

ANALYZING UPNVJ POLITICAL SCIENCE STUDENT'S PERCEPTION OF "OKE GAS" POLITICAL BRANDING ON TIKTOK IN THE CONTEXT OF PRABOWO SUBIANTO'S PRESIDENTIAN CAMPAIGN

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Abstract. This study explores the perceptions of Political Science students at UPNVJ regarding the "Oke Gas" campaign content on TikTok as part of Prabowo Subianto's political branding strategy during the 2024 presidential election. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the research investigates how students interpret the use of populist, symbolic, and visual communication in digital political campaigns. The Research shows that students see this strategy as a way to adjust to the large number of young voters. But their opinions are splits to some think it works well, while others thinks it's just a shallow attempt to improve image with a real policy ideas. The study also shows that in students are worried that too much emotional content might reduce the quality of serious democratic discussion. TikTok is always seen as good platform to spread political message quickly and interactively, but also raise concerns about whether going viral is more important than talking about real politic issues. Political science student, who heard how to analyze and understand democracy are you just campaign target, they can all judge political strategist critically. Their views are shape by the media they use, their political mindset as young people, and the conflict between campaign marketing and real democratic participation. This research help us understand how young, digital voters see political branding today.

Keywords: political branding; tiktok; youth voters; student perception; digital campaign

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's political era, branding has become an important way for candidates to build an image and connect with voters. *Political branding* does not only focus on the appearance of a figure, but also utilizes elements such as slogans, symbols, and communication styles that are tailored to the audience they want to reach. This approach no longer only emphasizes the delivery of a vision and mission, but also how to wrap political values and personalities into symbols that are easily recognized by the public (Olins and Needham, 2005) [1], *political branding* emphasizes the importance of brand personality namely the character and image that is attached to a politician and associated by the public through communication style, symbols, and visualizations. In the context of the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election, one well-known example is the "Oke Gas" campaign content from the Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka pair.

This phenomenon shows how political messages are conveyed. This campaign utilizes social media, especially TikTok, as the main distribution space for its content. TikTok, as part of *new media*, not only functions as a channel for disseminating information, but also as a space for the production and negotiation of visual, symbolic, and viral political meanings. Along with the increasing use of social media, TikTok has become a very popular platform, especially

among Gen Z. Therefore, TikTok is now a very powerful political campaign tool. This platform spreads short videos and visual content very quickly, making it easy to go viral and reach many people. Due to its ease of use and popularity, TikTok plays a big role in the dissemination of information globally. Its popularity among young people, especially Gen Z, makes it an effective platform for political campaigns that want to reach this group. From the perspective of *new media theory* developed by Pierre Levy (1990) [2], digital media such as TikTok represents a shift from one-way communication to participatory and algorithm-based communication.

In addition, within the framework of *political communication theory*, communication is understood as a process that plays a crucial role in forming public opinion (McNair, 2003) [3]. To explain that political communication includes all forms of communication aimed at influencing people's political views or behavior. The slogan "Oke Gas" has become very popular on social media and is widely shared by young people, especially Gen Z and students. This slogan often appears in various content such as TikTok videos, Instagram Reels, memes, and is even used as background music in campaign events. More than just an attention-grabbing phrase, "Oke Gas" is designed to depict enthusiasm, togetherness, and a fun youthful style, so that it can attract the attention of young voters. This slogan also seems to be part of Prabowo Subianto's image change from a figure known to be serious and firm to

being more relaxed and friendly to young people. This trend is interesting to study further, especially from the perspective of students. Students are at a phase of life where they are developing and learning many things. They generally have good digital skills and care about political issues. They are not only listeners to campaign messages, but also participate in spreading, discussing, and even being directly involved in political activities. Therefore, reviewing how students view “Oke Gas” can help understand whether branding like this is truly effective or not.

Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Jakarta (UPNVJ) students are part of an active campus environment, where students have a high concern for social and political issues. UPNVJ is also a campus based on national defense, so students in it tend to be sensitive to developing political issues. Because UPNVJ has a scientific orientation that is close to the political field, its students are often involved in political campaign activities, both directly and indirectly. On the other hand, the use of digital platforms as the main campaign channel presents new challenges in conveying authentic political messages. Many young people, including students, are often critical of political content that is considered insincere or too contrived. However, on the other hand, they are still interested in content that is funny, contemporary, or entertaining, even though it does not discuss political issues substantially.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method where qualitative research focuses on understanding social phenomena through the experiences and perspectives of participants. Data collection was carried out through literature review, interviews, participant observation, and content analysis [4]. To examine how UPNVJ Political Science students perceive the “Oke Gas” content on TikTok which is part of Prabowo Subianto’s political image in the 2024 presidential campaign (Creswell, 2014) [5]. The researcher systematically observed the “Oke Gas” campaign content on TikTok and collected responses from students to understand their views and level of political awareness. Interviews were conducted to support the findings with first-hand insights, while academic sources and news media were used to strengthen the context. This step-by-step approach helps provide a clear picture of how digital political content is received and interpreted by students in the current media landscape.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The “Oke Gas” content is a strategic campaign chosen by Prabowo for young people. This strategy shows a major change in the way politicians communicate with the Indonesian people, especially through digital platforms. Currently, political strategies like this are not only used to share information, but also to influence the way young people view each candidate. It is known that young voters reach around 60%

of the total 204 million voters, which is around 106 to 122 million people (pemilu.tempo.co, 2024). . Therefore, it makes sense that Prabowo's campaign focuses more on young people, aged between 17 and 40 years.

However, this strategy should not be viewed solely as a pragmatic move; it also reflects the evolving relationship between politics and popular culture within the context of contemporary political communication. [6]“Oke Gas” did not emerge organically as a slogan but was the product of a strategic calculation, designed to package political messages in a format that is easily digestible and appealing to younger generations. In practice, the slogan was crafted to evoke emotional resonance and interpretive flexibility. Political Science students at UPNVJ, as part of the younger generation with relatively high levels of critical awareness and political literacy, interpret the slogan through multiple analytical layers. Some view “Oke Gas” as an adaptive strategy in response to the shift toward increasingly visual, rapid, and personality based political communication rather than substantive and argumentative discourse. On the other hand, some interpret the content as a simplification of political discourse that neglects the substantive dimensions of the candidate’s vision and mission.

It is important to understand that when political messages begin to be packaged into memes, short audiovisuals, or viral catchphrases, a shift occurs from politics as a space for deliberation to politics as a space for rapid consumption. Political Science students perceive this strategy as potentially reinforcing the trend of “political personalization,” which emphasizes the figure and communication style of the candidate over the policies they propose. In the case of “Oke Gas,” Prabowo Subianto seeks to reshape his image from one that is firm, formal, and masculine, to one that is more relaxed, approachable, and even humorous. Some students interpret this as a rebranding effort aimed at winning the sympathy of young voters who are more responsive to populist communication styles than to rational and technocratic policy debates. UPNVJ Political Science students also observed how TikTok, as the main medium for disseminating “Oke Gas” content, indicates that politics is moving into the realm of aesthetics and emotion where messages are not necessarily meant to be understood in depth, but to be felt quickly. TikTok’s algorithmic nature, which promotes viral content based on engagement, makes political campaigns susceptible to falling into performative logic: what matters is attraction, not accuracy. In class discussions and interviews, many students expressed concern that such campaign strategies could lead to depoliticization, where voters are no longer encouraged to think, but merely to feel.

