DIGITAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN POLITICIANS IN INDONESIA: YOUTH PERSPECTIVES AND SELF-PORTRAYAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT. Less than 25% of seats in Indonesia's House of Representatives are held by women politicians. While studies have explored the topic of women in Indonesian politics, this article adopts a unique approach by examining the use of social media as a political marketing tool by women politicians in Indonesia during the 2024 pre-presidential election period. Key questions include how women politicians are portrayed on social media, how they portray themselves, and how Indonesian youths perceive them. Possible mismatches between portrayals are also considered. This study specifically analyzes and maps the characteristics of social media posts from 36 women politicians across their platforms. With the growing involvement of young people in the political arena, understanding younger generations' views on women politicians is crucial for comprehending social media's impact on Indonesia's democratic system. The findings contribute to the understanding of young people's interest in politics, particularly concerning women in politics, and offer insights into the potential influence of social media on future elections in Indonesia.

Keywords: Political participation; social media; women politicians; youth perception

INTRODUCTION

The recent Indonesian legislative election drew substantial public interest and sparked significant discourse among social media users. Since 2022, social media has become a critical platform influencing voters under the age of 40 (Ayu, 2023), with politicians actively seeking new ways to connect with younger voters, including through increased engagement on social media. As Milkman (2017) noted, social media is a powerful tool for reaching and influencing millennials and Generation Z in elections.

In Indonesia, the importance of social media as a bridge between voters and politicians is undeniable. With approximately 191 million active users in 2022 (We Are Social, 2022), social media has gained even greater attention in the lead-up to the presidential election. Instagram ranks as the second-most popular platform in the country, with roughly 106 million users as of February 2023. Despite its influence, there remains a stark gender disparity among the most-followed public figures: only five of the top 20 public officials with the most followers are women, and only one woman ranks among the top ten political figures (Rizaty, 2022; Imran, 2023). This is consistent with the fact that fewer than 25% of seats in Indonesia's House of Representatives are held by women politicians (Aspinall et al., 2021).

Female politicians encounter distinct challenges within the digital sphere, often facing labeling based on physical appearance and stereotypical gender roles (Verge and Pastor, 2018). Research indicates they experience higher levels of online harassment, intimidation, and hate speech than their male counterparts (Dash, 2020). In Malaysia, for instance, media coverage of female leaders has been shown to emphasize traditional gender roles rather than professional achievements or leadership qualities (Rajaratnam et al., 2020). Gelber's (2011) study on the role of social media in politics highlights that social media can empower women in politics, noting that some of the most effective and innovative political figures on social media are women. Gelber also suggests that women politicians use social media differently than men, although further research is needed to fully understand its impact on women's political roles.

Against this backdrop, this research aims to analyze social media discourse around the use of social media by female politicians in Indonesia. While previous studies have addressed women's participation in Indonesian politics, this article diverges by focusing on Instagram—one of the country's most widely used platforms—and examining its use by female politicians during the pre-presidential election period in 2024. Social media and young voters are deeply interconnected, as recent research by Utomo et al. (2022) has demonstrated, making a strategic approach to engaging this demographic crucial for political campaigns.

This study addresses two primary questions:
1. How do female politicians present themselves on social media platforms?
2. What are the perceptions of Indonesian youth regarding female politicians' public image beyond social media?

As young people take on a more prominent role in Indonesian politics and politicians increasingly utilize social media, answering these questions is essential for a better understanding of social media's impact on Indonesia's democratic process.

The structure of this article follows a logical progression to ensure clarity. It begins with an introduction that contextualizes the research issue and highlights the gaps this article seeks to address. This is followed by a review of the theoretical frameworks supporting the study, an outline of the methodology, a presentation of the findings, and a discussion of their implications. Finally, the article concludes by summarizing the key insights and their significance for future elections and democratic engagement in Indonesia.

The big five personality traits

The Big Five Personality Traits represent a comprehensive and widely accepted personality framework that identifies five fundamental dimensions influencing human personality: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, commonly abbreviated as OCEAN (Goldberg, 1990). These five traits serve as broad psychological categories that describe variations in human behavior, emotions, and thought processes.

Goldberg's work established the foundation for the OCEAN model, which has been extensively applied in psychological research to explore personality across different populations. This model has been particularly valuable in studying the personality characteristics of younger generations, offering insights into how their traits shape attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making. Moreover, the model has significant implications in diverse fields such as political behavior, social media engagement, and gender studies, helping researchers understand how personality influences individual actions and societal trends.

One notable finding in personality research using the OCEAN model is the consistent gender differences observed across cultures. Studies indicate that, on average, women score higher than men in conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Golbeck, 2011). This suggests that women tend to be more responsible, cooperative, and emotionally sensitive compared to men, highlighting important psychological differences that could influence workplace behavior, social interactions, and mental health outcomes.

