# Humor, Symbols, and Power: Prabowo-Gibran Political Memes on Social Media in the 2024 Presidential Election

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**Abstract -** This research explores the role of political memes in building the image and influencing public perception of the candidate pair Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka during the 2024 presidential election campaign. Using the symbolic interaction theory approach and qualitative content analysis, this study analyzed the visual and verbal symbols in memes circulating on social media such as TikTok, Twitter (X), and Instagram. The results show that political memes not only serve as a means of entertainment, but also become an effective communication tool in conveying complex political messages in a way that is easily accepted by the audience. Memes depicting Prabowo as a strong and decisive leader and Gibran as a young innovator create a narrative that reinforces their image as a representation of a blend of experience and innovation. In addition, memes also play a role in increasing political participation among young voters through humor and emotional engagement. This research concludes that political memes play an important role in political contestation in the digital age, facilitating social interaction and shaping political narratives that have a significant impact on public perception and participation.
**Keywords**: Political Memes, Political Image, Symbolic Interaction, Public Perception, 2024 Presidential Election

## Introduction

Memes have emerged as an important tool in political campaigns, functioning in various capacities ranging from humor to serious political criticism (Baker & Walsh, 2024). In political discourse, the role of memes has been widely studied, revealing their ability to influence public opinion, mobilize grassroots support, and shape political narratives (Aminulloh et al., 2022; Azmir et al., 2024; Hutapea & Purwatiningsih, 2022). This phenomenon is increasingly visible in the context of digital politics, where memes allow complex political messages to be conveyed in a simple and easily understood way to a wide audience.

One of the main functions of memes in political campaigns is as an instrument of criticism and contestation. Research Tella (2018) discusses how humor in political discourse can go beyond mere entertainment and become a medium for political criticism during the 2015 Nigerian presidential election. Similarly, research by Tran (2022) noted that memes were used as political weapons during the 2020 US presidential election, where various parties utilized the expressive power of memes to influence public opinion. This is in line with the findings of McLoughlin & Southern (2021) who argued that political memes can facilitate a form of network revolt, where activists share viral content to

mobilize support for their political cause. The ability of memes to summarize complex political messages in an easily digestible format increases their effectiveness as a tool for political engagement and critique.

Furthermore, memes have been shown to encourage democratic participation by allowing diverse groups of people to engage in political issues. Taylor-Smith et al. (2018) highlighted how memes allow individuals to personalize and share political messages, thus expanding participation in the democratic process. In the participatory aspect, memes can also act as channels for political discourse and social critique, effectively disseminating information and mobilizing support for social movements (Wang & Lee, 2024). The ability of memes to transcend geographical boundaries further enhances their role as a political marketing tool, as noted by Azmir et al. (2024) who discuss how memes can spread across borders, thus increasing their impact in political campaigns.

The emotional resonance of memes also plays an important role in their effectiveness. Research by Paz et al. (2021) shows that memes often reflect and reinforce existing social stereotypes and political sentiments, thus shaping public perception. This emotional appeal is crucial in political communication as it can trigger strong reactions and form a collective identity among supporters (Gal et al., 2015). In addition, the work of Villanueva & Toscano (2021) illustrates how memes can legitimize hatred and political violence, demonstrating their potential to influence political discourse in both positive and negative ways.

In addition to its role in shaping public opinion, memes also serve as a medium for political marketing strategies. Research Putra et al. (2022) shows that memes are increasingly used as propaganda tools to convey political messages and mobilize support. This is particularly relevant in the context of social media, where the rapid spread of memes can significantly influence political campaigns, as evidenced by the analysis of meme groups on Facebook during the 2016 US presidential election (Moody-Ramirez & Church, 2019). Their findings revealed how memes were used to spread grassroots political ideas, often framing candidates in a negative context. Adapting to the dynamics of social media and creativity in creating content are key to success in modern political campaigns. (Febriandy & Revolusi, 2024).

Thus, this study aims to explore how political memes, especially those related to the Prabowo-Gibran pairing in the 2024 presidential election, shape public image and function as a political communication tool.

## Theoretical Framework
### Symbolic Interaction Theory

In the political context, memes as a form of visual communication and symbolic text have become a very effective tool in shaping public perception and political image. Political memes not only present humor as entertainment, but also convey messages of power through symbols that are interpreted by various groups of people. Symbolic interaction theory explains that meaning is not fixed, but is formed through social interaction, where the symbols in political memes function to create a narrative that is favorable to certain parties (Blumer, 1969; Hutapea & Purwatiningsih, 2022).

According to symbolic interaction theory, first developed by George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer, individuals create and interpret meaning through social interactions mediated by symbols such as language, gestures, and other forms of communication. In the context of political campaigns, political memes function as visual and verbal symbols that carry certain meanings to the public. These symbols, such as images, text, or popular culture icons, have the ability to influence the audience's perception of political figures such as Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka. As explained by Mead and Blumer, humans use these symbols to create meanings that can change the way they see themselves and others (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934).

### Symbolic Meanings in Political Memes

In the context of political campaigns, memes function as a medium to convey symbols that are used to create certain perceptions of candidates. These symbols can be visual representations such as popular images or icons, or verbal forms of communication such as humorous or satirical texts. Hutapea & Purwatiningsih (2022) explained that symbols in political memes can be used to shape political identity in a relaxed and relatable way through humor, while still maintaining elements of power and influence. By using these symbols, meme creators attempt to "reconstruct" the candidate's political

identity by simplifying complex political issues and conveying them in a form that is easily understood by the audience.

