

Political Branding and Voter Preference Formation in the Prabowo-Gibran Campaign

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of political marketing in shaping voter preference formation during the 2024 Indonesian presidential election, focusing on the Prabowo Gibran campaign. The analysis highlights political branding as the core strategy through which campaign messages were constructed, circulated, and internalized by voters. Instead of emphasizing detailed policy agendas, the campaign relied on consistent branding, emotional narratives, and symbolic communication to influence public perception. Using a qualitative approach, this study analyzes campaign materials, media content, and public communication to identify key political marketing practices, including market segmentation, targeted messaging, candidate image repositioning, and strategic media utilization. The findings indicate that voter preferences were formed largely through emotional engagement, familiarity, and repeated media exposure rather than critical evaluation of policy alternatives. Popular culture elements such as campaign songs and digital content played a significant role in strengthening affective attachment to the candidates. The study concludes that political marketing has become a decisive force in Indonesian elections, reshaping democratic competition and voter engagement.

Keywords: Electoral Campaign, Indonesian Election, Political Branding, Political Marketing, Voter Preference

INTRODUCTION

Political marketing has become a defining characteristic of contemporary democratic elections, as political actors increasingly adopt marketing-oriented strategies to secure electoral support (Henneberg, Scammell, & O'Shaughnessy, 2009). Within this framework, political campaigns are designed not merely to communicate policy positions, but to

market candidates as political products through segmentation, targeting, positioning, and branding (Ahmed, Lodhi, & Ahmad, 2015; Winchester, Hall, & Binney, 2016). Voters are approached as consumers whose preferences can be shaped through carefully crafted messages, emotional appeals, and symbolic imagery (Jain, Gupta, & Sharma, 2025). This shift underscores the growing importance of political marketing in influencing voter behavior and structuring electoral competition.

The 2024 Indonesian presidential election offers a salient case for analyzing political marketing practices, particularly through the campaign of Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka (Nastain et al., 2025). Their campaign demonstrated an intensive and coordinated application of political marketing strategies aimed at maximizing voter reach and appeal. Rather than prioritizing detailed programmatic discourse, the campaign focused on market-oriented communication, adapting messages to different voter segments while maintaining a consistent brand identity. This approach highlights how political marketing functions as a strategic tool in contemporary Indonesian elections.

Central to the Prabowo-Gibran campaign was the integration of political branding as a core component of their broader marketing strategy. Visual symbols, slogans, digital content, and candidate personas were systematically managed to position the pair as both experienced and forward-looking leaders. According to Lees-Marshment, et al. (2019), political branding refers to the process through which political actors construct and communicate a distinct political identity in order to create emotional connections and electoral loyalty among voters. The marketing strategy sought to reposition Prabowo's established political image while leveraging Gibran's youth and digital familiarity to attract younger voters. Through the use of social media platforms, influencer networks, and mass-mediated communication, the campaign operationalized political marketing techniques to shape voter perceptions and preferences.

The increasing dominance of political marketing in contemporary elections has generated significant debate within political science, particularly regarding whether voter preferences are shaped more by substantive policy evaluation or by branding-oriented political communication. In many contemporary democratic contexts, campaigns increasingly rely on emotional narratives, symbolic representation, and media-driven image construction, raising concerns about the transformation of voters from deliberative citizens into political consumers. Within this debate, the 2024 Indonesian presidential election provides an important case for examining how political marketing strategies operate in shaping electoral behavior. This study therefore asks: “How were political marketing and branding strategies employed in the Prabowo-Gibran campaign to shape voter preference formation during the 2024 Indonesian presidential election?” To address this question, the study analyzes marketing processes such as positioning, message framing, audience segmentation, and media utilization rather than normative evaluations of electoral outcomes. By situating the campaign within the broader literature on political marketing, this paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how marketing-driven campaigns influence voter preference formation and redefine electoral dynamics in contemporary democratic contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach to examine political marketing strategies in the Prabowo-Gibran campaign during the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. A qualitative design is considered appropriate because it enables researchers to explore the meaning, symbolism, communication patterns, and interpretive dimensions embedded within political campaigns (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research is particularly useful for analyzing political communication processes that involve branding, positioning, emotional narratives, and media representation, which cannot be adequately captured through quantitative

measurement alone (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The study therefore focuses on understanding how political marketing elements were intentionally designed and communicated to shape voter preference formation rather than measuring electoral outcomes statistically.