Beyond individual personality analysis, the OCEAN model has also been applied in political research. A study by Amsalem et al. (2020) examined how personality traits influence politicians' visibility in the media. Using a dataset of 339 incumbent politicians across three countries, the study found that politicians who were less agreeable but more extraverted appeared more frequently in news coverage. This suggests that extraversion—characterized by sociability, assertiveness, and energy—plays a key role in securing media attention, whereas lower agreeableness—associated with competitiveness and a willingness to engage in controversy—may also increase public exposure. The research methodology involved self-assessments, where politicians rated themselves on the OCEAN traits, and media analysis that counted how often their names were mentioned in major news outlets within their respective countries.

The OCEAN model's ability to predict behavior across different domains underscores its robustness and reliability in psychological research. By providing a structured way to assess personality traits, it remains a vital tool for understanding human behavior in contexts ranging from everyday social interactions to large-scale political and media dynamics.

Our study takes a different approach by looking at the young generation's perception of politician personalities outside social media and draws the relationship with politicians' social media as portrayed by the politician themselves. Previous studies have tested the robustness of this framework. Özgüven and Mucan (2013) discovered that those who are careful and open to new experiences and content in their lives utilize social media more frequently. Despite some criticism, OCEAN traits remain one of the most dominant and reliable personality models in research and practice. Our study further chose this framework because of its simplicity and strength in the field.

Jenkins' public and private dimension

Cathy Jenkins in 2002 (Jenkins, 2002) analyzed how female politicians were portrayed in Australian media throughout history. She categorized news into two dimensions: Public and Private. Categories defined as public were those that described activities carried out outside the spheres of home and family, while categories defined as private indicated activities that dealt with the individual's life within the home and family, either at present or in the past. The Public categories used were Education, Work/Profession, Community (work or activities), Politics, Military service, and sports (Jenkins, 2002). The definitions for the categories were as follows:

education, the place where the person went to school, university, or college; degrees or educational qualifications held by the person; and mention of the geographical area where the person was educated. The Private categories were spouses, children, relatives, physical appearance, distress, personality, age, and background. The original Jenkin category was designed to map the text into categories. This study tests the framework for social media posts that contain text in captions and comments.

Cathy Jenkins (2002) conducted a comprehensive analysis of how female politicians have been portrayed in Australian media over time. Her research focused on identifying patterns in media coverage and classifying news content based on the nature of the topics discussed. She developed a framework that categorized media content into two overarching dimensions: Public and Private (Jenkins, 2002). This distinction aimed to highlight the extent to which media narratives focused on female politicians' professional achievements versus their personal lives.

Public categories included topics that pertained to activities conducted outside the domestic sphere, emphasizing professional, educational, and civic engagements. These categories comprised:

- Education: Coverage about where the individual attended school, university, or college; degrees or educational qualifications earned; and geographical details regarding their education.
- Work/Profession: Mentions of professional roles and career accomplishments.
- Community (work or activities): Involvement in social and civic activities within communities.
- Politics: Engagement in political roles, responsibilities, and contributions.
- Military service: Any involvement in national defense or military organizations.
- Sports: Participation in athletic activities or achievements in sports.

On the other hand, Private categories included media discussions centered on the politician's personal life and background. These topics often shaped public perceptions by emphasizing familial roles or personal characteristics rather than professional credentials. The Private dimension consisted of:

- Spouses: References to a politician's husband or wife.
- Children: Mentions of their children, parenting roles, or family life.
- Relatives: Coverage involving extended family members.
- Physical appearance: Commentary on looks, attire, body image, or style.
- Distress: Any portrayal of emotional struggles, hardships, or personal crises.
- Personality: Descriptions of character traits, temperament, or behavioral tendencies.
- Age: Mentions of the individual's age and how it relates to their career or public image.
- Background: References to personal history, upbringing, or socio-economic origins.

Jenkins' categorization system was originally designed as a framework for mapping traditional media content into structured analytical categories. Her work provided a foundational approach to assessing gender biases in media representations, particularly how female politicians are framed either as professionals or through a more personal, often domesticated, lens.

Building on Jenkins' framework, this study seeks to test its applicability in the context of social media, specifically by analyzing textual content from Instagram captions and comments. Unlike traditional media, where narratives are shaped by journalists and editors, social media platforms allow for a more dynamic, user-generated discourse. While Jenkins' public-private dimensions offer a lens through which to examine the interplay between public personas and private selves. It allows us to analyze how politicians present themselves publicly through digital imagery and how it helps us understand how young voters perceive politicians' public personas and authenticity. This dimensionality is crucial for analyzing how individuals navigate their public roles while maintaining their private identities.

