

THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL PERSONALIZATION ON VOTERS

**Ahmad Sampurna Rambe¹, Muhammad Fairuz Attaya², Ibnuburrahman³, Rizky Rahman
Alfiris⁴, Zakaria Musa Lubis⁵**

¹²³⁴⁵Program Studi Komunikasi dan Penyiaran Islam, Fakultas Dakwah dan Komunikasi,
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara Medan, Medan, Indonesia
Correspondence Email: ahmadsampurna@uinsu.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Political personalization is an increasingly dominant communication strategy in the practice of digital democracy, where the focus of politics shifts from institutions and ideologies to individual figures. This study aims to analyze the influence of political personalization on voter behavior, especially in the context of social media that allows direct and intense interaction between candidates and the public. Using a qualitative approach through literature study, this article examines how political personalization strategies are constructed and accepted by the public, as well as their impact on the quality of voter rationality. The results of the study show that voters, especially the younger generation, are more likely to respond to visual and emotional aspects of political figures such as communication style, personal narratives, and symbolic closeness on social media. Political personalization creates an impressive relationship between candidates and voters, but on the other hand also simplifies the complexity of politics into a contestation of personal images. The discussion shows that this phenomenon increases public involvement visually and emotionally, but reduces attention to ideas, programs, and policy substance. The conclusion of this study is that political personalization has a significant impact on shaping affective and impressive voter behavior, which in the long term can weaken the deliberative democracy process if not balanced by increasing public political literacy.

Keywords: political personalization; voters; political communication; image; democracy.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary democratic landscape, the phenomenon of political personalization has become one of the most striking features of modern political communication. Political personalization is characterized by a shift in focus from political parties or collective ideologies to individual figures who appear as the center of public narratives. Political figures are no longer merely representatives of institutions, but have become “brands” formed through visual communication, rhetorical style, and emotional approaches that are strategically packaged through the media, especially social media. This change does not emerge in a vacuum, but rather as a response to the logic of mass communication that is increasingly oriented towards symbolic appeal, and the dynamics of digital culture that prioritizes personal connections and visual impressions.

The practice of individual figures being the center of political narratives has become a dominant feature in the modern democratic landscape. The shift in focus from ideology or institutions to the personalities of political figures is reinforced by social media, which allows direct and symbolic communication between candidates and the public. Sulastri & Khoirotunnisa,(2023)noted that social media provides a strategic platform for candidates to build personal closeness with voters through everyday narratives and relatable visuals. This accelerates the formation of impressive emotional bonds, but the risk of reducing rational assessment of the candidate's vision and programs is real.

The urgency of discussing political personalization is increasingly relevant in the context of social media, which allows politicians to build direct and symbolic relationships with the public. In many democratic countries, including Indonesia, personalization does not only appear in formal political campaigns, but also in the daily communication of political figures published on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, or Twitter. Political figures do not only speak as officials, but also as “influencers” who convey personal narratives, display their daily lives, and even form digital personas that are relatable to the younger generation. This significantly influences the way voters understand and evaluate candidates, where personality and visual image are more decisive than policy programs and substance.

The urgency of this research increases when looking at the influence of social media on the political preferences of the younger generation. Ramadhan et al.,(2025)found that social media-based digital campaign strategies such as creative content design and AI significantly influenced young voters' behavior in the recent election. This phenomenon shows that digital media not only educates, but also has the potential to influence opinion through personalized, attractive and viral images, blurring the lines between personal charm and political legitimacy.

This trend has serious implications for voter behavior. Several studies have shown that voters are now more likely to vote based on personal impressions rather than rational evaluations of candidates' visions and missions. Voters, especially young and novice voters, respond to politics as an image show where the speaking style, appearance, and narrative of a political figure's personal life become determining factors in electoral decision-making. In this condition, political participation does increase quantitatively, but has the potential to decrease qualitatively due to the lack of critical engagement with the substance of ideas. This creates a condition that many experts call "performative democracy," where visual popularity replaces the depth of discourse.

Furthermore, another study by Tarigan et al.,(2024)shows that social media plays a major role in shaping Generation Z's political orientation in the North Sumatra Pilkada, although challenges such as disinformation and the potential for echo chambers remain. This indicates that while personalization increases engagement, it is also prone to creating a narrow and biased communication environment.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the influence of political personalization on voter behavior in the context of digital democracy. This study attempts to identify how personalization strategies are constructed by political figures, and how these strategies influence people's perceptions and political decisions. This study not only describes the phenomenon of personalization, but also reflects its impact on the quality of democracy and the structure of voters' political awareness. By analyzing the construction of personal and emotional symbolic communication, this article aims to uncover how individual narratives play a role in shaping the relationship between power and citizens.