Data collection was conducted through document analysis and digital media observation covering the official campaign period of the 2024 Indonesian presidential election from November 2023 to February 2024. Primary data sources consisted of official campaign materials produced and circulated by the Prabowo-Gibran campaign team, including campaign advertisements, speeches, campaign slogans, visual branding elements, and social media content distributed through Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter). These platforms were selected because they represented the campaign's most active channels for political communication and voter engagement, particularly among young and first-time voters. Secondary data consisted of news articles, public statements, political commentaries, and academic literature related to political marketing, branding, and electoral communication. The selection of secondary materials was based on three criteria: relevance to the Prabowo-Gibran campaign, discussion of political marketing practices, and publication credibility from academic journals, mainstream media outlets, or institutional sources.

Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis within a political marketing framework. Following Braun and Clarke (2006), the analysis involved several stages: data familiarization, initial coding, theme categorization, interpretation, and analytical synthesis. Campaign materials and media content were first systematically reviewed to identify recurring communication patterns and symbolic representations. The data were then coded based on political marketing concepts such as segmentation, targeting, positioning, branding, emotional appeal, and media strategy. After categorization, the identified themes were interpreted to examine how political marketing strategies contributed to candidate image construction and

voter preference formation. Through this analytical process, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how political marketing operated within the Prabowo-Gibran campaign and its broader implications for contemporary electoral politics in Indonesia.

To ensure the credibility and validity of the findings, this study applied data triangulation and source triangulation techniques. Information obtained from campaign materials was cross-checked with news reports, public statements, and relevant academic discussions to reduce interpretive bias and strengthen analytical consistency. The study also compared communication patterns across different media platforms, including Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X, in order to identify recurring narratives and branding strategies. This triangulation process helped ensure that the identified themes were not based on isolated campaign content but reflected broader and consistent political marketing practices throughout the campaign period. In qualitative research, triangulation is considered important for enhancing credibility, trustworthiness, and the rigor of interpretation (Morgan, 2024; Schlunegger et al., 2024).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Political Branding as The Core Marketing Strategy

Political branding emerged as the central axis of the Prabowo-Gibran campaign's political marketing strategy, shaping nearly all aspects of communication and voter engagement. Rather than positioning policy platforms as the primary driver of voter choice, the campaign prioritized the construction of a coherent and emotionally resonant political brand. Empirical findings from the campaign materials show that this branding strategy was consistently reflected through slogans such as "Indonesia Maju" and the popular digital expression "Gemoy," which became strongly associated with Prabowo's public image across TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube campaign content. Visual representations frequently portrayed Prabowo in relaxed and

humorous situations, including dancing gestures and casual interactions with supporters, contrasting with his previous image as a rigid military figure. At the same time, Gibran was consistently represented as youthful, technologically literate, and closely connected to younger generations through informal digital communication styles and short-form video content. These recurring narratives and visual symbols functioned as simplified cognitive shortcuts for voters, allowing complex political realities to be translated into easily recognizable images, emotions, and symbolic cues. In this sense, political branding was not merely a supplementary tactic but a strategic framework that organized how the candidates were introduced, interpreted, and remembered by the electorate.