However, not all students assessed the strategy negatively. Some noted that in the context of limited time and attention among young voters, symbolic communication approaches like “Oke Gas” could serve as an initial entry point for gradually building political awareness. From this perspective, viral content is not seen as the endpoint of political engagement, but rather as the starting point of more substantive involvement. This assumes, of course, that the candidate follows up by providing spaces for discussion, policy

clarification, and direct engagement after successfully capturing public attention. Therefore, students' perceptions of the "Oke Gas" content reflect two main poles: first, as a clever populist strategy that risks reducing the quality of political deliberation; and second, as an adaptive communication strategy aligned with the dynamics of the new media ecology, which if managed effectively can serve as a gateway to more progressive political education. From this point of view, students are not merely campaign targets but analytical actors capable of mapping out the trajectory and implications of social media-based campaigns like Prabowo Subianto's "Oke Gas" slogan.

1. The Symbolic Meaning Behind the "Oke Gas" Slogan

Based on the analysis conducted regarding the perceptions of UPNVJ Political Science students, the slogan "Oke Gas" is understood not merely as a viral campaign catchphrase, but as a symbolic construct that reflects the deliberate simplification of political messages to reach younger voters. Students interpret this slogan as effective within the framework of populist communication, utilizing casual, energetic, and culturally familiar language that resonates with the digital culture of the youth. The phrase "Oke Gas" conveys a sense of immediacy, urgency, and enthusiasm, packaged in an emotional format to create psychological resonance rather than deliver in-depth policy content. This represents a form of deliberate branding, wherein communication strategies intentionally reduce political complexity in order to be quickly and widely accepted by novice or apolitical audiences.

The meaning of "Oke Gas," as interpreted by the majority of students, symbolizes a shift from rational-based politics to affective-based politics[7]. They recognize that the slogan is not isolated, but rather a part of a broader effort to reframe Prabowo Subianto's political image shifting from his traditionally rigid, militaristic, and conservative persona to a more flexible, humorous, and youth-friendly figure [8]. In this context, "Oke Gas" functions both as a tool to soften past political perceptions and as a vehicle to fill the absence of substantive policy discourse with a more 'pop' and personable image.

According to the students, there are doubts about the content because it is considered too emotional. It is even considered as something that is used to attract public attention because it is considered too important to go viral and appeal to the public. In their view, something that is too simple and does not describe the basis of the real political vision and mission by slogans like this risks damaging politics and making it merely entertainment, seeking popularity and visual impressions, instead of opening up space for debate about ideas, visions, and policy agendas.

Students are aware that in today's digital political sphere, symbols have become primary tools for shaping public perception, where speed and virality often outweigh the depth of ideas. This awareness leads to a central criticism: that overly symbolic political branding can replace substantive discourse with shallow representations in the name of electability. The meaning of "Oke Gas," from the students' perspective, cannot be separated from the media ecology context, image-framing strategies, and the logic of the electoral political market. It is

not merely a campaign slogan, but a representation of how politics is now packaged, marketed, and consumed particularly by the younger generation in formats that are more visual, symbolic, and emotional than ever before. Within this landscape, Political Science students are not passive consumers but rather critical observers capable of distinguishing between political communication as a tool for democratic participation and political communication as an electoral commodity.

2. The Effectiveness of Political Communication through the New Media Platform TikTok

The platform employed to execute this campaign strategy TikTok stands as a paradigmatic example of how new media technologies are reshaping the architecture of political communication in the 21st century [9]. As a relatively new but explosively popular social media application, TikTok has rapidly become a dominant channel, especially among Generation Z, who represent a significant portion of the voting population in Indonesia. Unlike traditional media platforms, TikTok thrives on short-form, visually engaging, and highly interactive content, a format that is particularly effective in capturing the fleeting attention span of digital natives. The app's algorithmic infrastructure, designed to prioritize user engagement and virality, allows political content to be disseminated widely and rapidly often reaching millions within hours, without the need for traditional gatekeeping mechanisms such as editorial review or fact-checking processes. This phenomenon is of course considered to be able to influence how democracy takes place, where political messages are designed as entertainment that entertains the public so that it can later damage the public's perspective.