As an approach, this research was conducted using a qualitative method through a literature study, by reviewing relevant scientific literature related to political communication, voter behavior, and digital culture. This study hypothesizes that political personalization is one of the main factors influencing electoral decisions, especially in societies that tend to have low levels of political literacy. Thus, this article is expected to be able to provide theoretical and practical contributions in

understanding the challenges of democracy in an era of communication that is increasingly focused on personas, not ideas.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory and reflective literature study method. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore in depth the complexity of the phenomenon of political personalization in the realm of contemporary political communication, especially in relation to changes in people's electoral behavior in the digital era. This method relies on the search, identification, and critical analysis of relevant academic literature, both in the form of scientific articles, reference books, research reports, and conceptual documents that raise issues of political personalization, social media, and voter behavior. The selection of sources was carried out purposively based on the depth of argumentation, thematic relevance, and its contribution to the formation of theoretical perspectives.

The object of study in this research is conceptual and discursive, covering the narrative of political personalization in media communication, the strategy of self-image of political figures in digital space, and how these aspects are responded to by voters as active audiences. Political personalization is operationalized as a communication strategy that places individual politicians as the center of discourse, by prioritizing personality image, emotional communication style, and visual approaches designed to create symbolic attachment with the audience. On the other hand, voter behavior is understood as a psychological response and electoral action formed by perceptions of the candidate's persona, both affectively and symbolically.

The analysis technique used in this study is thematic content analysis, which is an interpretive approach used to identify, group, and interpret the main themes in the literature studied. Ranie et al.,(2024)The analysis process includes critical reading of the text, classification of emerging representation patterns, and reinterpretation of the construction of political personalization based on the theoretical framework of political communication and voter behavior. This approach provides space for researchers to compile a conceptual synthesis that is not only descriptive, but also offers critical reflection on the ideological impact of political personalization on the quality of democracy and political awareness of contemporary society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the literature review show that the strategy of political personalization places political figures as the center of the narrative, replacing ideological orientation or institutional programs. Candidates actively display their lifestyle, family interactions, and emotional expressions through social media, the main goal of which is to create symbolic bonds with voters. Sutjipto et al.,(2024)found that “personal narratives and relatable visual styles on platforms like Instagram make figures more resonant with young voters.” His interpretation is that personalization is not just a communication strategy, it has become a key tool in shifting the public’s focus from the substance of policy to the impression of personal image.

In addition, Rizma Riendani et al.,(2024)noted that social media such as TikTok and Instagram do increase the political engagement of the younger generation, but the sustainability of critical discourse is still hampered by filter bubbles and algorithmic bias. This shows that although personal image can attract attention, public engagement tends to be emotional and easily manipulated rather than reflective of the content of the message.

Table 1. Political Personalization Strategies and Their Impact on Voters

Political Personalization Strategy	Media Used	Impact on Voters
Showing personal life	Instagram, TikTok	Increasing symbolic closeness with young voters
Relaxed and interactive language style	Twitter, YouTube Shorts	Creating the perception of a "leader close to the people"
Visualization of emotional expression in campaigns	Live streaming	Enhance emotional connection
Emphasis on personality rather than program	All platforms	Lowering attention to the substance of the policy

The table above shows that the political personalization strategy does not only target the technical aspects of communication, but also forms an emotional impression on voters. The dominance of the use of visual media strengthens the symbolic relationship that is fast but shallow. This shows that voter preferences tend to be directed at the persona, not at a substantial vision or policy.

Several studies also show a tendency towards politicization of images that carry threats: Ridwan and Fatkhuri(2023)In the case study of the Solo Pilkada, it was revealed that dominant personalization weakened the internal organization of the party and emphasized dependence on certain figures. When internal democracy is eroded by personalization, the institutional structure of the party weakens and voter behavior is more symbolic loyalty than idea-based support.

At the level of voter behavior, Khumairo' & Asfar,(2023)found that more than 20% of first-time voters in Sidoarjo made their choice based on visual impressions and candidate style, not ideology. This confirms a shift in electoral motivation from rational to impressional, where voting decisions are more influenced by the candidate's personal symbolism than the substance of policies.

In addition, Kholilurohman,(2024)shows that political identity (such as religion or ethnicity) is still a major factor in voter behavior, but personalization adds a new layer to decision minting, namely personal magnetism in a spiritual or ethnic frame. This shows the complexity of the interaction between figure image and public identity in shaping voting patterns.