The Prabowo-Gibran brand was deliberately designed to balance continuity and adaptation within Indonesia's evolving political market. Empirical observations from campaign advertisements, social media content, and public appearances indicate a consistent effort to reconstruct Prabowo's political image into a more approachable and emotionally relatable figure. Campaign visuals on Instagram and TikTok frequently displayed Prabowo smiling, dancing, interacting casually with supporters, and participating in humorous digital trends associated with the "Gemoy" persona. These representations contrasted sharply with his previous electoral image, which had been strongly associated with assertive military leadership and nationalist rhetoric (Thengono, 2024). At the same time, Gibran's inclusion functioned strategically to reinforce themes of youthfulness, digital literacy, and generational transition. His communication style on social media emphasized informality, technological familiarity, and proximity to younger voters through short-form videos and interactive online content. From a political marketing perspective, these communication patterns reflect a repositioning strategy in which established political identities are selectively reconstructed to align with changing voter preferences and media consumption patterns. Rather than fundamentally transforming ideological orientation, the campaign

adjusted symbolic presentation and emotional appeal to maintain electoral relevance within an increasingly digital and youth-oriented political environment.

Critically, the dominance of political branding in the Prabowo-Gibran campaign underscores the increasing commercialization of electoral politics in Indonesia. Voters were engaged less as deliberative citizens evaluating policy alternatives and more as consumers responding to brand consistency and emotional appeal. The effectiveness of this strategy highlights how political marketing can successfully manufacture voter trust and identification through image management. However, it also raises normative concerns about the erosion of substantive political discourse, as branding-driven campaigns risk prioritizing symbolic appeal over meaningful policy engagement in democratic competition.

B. Market Segmentation and Targeted Communication

Market segmentation and targeted communication constituted a decisive component of the Prabowo-Gibran campaign's political marketing strategy, revealing a highly calculated approach to voter mobilization (Annisa & Maghfira, 2025). The campaign did not treat the electorate as a homogeneous political public, but as a fragmented market composed of distinct voter segments with different expectations, anxieties, and levels of political engagement. By identifying these segments, the campaign was able to tailor its communication in ways that maximized emotional resonance rather than ideological coherence. This reflects a broader shift in electoral politics where political persuasion is increasingly driven by marketing logic instead of democratic deliberation.

One of the most visible voter segments targeted by the Prabowo-Gibran campaign was young and first-time voters. This segment was intensively approached through digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, where campaign communication relied heavily on short-form

videos, meme culture, music trends, and interactive visual content. Empirical observations from the campaign materials show that Prabowo's "Gemoy" persona became a central branding narrative among younger audiences, particularly through humorous dance clips, casual interactions, and emotionally light political content circulated widely on TikTok and Instagram Reels. In addition, the campaign song "Oke Gas" was repeatedly used in digital content and public campaign events, functioning not only as entertainment but also as a recognizable political branding tool that strengthened emotional familiarity among young voters (Tanuwijaya, 2024). Rather than emphasizing detailed policy programs, the campaign prioritized relatability, informality, and symbolic representation that aligned with youth-oriented digital culture. This communication style reflects broader trends in contemporary political marketing, where political engagement among younger voters is increasingly mediated through popular culture, emotional identification, and platform-specific digital interaction (Medista & Marianata, 2024). As a result, political participation was framed less as rational policy evaluation and more as affective and lifestyle-oriented identification with candidate personas.

At the same time, the campaign deployed differentiated messaging to appeal to older and more traditional voter segments. For these voters, communication emphasized themes of leadership experience, political stability, national unity, and continuity of development programs associated with the Jokowi administration. Empirical observations from televised campaign speeches, formal political advertisements, and Facebook and YouTube campaign content show that Prabowo was frequently portrayed wearing formal attire such as peci and safari shirts while delivering messages related to state leadership, economic continuity, food security, and national defense. Compared to the more humorous and informal communication directed toward younger voters, messages targeting older voter groups relied on calm rhetoric, patriotic symbolism, and authoritative visual presentation. National symbols such as the Indonesian flag, images of rural communities,

and references to unity and social harmony were repeatedly used to reinforce familiarity and reassurance among traditional voters. This dual communication strategy demonstrates how political marketing enables campaigns to construct multiple narratives simultaneously, allowing candidates to adapt their image according to different voter expectations without directly confronting contradictions between messages delivered to separate electoral segments.