This article tested the combination of the two frameworks (OCEAN and Jenkins) for social media posts that contain text in captions and comments to offer a nuanced approach to studying personality and identity in the context of public roles. By employing these frameworks, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how young voters perceive and interact with online political content, ultimately contributing to more effective campaign strategies and voter engagement efforts.

METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining manual content analysis with a quantitative descriptive methodology. Due to the data constraint on women politicians in Indonesia, we extracted politicians served in 2019 – 2024 data from Wikipedia. The data was manually crosschecked for the validity through several websites, and their social media accounts were traced.

Instagram captions were collected from 36 women politicians actively using the platform. Politicians were selected based on recent activity, specifically excluding those whose latest posts were prior to August 2023. Additionally, only politicians with more than 4,000 followers were included, ensuring that the sample consisted of figures with notable visibility and engagement on social media. The list of Instagram links for each female politician, along with the number of posts and followers, is provided in Appendix 1. To capture dynamics relevant to the upcoming 2024 election, data collection focused on content posted between January 2023 and August 2023.

An online questionnaire was designed to include both qualitative and quantitative questions, targeting Indonesian respondents aged 17 to 42 across diverse locations in Indonesia. Distributed online through personal networks, the survey utilized a snowball sampling method to reach a broader audience. The data that we collected did not show any significant difference on the demographic of respondents. Therefore, we believe that it represents a diverse set of respondents.

The Big Five personality traits (OCEAN), used in this study to assess young people's perceptions of Indonesian women politicians, were measured through an observer rating captured via an online questionnaire. To analyze the politicians' strategies and patterns of self-presentation on Instagram, a manual content analysis was conducted on their captions. The coding process for Instagram captions was also performed manually to enable categorization based on Jenkins' framework and the OCEAN theoretical model.

First, categorization criteria were established according to these theories, classifying captions into distinct groups: public or private, incorporating religious nuances, expressing emotions, or containing slang. Each caption was then labeled according to its relevant categories, allowing for the possibility of multiple categorizations within a single caption. This approach allowed for a detailed examination of recurring themes and messaging strategies employed by the politicians. The conceptual framework of this study is illustrated in Figure 1.
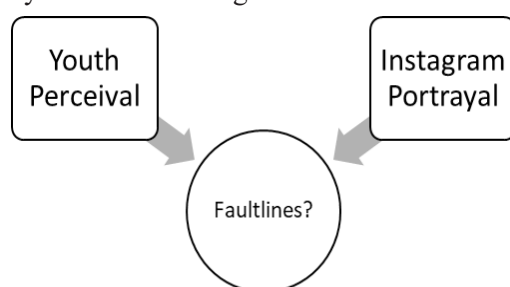
Source: Primary data, 2024

Figure 1. Conceptual Research Framework

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic of Respondents

The participants in our study were dominated by those who lived outside Java (66.67 %) (Table 1). More than 80% of our respondents (n= 887) reported following political news, and among these, 777 people showed an interest in political news related to women politicians. It is also intriguing to observe that approximately 68% of our respondents actively followed women politicians on social media platforms.

Table 1. Demographic of Respondents

Category	Response	Count (n)	%
Total Respondent		1101	100%
Gender			
	Male	443	40,2%
	Female	658	59,8%
Domicile			
	Java island	368	33,3%
	Outside Java	733	66,7%
Following Women Politicians on Social Media			
	Yes	756	68,7%
	No	345	31,3%
Interest in Political News			
	Yes	887	80,5%
	No	214	19,5%
Interest in Political News Related to Women Politicians			
	Yes	777	70,6%
	No	324	29,4%

Source: Primary data, 2024

The Big Five Personality Traits Model (OCEAN)

The subsequent section of the questionnaire invited respondents to categorize female politicians according to the Big Five Personality Traits model (OCEAN). From this exercise, *Openness* (50.6%) and *Conscientiousness* (42.5%) emerged as the top traits associated with these politicians. Respondents were permitted to select more than one of the five traits, allowing for a nuanced perception of personality characteristics.

Social media analysis in this study focused on Instagram captions from 36 female politicians, with data collected during a defined observation period. Appendix 1 provides detailed statistics for the politicians included in the analysis. A total of 6,861 captions were extracted from these Instagram accounts and subsequently classified based on Jenkins' public and private dimension framework. Overall, 74.3% of the captions were categorized as representing "public-dimension" content, reflecting activities and characteristics outside the personal

sphere. The remaining captions fell into "private-dimension" posts or mixed categories that could not be easily classified into either dimension.