Overall, these findings suggest that political personalization consistently triggers significant changes in voter behavior, shifting voter motivation from rational assessment of programs to emotional assessment of candidate personas. This is in line with the phenomenon of “performative democracy” where elections become a competition for visual and impressionable images, with the risk of weakening the deliberative foundation and quality of substantive democracy without being accompanied by strengthening public political literacy.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that political personalization has become a dominant strategy in shaping contemporary political communication, especially in the era of digital media that facilitates symbolic closeness between political figures and the public. This approach places individual figures as the center of political narratives, with an emphasis on communication style, personal appearance, and emotional narratives that are displayed massively through social media. These findings reveal that personalization strategies have a significant impact on voter behavior, especially in shifting political orientation from the substance of ideas to personal impressions that are emotional and visual. Voters, especially from the younger generation, tend to respond to image-based political communication with higher intensity, but with lower levels of rationality. This indicates a shift in preference patterns from evaluating policies and programs to assessing the symbolic appeal of candidates. In the long term, this tendency has the potential to weaken the quality of deliberative democracy because the public discourse space becomes narrower and shallower, dominated by symbolic consumption rather than the exchange of ideas. Thus, political personalization, although effective in increasing public engagement emotionally and visually, also has serious consequences for the depth of political participation. Therefore, efforts are needed to strengthen political literacy and public communication ethics, so that personalization does not become a tool for political simplification, but remains within the framework of responsible representation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Kholilurohman, K. (2024). PRAKTIK POLITIK IDENTITAS MENUJU PEMILU 2024 DAN PENGARUHNYA TERHADAP DEMOKRASI. *Legacy: Jurnal Hukum dan Perundang-Undangan*, 4(1), 60–80. <https://doi.org/10.21274/LEGACY.2024.4.1.60-80>
- Khumairo', A. A. A., & Asfar, M. (2023). Perilaku Memilih Masyarakat pada Pilkada Kabupaten Sidoarjo Tahun 2020. *Jurnal Politik Indonesia (Indonesian Journal of Politics)*, 9(2), 127–140. <https://doi.org/10.20473/JPI.V9I2.50796>
- Ramadhan, F. S., Erviantono, T., & Noak, P. A. (2025). PERAN MEDIA SOSIAL DALAM MEMPENGARUHI PERILAKU POLITIK GENERASI MUDA DI INDONESIA: STUDI KASUS KAMPANYE PRABOWO-GIBRAN. *Triwikrama: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial*, 7(7), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.6578/TRIWIKRAMA.V7I7.11516>
- Ranie, H., Romadhoni, N., & Ardihifah, S. (2024). PEMBINGKAIAN BERITA KASUS BUNUH DIRI PEREMPUAN DI malangposcomedia, id SEBAGAI MEDIA YANG TERKONVERGENSI. *NIVEDANA: Jurnal Komunikasi dan Bahasa*, 5(3), 372–392.

- Ridwan, M. A., & Fatkhuri, F. (2023). Dinamika Personalisasi Partai Politik Dalam Rekrutmen Bakal Calon Walikota Solo 2020 (Studi Kasus Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDI-P)). *JPW (Jurnal Politik Walisongo)*, 5(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.21580/JPW.V5I1.16789>
- Rizma Riendani, C., Raghda Atshila, I. S., Abhinaya, A., Ridlo Abdillah, A., Dzaky Mufadhol, B., Pembangunan Nasional, U., Timur, J., Rungkut Madya, J., Anyar, G., & Gn Anyar, K. (2024). Pengaruh Algoritma Media Sosial Terhadap Selektivitas Konsumsi Berita Politik Pada Generasi Z Di Indonesia. *Jurnal Pustaka Cendekia Hukum dan Ilmu Sosial*, 2(3), 224–228. <https://doi.org/10.70292/PCHUKUMSOSIAL.V2I3.68>
- Sulastri, A. N., & Khoirotunnisa, P. (2023). Personal Branding Anies Baswedan dalam Membangun Citra pada Pilpres 2024 di Instagram. *JPW (Jurnal Politik Walisongo)*, 5(1), 73–84. <https://doi.org/10.21580/JPW.V5I1.16743>
- Sutjipto, V. W., Putri, M. L., Sary, M. P., Christdiyatmiko, A. E., Hakim, F. Z., & Putri, A. D. (2024). PENGARUH MEDIA SOSIAL INSTAGRAM TERHADAP PERSONAL BRAND GANJAR PRANOWO BAGI PARTISIPASI GENERASI Z DI PEMILU 2024. *SOURCE: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 10(2), 162–178. <https://doi.org/10.35308/SOURCE.V10I2.9448>
- Tarigan, V. C. E., Asnawi, M. I., Rokan, M. P., Girsang, L. W. P., & Simbolon, N. (2024). Pengaruh Media Sosial Terhadap Keterlibatan Politik Generasi Z dalam Pemilihan Gubernur Sumatera Utara 2024. *Locus: Jurnal Konsep Ilmu Hukum*, 4(3), 99–106. <https://doi.org/10.56128/JKIH.V4I3.399>