Critically, this segmented communication strategy illustrates how political marketing can dilute accountability in democratic competition. When messages are fragmented and tailored to specific audiences, voters are exposed to selective representations of the candidates rather than a unified and transparent political agenda. The Prabowo-Gibran campaign's targeted communication capitalized on this dynamic by prioritizing emotional alignment within each segment, minimizing the risk of ideological scrutiny across the electorate as a whole (Sihombing, 2024). This practice raises concerns about the erosion of a shared public sphere in electoral politics.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of market segmentation in the Prabowo-Gibran campaign highlights the growing power of political marketing to engineer voter preferences with precision. Voters were not persuaded through open debate or policy confrontation, but through strategically crafted messages designed to fit their social identities and media consumption patterns. While this approach enhanced electoral competitiveness, it also exposed the vulnerability of democratic processes to marketing-driven manipulation, where electoral success is achieved by managing perceptions rather than fostering informed political judgment.

C. Repositioning of Candidate Image through Marketing

Repositioning of candidate image through marketing constituted a strategic cornerstone of the Prabowo-Gibran campaign, reflecting a deliberate effort to recalibrate public perceptions through systematic image

management. Political marketing was employed not merely to amplify existing identities, but to actively reconstruct how the candidates were understood by the electorate. This process demonstrates how marketing techniques can function as powerful tools in reshaping political meaning, allowing candidates to adapt their public image to shifting electoral dynamics without fundamentally altering their political positions.

In the case of Prabowo Subianto, image repositioning was particularly significant due to his long-standing and firmly established political profile (Raharja, 2025). The campaign softened his public image by emphasizing composure, emotional warmth, and inclusivity, contrasting with earlier portrayals that highlighted assertive leadership traits. Through carefully curated visuals, controlled narratives, and symbolic gestures, the campaign gradually redirected public attention away from polarizing associations. This repositioning illustrates how political marketing can strategically manage historical perceptions and reduce electoral resistance.

Gibran Rakabuming Raka's role further reinforced the repositioning strategy by introducing a contrasting yet complementary image within the Prabowo-Gibran campaign. His portrayal as youthful, digitally literate, and representative of generational transition served to modernize the overall campaign image (Kartinawati & Purwasito, 2024). Empirical observations from campaign content on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube indicate that Gibran was frequently represented through casual communication styles, interactive digital appearances, and visually simplified political messaging designed to resonate with younger audiences. Rather than emphasizing detailed policy expertise or ideological positioning, the campaign prioritized symbolic attributes such as youthfulness, technological familiarity, and emotional accessibility. In many campaign narratives, Gibran functioned less as a policy-oriented political actor and more as a symbolic representation of generational change and political modernization. This symbolic construction enabled the campaign to establish emotional proximity with younger voters

without requiring substantive engagement with complex policy debates. As a result, symbolic representation operated as a substitute for programmatic discourse, where political legitimacy was constructed through identity, image, and affective resonance rather than through detailed articulation of policy agendas. From a political marketing perspective, this demonstrates how candidate pairing can be strategically instrumentalized not only to broaden demographic appeal but also to simplify political communication into emotionally consumable representations across different voter segments.

The repositioned images of both candidates were sustained through consistent and repetitive communication across multiple platforms. Visual coherence, narrative alignment, and message discipline were maintained throughout campaign activities, reinforcing the credibility of the newly constructed images. Repetition played a critical role in normalizing these representations, enabling voters to internalize the revised identities as authentic and stable. Political marketing thus operated not only at the level of persuasion but also at the level of perception management.