To uncover potential patterns, a cross-tabulation was conducted between the dimension classifications and the ideological affiliations of the political parties represented. Table 2 presents a summary of these cross-tabulation results, highlighting key associations between party ideology and the nature of content shared by female politicians on social media.

Table 2. Cross-tabulation on Political Parties' Ideology

Instagram Post Dimension	Nationalist	Islamist
Public	3021	2078
Private	806	243
Mixed	45	668

Source: Primary Data, 2024

In contrast to Jenkin's classification of news posts into public and private dimensions, this analysis identified a new category: the mixed dimension. This category includes posts such as congratulatory messages for Eid al-Fitr, which blend elements of both public and private content.

Table 3 presents a cross-tabulation of religious nuances and party affiliations in social media captions, highlighting notable differences between Nationalist and Religious parties. Within the Nationalist category, emotionally charged posts (1,448) are more prevalent than religiously themed posts (532), accounting for 37.40% and 13.74% of the total, respectively. In contrast, within the Religious party category, religiously themed posts (725) outnumber emotional posts (358), comprising 24.26% and 11.98% of the total, respectively. These findings indicate a distinct pattern in content emphasis between the two party categories.

Table 3. Cross-tabulation on Religious Nuances and Parties in Captions

	Emotion	Religious
Nationalist	1448	532
Religious	358	725

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Indonesian Millennials and Gen-Z Exhibit Heightened Political Interest

Political interest is a fundamental factor influencing political engagement (Keating & Melis, 2017). Recognizing the extent to which Indonesia's younger generations engage with politics is essential for understanding emerging voter trends. Traditionally, studies have shown that younger demographics, especially Gen-Z, tend to have lower levels of political interest compared to older groups like Baby Boomers and Gen-X (Andersen et al., 2021). However, this study finds a notable deviation from this trend, revealing a heightened political interest among Indonesian Millennials and Gen-Z (Saputro et al., 2023; Rizaty, 2022; Taylor, 2018).

This growing interest in politics among young Indonesians may be closely tied to the significant increase in political information on social media, especially during the pre-election period. In the lead-up to elections, platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter are often dominated by political content, increasing the exposure of young users to political debates, campaign promises, and policy discussions. The pervasive presence of political content on these platforms during this time can be a powerful catalyst, driving political curiosity and engagement among these digital-savvy generations.

This pattern suggests that pre-election periods may play an essential role in activating political interest among youth. Exposure to frequent political updates, controversies, and discussions can amplify awareness and prompt more active participation in political discourse, challenging previous assumptions about a stable relationship between political interest and media exposure (Andersen et al., 2021; Boulianne, 2011). Moreover, the dynamic nature of Indonesian politics and the rise of younger political leaders could also inspire Millennials and Gen-Z to become more politically involved, viewing politics as a relevant and impactful domain in their lives. This heightened political awareness may have significant implications for voter turnout and the strategies candidates use to engage with young voters.

Following Women Politicians on Social Media

There are several motivations for following public figures on platforms like Instagram, with access to information that aligns with personal interests being among the most common (Morton, 2020). Additionally, public figures often serve as sources of inspiration. From a political perspective, a substantial follower count helps politicians build rapport with their audience, positively influencing public support (McLaughlin & Macafee, 2019). Politicians with significant followings have a unique opportunity to connect with a diverse audience, shaping public opinion and possibly encouraging political engagement among users. This influence is critical as social media platforms have become essential spaces for political engagement, especially among younger generations.

The 36 female politicians analyzed in this study varied significantly in follower count, ranging from 4,900 to 7.8 million. The politician with the fewest followers, Agustina Wilujeng Pramestuti, a member of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Resilience (PDI-P), is 52 years old. Conversely, Krisdayanti, a former Indonesian pop diva who transitioned to a political career, holds the highest number of followers on Instagram. Out of the 36 politicians studied, only 11 were under the age of 42.

Interestingly, younger politicians tended to have fewer posts on average (147) compared to their older counterparts (209 posts). This observation indicates that older women politicians tend to be more active on social media, potentially due to experience and long-standing engagement with their audiences. The lower posting frequency of younger politicians compared to their older counterparts can be attributed to generational differences in political engagement and expression. Younger politicians may prioritize different forms of political participation and expression, reflecting evolving citizenship norms and engagement patterns (Baoulianne & Shehata 2021). These factors suggest a shift in how political interest is expressed among younger generations.

These findings reveal that young Indonesians are likely to follow at least one woman politician on social media, a trend that women politicians could leverage to increase their appeal to this voter demographic. Although Millennials and Gen-Z make up approximately 60% of the voter base in the 2024 Indonesian elections, gaining their support remains a challenge due to their generally critical view of political parties (Saputro et al., 2023). Therefore, maintaining an active social media presence is a strategic priority for these politicians.