Political Science students at the Universitas Nasional Veteran Jakarta (UPNVJ) are aware of this change and consider TikTok not just a tool for communication, but also a political platform that has a very strong influence. From their perspective, this platform can damage political identity, allowing candidates to change their way of doing politics to suit the communication style of young people. In the context of Prabowo Subianto's "Oke Gas" campaign content, TikTok is used to change the impression of political figures from those who previously gave an image of being rigid, formal, and militaristic. To someone who in his content is funny, meme-oriented, and often informal, Prabowo's campaign seeks to bridge the generational and emotional gap between the previous generation and Gen Z voters.

My analysis revealed that students interpret the use of TikTok as both a strategic and problematic maneuver. On one hand, many acknowledge the pragmatic necessity for political actors to adapt to the communication styles of younger constituents. The transition from televised debates and long-form speeches to short, digestible, and aesthetically tailored TikTok videos is seen as a rational response to the realities of digital attention economies. "Oke Gas," as a slogan and campaign theme, is viewed by some students as a clever branding technique designed to encapsulate energy, decisiveness, and accessibility in just two simple words. The linguistic simplicity and cultural relevance of the phrase align well with the informal and fast-paced discourse typical of social

media users, especially within youth subcultures that value humor, relatability, and low effort virality.

While many people think this is a smart strategy, Political Science students are still skeptical. Many of them feel that Prabowo's TikTok image makeover looks fake and inconsistent with his past as a strong and decisive leader. They find it confusing to see him being funny and friendly now, and they wonder if this is a real change or just a way to get more votes. These students see this kind of campaign as more about appearances than real ideas or plans. They are aware that social media can be used to manipulate people's perceptions rather than convey a clear political message. They also see this as part of a larger trend in politics today, where leaders care more about their image and online likes than about real discussions or policies. To them, TikTok is not just a platform for communication. It is more like a stage, where politicians act like entertainers to get attention. The use of jokes, visuals, and short-form content makes students question whether this is actually helping people engage with politics or just turning politics into a show. Some worry that when politics becomes just about trends and memes, people stop thinking deeply and just watch instead of participating.

Not all students gave negative opinions. Some of them said that using TikTok could actually help young people become more interested in politics, especially those who usually don't care. In this way, "Oke Gas" is seen as the starting point of something that can attract attention. If political content continues to emerge and becomes more meaningful later, it can make young people more involved and informed. Using TikTok for politics has its good and bad sides. TikTok can reach many people and get them involved, but it can also turn politics into a show that focuses too much on personalities. Political Science students at UPNVJ seem to understand this well. Based on their involvement in the politics they study, they can see not only the smart strategy behind it, but also the problems it might cause for democracy. For them, "Oke Gas" is not just a campaign tool, but a way to see more deeply about how political messages, how media and society are connected, and how difficult it is to build political awareness among young people in today's digital world.

3. UPNVJ Political Science Students' Perspective on Prabowo Subianto's Political Communication Strategy

TikTok is a new social media application that is growing very fast. This application has changed the way people, especially young people, see and talk about politics today. This application is no longer just for entertainment but is also used to share political ideas and gain public support. In Prabowo Subianto's campaign, especially through the "Oke Gas" content, TikTok is widely used to convey political messages quickly and in an emotional and easy-to-understand way. The way TikTok works with short videos and content that can go viral helps it reach young voters who like fast, visual, and simple information. Political Science students at UPNVJ realize that TikTok, as a form of new media, offers a level of effectiveness that is often unmatched by other media such as news, websites, or TV shows. This effectiveness lies in its capacity to build closeness in an entertaining, concise, and to-the-point manner. However, behind this effectiveness, students also highlight a

shift in the value of political communication from rationality to emotional appeal. TikTok encourages a mode of communication that prioritizes easy impressions and perceptions, ultimately influencing how society, especially young voters, understand and engage with politics.

In the case of the "Oke Gas" content, most students interpret it as a rebranding effort of Prabowo Subianto's long-standing image typically associated with militarism, firmness, and rigidity. His appearance on TikTok with a more relaxed, humorous, and youth-friendly persona is perceived as a political attempt to align with the ideal image held by younger voters [10]. Students argue that while this strategy is indeed adaptive to the new political communication ecosystem, it does not escape scrutiny regarding its authenticity and the consistency of the candidate's political character. For some, this transformation reflects a form of digital populist communication; for others, it is seen as image manipulation aimed at securing electoral support.