The effectiveness of image repositioning in the Prabowo-Gibran campaign can be observed through the consistency and public circulation of the newly constructed candidate images across multiple communication platforms. Empirical findings from campaign advertisements, televised appearances, TikTok content, Instagram posts, and online political discussions indicate that Prabowo's revised image as a calm, approachable, and emotionally expressive leader became increasingly dominant throughout the campaign period. The widespread popularity of the "Gemoy" persona, repeated visual branding, and the intensive circulation of emotionally oriented campaign content contributed to the normalization of this reconstructed image among voters. At the same time, Gibran's portrayal as a youthful and digitally connected figure reinforced perceptions of generational transition and political modernization. In analytical terms, the "success" of image repositioning therefore refers not merely to electoral victory, but to the

campaign's ability to consistently reconstruct candidate perceptions, maintain narrative coherence across media platforms, and generate widespread emotional recognition among different voter segments. This development highlights the increasing dominance of marketing logic in contemporary electoral competition, where candidate identity becomes a flexible construct shaped by strategic communication rather than a fixed reflection of political history or ideological consistency. While this adaptability enhanced the campaign's communicative effectiveness, it also narrowed the space for substantive political evaluation, as voters were encouraged to engage more with curated political imagery than with detailed assessments of policy commitments and governance capacity.

D. Media Strategy and Voter Preference Formation

Media strategy became the arena where political marketing in the Prabowo-Gibran campaign most vividly translated into voter preference formation. Media was not treated as a neutral channel for conveying information, but as a space to manufacture political affect and momentum. Through continuous exposure, repetition, and emotional cues, the campaign shaped how voters felt about the candidates before considering what they stood for. Preference formation thus emerged less from policy comparison and more from mediated familiarity, rhythm, and emotional recognition.

Social media functioned as the backbone of the Prabowo-Gibran campaign's political marketing strategy, particularly through platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter). These platforms enabled campaign messages to circulate in forms that were light, entertaining, visually engaging, and easily shareable among digital audiences. Empirical observations show that TikTok and Instagram Reels were especially significant in distributing short-form political content, including humorous dance clips, "Gemoy" visual narratives, campaign jingles such as "Oke Gas," meme-based communication, and emotionally simplified campaign messages.

Meanwhile, YouTube was used to amplify longer campaign appearances, interviews, and emotionally framed political storytelling, while X functioned as a platform for rapid narrative circulation and public political engagement. Through these media ecosystems, political communication became embedded within everyday digital consumption patterns, where users encountered campaign content alongside entertainment, lifestyle, and popular culture trends. The intensive repetition of emotionally resonant content increased visibility, familiarity, and symbolic attachment to the candidates, particularly among younger voters who consumed political information primarily through algorithm-driven social media feeds. In this environment, the boundary between political messaging and entertainment became increasingly blurred, making political alignment feel intuitive, emotionally immediate, and socially shareable rather than deliberative and policy-oriented.

A striking example of this media-driven preference formation was the use of the campaign song “Oke Gas” (Tanuwijaya, 2024). Rather than serving as a conventional campaign anthem with ideological or programmatic content, the song operated as a branding device. Its upbeat rhythm, simple lyrics, and repetitive structure made it memorable and emotionally engaging. “Oke Gas” functioned as a sonic shortcut that associated the Prabowo-Gibran campaign with optimism, decisiveness, and forward movement. Through constant repetition on social media and campaign events, the song embedded itself in public consciousness, shaping voter sentiment without explicit political argumentation.

The effectiveness of “Oke Gas” illustrates how sound and popular culture can become powerful tools in political marketing. Music worked to lower cognitive resistance, allowing political messages to be absorbed subconsciously. Voters did not need to agree with a policy position to feel positively aligned with the campaign; emotional resonance was sufficient. This strategy demonstrates how media can cultivate affective loyalty, where support is driven by mood, familiarity, and symbolic association rather than

rational evaluation (Medista & Marianata, 2024).

The broader media strategy of the Prabowo-Gibran campaign reveals a shift in how voter preferences are constructed in contemporary elections. Preference formation increasingly occurs through repetition, entertainment, and emotional cues delivered via mass and digital media. While this approach proved effective in generating broad appeal and visibility, it also signaled a narrowing of democratic engagement. Media-driven political marketing encouraged voters to consume political symbols rather than critically interrogate political substance, reinforcing a form of electoral participation shaped more by feeling than by judgment.