The Use of Emotions in Social Media Captions

The role of emotions in social media captions has gained considerable research attention, especially in political communication. Political posts on social media often contain emotional content, which significantly impacts engagement and communication effectiveness (Bossetta & Schmøkel, 2023). Social media platforms have become vital for expressing emotions, with the ability to detect emotions aiding in understanding the psychological state of content creators (Nandwani & Verma, 2021). Emotions, particularly positive ones, serve as a bridge to connect more authentically with followers, building trust and fostering deeper engagement.

Research on the emotional content in Indonesian political communication is relatively sparse. However, Alvin (2023) categorized President Jokowi's Instagram posts during the G-20 Presidency by emotion, identifying themes of calm, happiness, and confusion. Similarly, this study analyzed emotional expression among female politicians, finding that positive emotions such as joy, confidence, optimism, love, pride, and admiration were dominant. For instance, captions like *"Bersama-sama kita bisa membangun negeri yang kita cintai ini. Terima kasih atas doa dan dukungan kalian yang luar biasa!"* (Together, we can build the country we love. Thank you for your incredible prayers and support!) reflect an optimistic and encouraging tone, fostering solidarity and hope among followers. Another example, *"Hari ini, saya merasa sangat bangga dapat menyaksikan generasi muda yang bersemangat berkontribusi untuk bangsa ini. Kalian adalah harapan masa depan!"* (Today, I am so proud to witness young people eager to contribute to this nation. You are the hope of the future!), expresses pride and admiration, effectively inspiring followers.

The trend of female politicians using positive emotional language is influenced by a combination of societal expectations, strategic communication choices, and media representation (Hargrave & Blumenau 2022; Karl & Cormack 2021; Renner & Masch 2019; D'Errico et al. 2022; Scott & McDonald 2022). Female politicians often face societal expectations to conform to traditional gender roles, which include being more empathetic and emotionally expressive. This can lead to the use of more positive emotional language as a way to align with these expectations (Hargrave & Blumenau 2022; Karl & Cormack 2021). At the same time, Gender stereotypes suggest that women are more nurturing and compassionate, which can pressure female politicians to adopt a communication style that reflects these traits to avoid backlash or negative perceptions (Hargrave & Blumenau 2022; Renner & Masch 2019). Female politicians may strategically use positive emotional language to connect with voters and convey authenticity. This approach can enhance their perceived competence and benevolence, especially when discussing moral or social issues (D'Errico et al. 2022). Positive emotional language can also serve as a tool to mitigate the impact of gender biases, allowing female politicians to navigate complex political landscapes more effectively (Karl & Cormack 2021; Scott & McDonald 2022).

Media coverage often highlights the emotional expressivity of female politicians more than their male counterparts, reinforcing the visibility of positive emotional language in their public communications.

Female politicians' emotions are more frequently showcased in media, which can perpetuate the perception that they use more positive emotional language (Renner & Masch 2019). These factors above collectively shape how female politicians are perceived and how they choose to present themselves in the political arena.

These findings align with Waterloo et al. (2018), who observed that positive emotional expressions are more widely accepted across digital platforms. Such expressions not only enhance the perceived relatability of political figures but also help them navigate sensitive issues with a tone that encourages engagement rather than division.

Additionally, Tifferet and Vilnai (2014) found that female social media users, including politicians, tend to express emotions more openly compared to their male counterparts, who often display assertiveness and seriousness. For example, captions like *"Doa tulus saya selalu bersama kalian yang sedang menghadapi masa sulit. Jangan pernah menyerah, karena harapan selalu ada!"* (My heartfelt prayers are always with those facing tough times. Never give up, for there is always hope!) illustrate empathy and compassion, traits often associated with female leadership.

The study also revealed a fascinating contrast in emotional language use between party affiliations. Nationalist party members employed emotional expressions in 37.4% of their captions, frequently using language to evoke national pride or communal solidarity. For instance, *"Bangga menjadi bagian dari perjuangan ini. Indonesia adalah rumah kita, dan kita akan selalu menjaga kehormatannya!"* (Proud to be part of this struggle. Indonesia is our home, and we will always uphold its honor!) emphasizes unity and dedication. In contrast, politicians affiliated with Islamist parties showed a lower frequency of emotional content, with only 12% of their captions containing similar expressions. Instead, their posts often focused on religious messages with a more subdued emotional tone.

This nuanced use of emotional language highlights how social media captions can serve as powerful tools for shaping public perception and engagement. Politicians who effectively integrate positive emotions into their messaging can foster stronger connections with their audience, appealing to both their values and aspirations.

