lead to distortions in sentiment classification, especially in statements that are ambiguous or contain subtle criticism.

This study demonstrates adherence to ethical standards in digital research by anonymizing Instagram users, even though data were collected from public accounts, thereby preserving user privacy and upholding academic integrity. Theoretically, this research contributes to the expansion of personal political branding discourse in regional electoral contexts, particularly by highlighting the role of celebrity figures like Vicky Prasetyo whose candidacy signals a shift from institutional to individualized branding strategies. At the same time, it reveals a potential “public distrust” gap between social media popularity and public confidence in bureaucratic competence, enriching the theoretical landscape of local political communication. On a practical level, this study urges the Pemalang Regency General Election Commission (KPUD) to formulate digital campaign guidelines emphasizing content authenticity, regulation of candidates’ official accounts, filtering of visual disinformation, and monitoring of algorithmic manipulation, in order to uphold the quality and integrity of democratic processes in the digital age.

The author has some limitations in that the scope of the data is limited to the Instagram platform, so it does not yet reflect a full representation of public opinion on other social media such as Facebook, Twitter (X), and TikTok which have different characteristics and users. Restrictions have an impact on the generalization of results, especially in understanding voter perceptions tend to assume independence between features (words), so sentences can go undetected.

For future research improvements, it is recommended to expand the data sources to include various social media platforms such as Twitter (X) to capture more heterogeneous and comprehensive opinion dynamics. This approach also allows segmentation of voters based on age, social background, and media preferences, so that the analysis can be sharper and more representative.

The use of network mapping and topic modeling analysis can also be an additional strategy to identify communication patterns and dominant issues that influence public sentiment towards candidates. Thus, future research will not only be able to increase the precision in measuring sentiment, but also to comprehensively describe the deeper relationship between personal branding strategies and political electability.

This research makes an important contribution to the development of local political communication studies, related to personal political branding in the contestation of regional heads in Pemalang. Through an approach based on social media sentiment analysis, this research expands the theoretical understanding of how the personal image of regional head candidates is formed and accepted by local communities. The results can be utilized by political practitioners, campaign consultants, and candidates to design communication strategies that are more targeted and in line with the characteristics of voters in the regions. In addition, the utilization of social media data in this study also shows potential as an alternative source of information in measuring electability. Thus, this study contributes to the development of contemporary political research methodologies that are more adaptive to the changing communication landscape of society.

At the level of electoral management bodies and other stakeholders in understanding the evolving patterns of political communication, as well as designing regulations that are more responsive to the dynamics of digital campaigns. With the increasing use of social media in local politics, a deep understanding of personal political branding is important to maintain the quality of democracy and improve people's political literacy.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that personal branding plays a significant role in shaping public perception of Vicky Prasetyo's candidacy for Regent of Pemalang in 2024. Although dominated by neutral sentiment, social media responses reflect the public's initial interest in a non-political figure entering local politics. In a landscape typically dominated by incumbents, Vicky's digital strategy emphasizing unique character, emotional connection, and narrative consistency has increased his visibility, though findings do not yet fully indicate a gap between social media popularity and actual electoral preferences. The limitations of this study lie in its reliance on qualitative media-based data. Therefore,

future research should adopt a quantitative approach and explore the impact of algorithms on the distribution of campaign messages and shifts in public perception in real-time.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Muhamad Edgar Kusuma: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing, Validation; **Arif Zainudin:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Validation, Resources; and **Agus Setio Widodo:** Writing - Original Draft. All authors have read and approved the final version of this manuscript.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare no known financial conflicts of interest or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this manuscript.

DECLARATION OF ETHICS

The authors declare that the research and writing of this manuscript adhere to ethical standards of research and publication, in accordance with scientific principles, and are free from plagiarism.

DECLARATION OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

The authors declare that generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI) and other AI-assisted tools were used prudently, not excessively, during the research and preparation of this manuscript. Specifically, ChatGPT for brainstorming ideas and Grammarly for language check. All AI-generated material was reviewed and edited for accuracy, completeness, and compliance with ethical and scholarly standards. The authors accept full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

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