E. Implications for Political Marketing in Indonesian Elections

The Prabowo-Gibran campaign illustrates how political marketing has become a dominant force shaping electoral competition in Indonesia. Campaign success is increasingly determined by the ability to manage images, narratives, and emotional appeal rather than by the strength of policy proposals or ideological clarity. This development signals a structural transformation in Indonesian elections, where marketing logic now operates at the core of political strategy. Political actors are compelled to compete not only in the arena of ideas but also in the marketplace of attention and affect.

One major implication of this shift is the redefinition of voters within the democratic process. Voters are increasingly treated as market segments whose preferences can be engineered through branding, media exposure, and emotional alignment. Political participation thus risks becoming passive, as citizens are encouraged to respond to symbols and familiarity rather than engage in critical evaluation (Jun, 2024). This marketing-driven approach may enhance electoral efficiency, but it also weakens the deliberative foundation of democracy by reducing political choice to consumer-like behavior.

The growing reliance on political marketing also alters the nature of political accountability. When campaigns prioritize image consistency and emotional resonance, policy commitments become secondary and often ambiguous. This makes it more difficult for voters to assess performance and hold leaders accountable after elections. The Prabowo-Gibran campaign demonstrates how successful branding can shield candidates from substantive scrutiny, allowing political legitimacy to be constructed through perception rather than policy credibility (Wijanarko et al., 2025).

At the systemic level, the dominance of political marketing intensifies inequality within electoral competition. Candidates and coalitions with greater access to media resources, professional consultants, and digital infrastructure gain a structural advantage. This creates an uneven playing field where electoral outcomes are influenced by marketing capacity rather than political competence or public interest. As a result, democratic competition risks being skewed toward those who can afford to manage perceptions most effectively.

These implications highlight the need to critically reassess the role of political marketing in Indonesian elections. While marketing strategies can modernize political communication and broaden voter outreach, their unchecked dominance threatens the substantive quality of democracy. Future electoral reforms and political education efforts must address this imbalance by strengthening issue-based debate and fostering critical media literacy among voters. Without such counterweights, Indonesian elections risk evolving into contests of branding supremacy rather than arenas of meaningful democratic choice.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the Prabowo-Gibran campaign relied heavily on political marketing to shape voter preferences during the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. Through strong political branding, clear market segmentation, strategic image repositioning, and intensive media use, the campaign successfully built emotional connections with voters. Voter support

was formed not mainly through policy debates, but through repeated exposure to symbols, narratives, and popular culture that made the candidates feel familiar, relatable, and convincing. Political marketing therefore functioned as the main engine driving voter preference formation.

At the same time, this case reveals important challenges for Indonesian democracy. When elections are dominated by marketing strategies, political choices risk being guided more by feelings and image consumption than by critical evaluation of ideas and programs. While political marketing can make campaigns more engaging and accessible, it can also reduce the space for substantive discussion and accountability. This conclusion highlights the need for greater voter awareness and stronger democratic norms, so that political marketing serves as a tool for communication rather than a substitute for meaningful political judgment.

This study also contributes to the broader scholarship on political marketing and Indonesian electoral politics by demonstrating how contemporary campaigns increasingly rely on branding-oriented communication and affective media strategies to shape voter preferences. While previous studies have often emphasized campaign communication or electoral outcomes separately, this research highlights the interconnected relationship between political branding, digital media culture, and voter preference formation within Indonesia's evolving democratic context. The findings further enrich political marketing scholarship by showing how symbolic representation, emotional narratives, and platform-based communication can reconstruct candidate identity and influence political engagement beyond conventional policy discourse. In the context of Indonesian political studies, this research provides empirical insight into the growing transformation of electoral competition from ideology-centered politics toward media-driven and personality-oriented political marketing practices.

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