Religious Nuances in Captions

Previous studies have shown that political party affiliation significantly influences how female politicians construct their public personas on social media. Female politicians often align their social media strategies with their party's stance on issues. For instance, Republican women in the U.S. House are particularly active in framing the defunding of planned parenthood as both a women's and fetal rights issue, balancing gender and party expectations to strategically engage in debates (Johnstonbaugh, 2020). In contexts like South Africa, female politicians from various parties use social media to challenge traditional media gatekeeping, promote their public works, and assert their agency in shaping public discourse. This strategic use of social media helps them enhance visibility and influence public perception (Matsilele & Nkoala 2023).

An in-depth analysis of Instagram captions among female Indonesian politicians revealed a strategic incorporation of Islamic references in their political messaging. Darwin and Haryanto (2021) noted that several female politicians employ Islamic symbolism on social media to cultivate a pious public image and foster stronger connections with their voter base. This aligns with a broader trend where Islamic themes in Indonesian social media have contributed to increased women's political participation and representation, especially within local parliaments. By engaging with Islamic values, these politicians may strengthen their appeal to conservative and religious constituents, reflecting a unique adaptation to the Indonesian cultural context.

In this study, women politicians were classified according to their party's ideological orientation—either Nationalist or Islamist. Expectedly, politicians from Islamist parties frequently utilized religious expressions, such as Quranic verses, greetings like "Assalamualaikum," or terms like "Barakallah," to convey an identity rooted in Islamic values. Their posts often highlight themes of piety, service to the community, and humility before God. These captions are carefully crafted to not only reflect personal belief but to also appeal to the moral values held by their audience, creating a sense of shared identity.

Interestingly, politicians from nationalist parties, while less overt in their religious messaging, also incorporated occasional references to Islamic values, signaling the widespread appeal of religious discourse in Indonesia's political landscape. These nationalist politicians may refer to religious holidays, offer prayers for national welfare, or invoke Allah's guidance, illustrating a nuanced approach where religion serves as a unifying, nonpartisan cultural touchstone. This demonstrates how religious themes are not confined to any one ideological stance but have become an influential tool for public engagement across the political spectrum.

Politicians often use religious nuances in their social media communications to strengthen their political messaging and connect with specific voter bases. A previous study showed how religious messages on social media often generate high levels of engagement and interaction, as seen in the case of the Mayor of Bucharest, who used religious posts to gain political support and increase her follower base (Dogaru-Tulică 2019). This explains why both nationalists and Islamists use religious references.

This trend underscores the balancing act politicians must perform in Indonesia, where voters expect authenticity and respect for Islamic traditions, regardless of the candidate's party. It also illustrates the adaptive nature of Indonesian political communication, where even secular-leaning politicians may integrate religious nuances to foster inclusivity, build credibility, and tap into the nation's deep-rooted Islamic heritage. This blending of religious and political messaging offers valuable insight into the role of cultural values in shaping Indonesia's unique brand of democracy.

Public vs. Private Dimensions in Social Media Posts

In Western democracies, social media platforms are often seen as spaces for public discourse, yet they also present challenges related to privacy and selective engagement. For instance, in the United States, privacy concerns negatively impact political participation on social media, particularly in diverse discussions, while homogeneous discussions are less affected (Ahmed and Masood 2024). Additionally, selective avoidance behaviors, such as unfriending and content removal, are prevalent, especially in the U.S., driven by confrontational discussion styles and ideological extremity (Skoric et.al 2021). These behaviors highlight the tension between public engagement and private preferences on social media.

In ASEAN countries, social media's role in public versus private dimensions is nuanced by cultural and political contexts. For example, in cities like Bandung, Iligan, and Phuket, social media is primarily used for information dissemination rather than interactive citizen-government engagement, indicating a more controlled and private use of these platforms (Roengtam et.al 2017). In contrast, in countries like Singapore and Malaysia, social media facilitates political discussions and participation, although privacy concerns can dampen this engagement (Ahmed and Masood 2024). This suggests that while social media can serve as a public forum, privacy concerns and governmental structures influence its use.

Research indicates that Millennial voters tend to favor women politicians who maintain a professional tone on social media, avoiding excessive sharing of personal content (Storie & Marschlich, 2022). This preference aligns with findings that suggest the portrayal of personal life details does not significantly enhance perceptions of effective leadership among women politicians (Yueqin & Ling, 2020). Instead, professionalism and a focus on public service are more likely to resonate with voters, particularly in the Indonesian context.

An analysis of Instagram posts by Indonesian women politicians reinforces this trend, with over 70% of posts centered on professional activities. Common themes include attending governmental meetings, delivering speeches, launching social initiatives, or visiting communities. For instance, posts showing politicians participating in disaster relief efforts or inaugurating public infrastructure projects tend to dominate their feeds. This emphasis on professional content suggests a deliberate strategy to showcase their dedication to public service and competence as leaders.