How political messaging works on TikTok isn't just about how many people see it, but also about whether the message helps people think more deeply about politics. Students noted that while TikTok can get a lot of attention, content like "Oke Gas" doesn't really help people understand the candidates' goals or ideas clearly. So, success in political communication shouldn't just be measured by the number of likes or views, but by how much the content helps people think and talk about politics seriously. UPNVJ Political Science students see themselves not just as viewers, but as people who think critically about the quality of political messages. TikTok may make political campaigns more fun and open, but it also poses problems, such as making serious messages seem too simple, or making people less concerned with politics. That's why the real success of using platforms like TikTok for politics depends on how well the platform blends style with content, and whether it leaves a lasting impact on how democracy works.

4. The Continuity Between Students' Political Orientation and Academic Background

UPNVJ Political Science students did not just react simply and casually to the "Oke Gas" campaign. Their opinions came from what they had learned in their studies, which helped shape their perspective on politics. As Political Science students, they have basic knowledge of political theory and learn to think critically about political messages, especially those shared through digital media. Therefore, they did not just see "Oke Gas" as funny or trending content, but they understood it as a way to focus attention on the candidate's image, while sometimes ignoring real discussions about policy.

From their observations, students saw that there was an imbalance between Prabowo Subianto's personal image that was often displayed and the explanation of the contents of the policy that should be the main focus of political communication. This imbalance is considered part of the current campaign method, especially in media like TikTok which prioritizes fame, but often ignores the meaning of the content. Political Science students, designed to theorize and think critically, see this strategy as a shift from politics that relies on arguments to politics that prioritize fame. It is also important to understand

that students' political orientation is not formed instantly. It arises from a combination of their experiences as TikTok users and the lessons they receive on campus about the theory and workings of politics. So when they respond to the "Oke Gas" content, their response comes from a scientific understanding as well as sensitivity to current political conditions. Students who already understand the theory usually see this content as a form of digital characterization, while those who are still early in understanding politics are more interested in the emotional and entertainment side.

Simply put, what students learn about politics in college influences the way they think and talk about political issues. Their opinions are not just based on what they see on the surface; they also think deeper about how democracy works, how campaigns are run, and whether political leaders truly represent the people. This shows that their political views are connected to what they learn. How they learn it becomes their judgment of what they see on social media. That's why the way UPNVJ Political Science students responded to the "Oke Gas" campaign is closely related to what they've learned in their studies. Their education helped them view content in a more thoughtful way, compare appearances with real ideas, and understand the difference between campaign gimmicks and real political goals. This proves that studying politics in college isn't just done in the classroom it also helps students think critically about what's happening in the real world.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The way UPNVJ Political Science students view Prabowo Subianto's "Oke Gas" content on TikTok shows how political communication has changed in the digital era. This style focuses more on visuals, symbols, and is close to what young people like. Most students consider this strategy a way to adapt to today's voters, especially since many of them are still young. Some students think "Oke Gas" is a smart strategy to approach young people, but others feel it is more about changing Prabowo's image to appear friendlier or more acceptable, rather than focusing on his actual political ideas. This focus on personal image rather than actual policies has some students worried that it could damage the quality of democratic discussions. TikTok is considered very useful for spreading political messages quickly and widely. But at the same time, it makes people question whether being popular has become more important than discussing serious political issues. Critical students realize that content like "Oke Gas" plays more on emotions than discussing actual policies. So, even though the content is interesting, many students are still thinking more deeply about what it means for political education and young voters. Their opinions are influenced by what they see in the media, their political views as young people, and the ongoing tension between the campaign and true democratic values. In this situation, students do not just watch passively, they think, analyze, and evaluate political strategies with their own knowledge and awareness of democracy.

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