Politicians holding high-profile public offices, such as governors or ministers, were particularly inclined to prioritize public-facing content. For example, a governor's post highlighting the progress of infrastructure projects or a minister's post about international diplomatic engagements illustrates their commitment to delivering results. Such posts not only reinforce their roles as public servants but also help them maintain an image of reliability and professionalism.

However, some politicians strategically blend personal elements with public content to humanize their image. For example, a post featuring a family moment during a community event or a reflective caption about balancing work and personal life can create relatability without compromising their professional image. These carefully curated glimpses into their personal lives may help build rapport with constituents while reinforcing authenticity.

Interestingly, while personal content is less emphasized, it is not entirely absent. Posts celebrating milestones, such as birthdays or anniversaries, or acknowledging family support, are occasionally included. These posts often attract high engagement, reflecting the public's curiosity about the personal lives of public figures. Despite this, the predominance of professional content suggests that women politicians recognize the importance of aligning their social media strategy with voter expectations for competent and results-driven leadership.

In the broader context of political communication, this approach underscores the delicate balance women politicians must maintain. By emphasizing public over private dimensions, they project professionalism and capability, qualities that resonate strongly with Millennials and Gen-Z voters who prioritize performance and integrity over personal relatability. This strategy also reflects an understanding of cultural norms in Indonesia, where leadership is often associated with visible contributions to societal progress rather than individual personal narratives.

Millennial and Gen-Z Perspectives on Women Politicians

No prior studies have comprehensively explored how young Indonesians perceive women politicians. However, a survey by Utomo et al. (2022), conducted in collaboration with the IDN Research Institute, revealed that Millennials in Indonesia tend to prioritize a candidate's personal capabilities, such as leadership skills and problem-solving abilities, over traditional factors like religious background, ethnicity, or party affiliation. This shift indicates that younger voters value competence and practical attributes more than identity-based factors, reflecting a more pragmatic approach to political evaluation.

Findings from this study suggest that Millennials and Gen-Z predominantly associate Indonesian women politicians with two key personality traits from the OCEAN model: *Openness* and *Conscientiousness*. Politicians perceived as high in openness are viewed as receptive to new experiences and ideas, making them appear approachable, creative, and adaptable to change. For instance, female leaders who actively engage with followers on social media or discuss progressive policies may be seen as embodying openness. These traits resonate strongly with younger voters who value inclusivity and innovation in leadership.

Conscientiousness, another highly valued trait, portrays women politicians as diligent, reliable, and well-organized—qualities that align with the voter expectations for leaders capable of delivering results. A woman politician who consistently emphasizes meticulous planning, accountability, and dedication in her public messaging may reinforce perceptions of conscientiousness. For example, posts that highlight achievements in education reforms, health programs, or grassroots initiatives can solidify this image.

This focus on openness and conscientiousness aligns with broader research indicating that these traits are associated with effective leadership and electability (Aichholzer & Willmann, 2020). Younger voters, particularly Millennials and Gen-Z, may find these qualities appealing because they signify a combination of empathy and competence, essential in addressing complex societal challenges.

Interestingly, the evolving perspectives of Millennial and Gen-Z voters could also signal an opportunity for women politicians to redefine traditional gender norms in Indonesian politics. By leveraging their perceived strengths in openness and conscientiousness, female leaders can present themselves as relatable yet results-driven candidates, breaking stereotypes and encouraging broader acceptance of women in leadership roles. This approach not only enhances their electability but also contributes to reshaping public perceptions about the role of women in politics, especially among younger generations who are more open to gender equality and progressive ideals.

Moreover, the findings underscore the importance of strategic communication in political campaigns. Women politicians who effectively highlight their openness through participatory dialogue with constituents and conscientiousness through evidence-based results may significantly enhance their appeal among Indonesia's increasingly discerning youth electorate.

Addressing Young Voters

The findings present mixed evidence regarding the extent to which female politicians in Indonesia engage young voters through their social media communication. For instance, only 3% of Khofifah Indar Parawansa's 1,378 Instagram posts included slang—an informal language feature commonly associated with youth culture. Similarly, Puan Maharani's 798 posts demonstrated minimal use of youth-oriented language, indicating a gap in tailoring messages to resonate with younger audiences. However, some attempts to connect with this demographic were evident; Khofifah, for example, referenced the popular South Korean boy band BTS in a humorous post (Figure 2), signaling her awareness of youth culture trends and their potential to enhance relatability among younger constituents.

The use of slang in political communication has emerged as a dynamic and evolving phenomenon, gaining prominence alongside the rise of social media platforms. Research by Ernst et al. (2019) highlights how informal language and creative slang have been leveraged in political campaigns globally, such as the 2016 US Presidential Election and the 2019 Indian National Election. These strategies demonstrate that the tone and language used by politicians can significantly shape public perception and influence voter engagement.
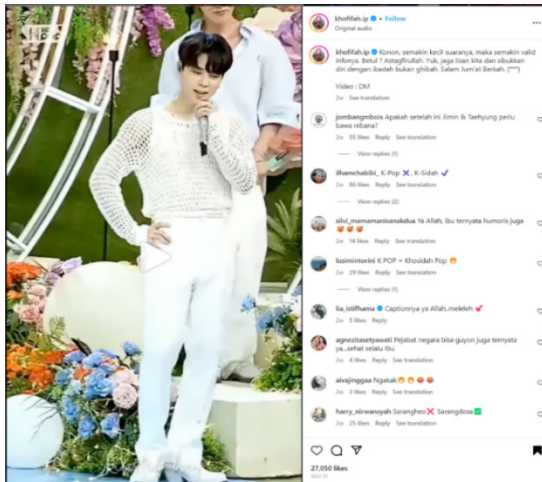
Figure 2. Khofifah's Instagram Post on July, 2023

In the Indonesian context, platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook have revolutionized political communication by enabling direct and informal interaction with voters. Younger users, in particular, often employ slang in their digital conversations, creating an opportunity for politicians to adopt this linguistic style to establish rapport. An analysis of captions used by female politicians in this study revealed a variety of informal terms, such as *mukbang, guys, viral, bercyanda, ambyar, santuy, curcol, bestie, lur, kuy,* and *gaskan.* These terms not only reflect youth culture but also signal a shift in political discourse toward a more relatable and accessible style.

For example, a politician using a caption like *"Santuy dulu sebelum gaskan kerja buat rakyat!"* (Relax first before getting to work for the people!) can project an image of approachability and alignment with the informal, fast-paced communication style of younger voters. Similarly, incorporating trending slang such as *viral* or *bestie* can amplify the visibility of posts by tapping into popular keywords among youth.

Despite these efforts, the limited use of youth-oriented language by key figures like Khofifah and Puan suggests a potential gap in effectively reaching younger demographics. Given that Millennials and Gen-Z are projected to dominate the voter base in future elections, such strategies may need to be prioritized. Younger voters are not only digital natives but also highly attuned to authenticity and cultural trends, making the integration of slang a potentially powerful tool for political marketing.

Furthermore, the use of informal language transcends mere relatability—it also serves as a bridge across social and cultural fault lines. By adopting the language of younger audiences, politicians can foster inclusivity and reduce the perceived distance between political elites and everyday citizens. However, this approach requires balance; overuse or inauthenticity in employing slang can undermine credibility and alienate other voter segments.

Future research should explore how the strategic use of informal language in political communication impacts voter behavior and perception. Additionally, the apparent hesitancy of some politicians to fully embrace youth-oriented language underscores the need for a deeper understanding of cultural nuances and voter expectations. For those seeking to engage younger voters effectively, blending authenticity, cultural relevance, and strategic messaging will be critical in shaping the success of their campaigns.

CONCLUSION

What are the fault lines in the discussion of youth and politics in Indonesia? The findings suggest that Indonesia's younger generations perceive female politicians as approachable and open to new experiences. They also favor politicians who post less about their private lives. This highlights the importance of how fault lines differ across countries. These two traits: openness to experience and conscientiousness, warrant further exploration, especially in the context of female politicians seeking support from youth.

At the very basic, this study explores the perceptions of millennials and Gen-Z in Indonesia regarding women politicians, highlighting two key fault lines: women politicians are seen as more open to new experiences and those who share less of their personal lives are preferred. The study finds that women politicians often use emotional appeals in their social media portrayals, while their engagement with young voters through slang is limited. The religiosity of politicians from nationalist and Islamist-based parties also shows minor differences, indicating that party ideology is not strongly reflected in social media. Social media has become a vital tool for political marketing, enabling women politicians to connect with young voters and tailor their messages. Aligning social media branding with the preferences of the youth can improve politicians' chances of gaining their support in the upcoming election. The findings suggest that political parties should focus on showcasing the professional aspects of politicians and avoid oversharing personal information.

However, limitations such as an uneven distribution of respondents and the need for further exploration of the motivations behind young voters' engagement with political accounts should be addressed in future studies. Additionally, future research could integrate machine learning techniques to enhance

the objectivity of social media analysis and expand the scope to include more female political figures. Moreover, incorporating supplementary theories from political communication or gender studies could provide deeper analytical insights. Similarly, further analysis on whether the trends observed in Indonesia correspond with or diverge from global trends in digital political participation needs to be conducted in future studies.

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