These symbols allow the public to actively interpret the meaning that the memes are trying to convey, thus creating a social interaction where political meaning is shaped collectively. Memes depicting Prabowo as a strong leader or Gibran as an innovative young leader function as symbols that influence the way the public sees them, depending on how the symbols are understood by the audience. The reception of these symbols is also influenced by the social and cultural background of the audience, which means that memes can have different meanings for different groups (Hasim et al., 2023).

*The Influence of Memes on Political Perceptions*

In political campaigns, memes are used to simplify complex political narratives and convey them in a way that is acceptable to a wide audience. The symbols in political memes help to create a strong perception of the candidate, where humor and irony are often key tools in building the narrative. Udoudom et al. (2024) showed that in the context of decoding media messages, individuals play an active role in interpreting the symbolic meanings contained in political memes, and this process allows them to negotiate with the political identity formed based on these meanings.

For example, memes that use humor to portray Prabowo as an assertive figure or Gibran as a modern leader can influence the way audiences see them in a political context. Thus, political memes function not only as a means of entertainment, but also as an effective medium to shape public opinion and political image. Hutapea & Purwatiningsih (2022) emphasized that political memes, through the use of visual and verbal symbols, create a narrative that has a direct impact on a candidate's image, especially among young voters who are more frequently exposed to social media.

*Symbolic Interaction Theory and Political Participation*

In addition to influencing public perception, political memes also play an important role in increasing political participation in the digital age. Lillqvist et al. (2018) showed that memes can be used by consumers to challenge the legitimacy of marketers on social media, and a similar phenomenon can occur in political campaigns where the public uses memes to express support or criticism of candidates. Memes serve as a medium that facilitates public participation in political discourse, allowing individuals to interact with relevant political symbols and give them meanings that match their political views.

The symbols in political memes also enable the creation of a collective identity among supporters of candidates. Paz et al. (2021) stated that memes often reinforce existing social stereotypes and political sentiments, forming a shared identity among groups that share the same political views. In the context of the Prabowo-Gibran campaign, political memes are used to create narratives that strengthen collective identities among their supporters, while shaping a clearer and more acceptable political image to the wider community.

**Material and Methodology**

This research uses a qualitative method with a content analysis approach to understand how political memes shape the image and public perception of the candidate pair Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka during the 2024 presidential election campaign. Qualitative content analysis was chosen because this method allows researchers to identify, categorize, and interpret the symbols and messages contained in memes, especially in the context of interaction on social media. This approach also focuses on in-depth analysis of the messages generated from the symbols in memes, including text and visuals, and how audiences interpret them (Krippendorff, 2004).

The main data in this study are memes taken from various social media platforms such as TikTok, Twitter (X), and Instagram. The memes analyzed were selected based on the number of significant interactions such as views, likes, shares, and comments. A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that the memes analyzed were those that had a major impact on public discourse. In addition, the social interactions under each meme were also analyzed to understand how the symbols and messages contained in the memes were received and interpreted by the audience.

This research uses symbolic interaction theory as a theoretical basis to understand how political memes become a medium for people to form social and political meanings. This theory emphasizes that the meaning contained in political symbols is not fixed, but is formed through social interactions that

occur between meme creators, audiences, and the socio-political context that surrounds them (Blumer, 1969). In this context, political memes function as symbols that create or reinforce perceptions about candidate pairs and their political campaigns.

The content analysis technique was conducted by categorizing memes based on themes and dominant visual and text symbols. For example, themes such as "Prabowo as a Strong Leader" or "Gibran as a Young Innovator" are identified through symbols such as clothing, gestures, colors, and text messages accompanying the visuals. Furthermore, audience interactions on social media, such as comments and reactions to the memes, are analyzed to understand the collective perceptions formed through the memes.

To ensure the validity of the data, this research uses triangulation techniques by comparing the results of meme analysis from various platforms and involving experts in the field of political communication to provide an assessment of the resulting interpretations. This analysis aims to reveal how symbols in political memes influence audience perceptions, increase political participation, and shape public narratives during the 2024 presidential election campaign.

**Result and Discussion**

From the analysis of 100 memes collected from TikTok, Twitter (X), and Instagram, several recurring themes and symbolic representations of the candidate pair Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka were identified.

*Representation of Prabowo-Gibran in Political Memes*
*Prabowo as a Strong and Decisive Leader: A Symbol of Military Leadership*



**Figure 1.** Strong and Decisive Leader Category Memes
Source: https://www.tiktok.com/@dekade_08/

This meme shows an interaction between Prabowo Subianto and an officer from the US Delta Force, where the visual narrative utilizes military symbolism to emphasize Prabowo's image as a strong leader. The text accompanying this image, "American Delta Force Officer Slapped by Prabowo", not only reinforces Prabowo's symbol of might and decisiveness, but also emphasizes his ability to face international challenges, including the military power of a large country like the United States.

This meme uses the narrative "Remehkan Indonesia" which implicitly underlines Prabowo's patriotism and courage in protecting the nation's honor. This visual further reinforces the perception that Prabowo is a decisive leader in maintaining Indonesia's dignity, even in the face of world powers.

The meme also utilizes militaristic elements - with Prabowo wearing a full uniform and red beret - to emphasize discipline, strength, and courage as values associated with him. This symbol creates an image of Prabowo as a figure who does not hesitate to take strong action to defend national interests.

With 808,000 views and 37,200 likes, this meme has clearly received great attention from the social media audience, showing that the narrative of "Prabowo as a firm leader" has strong emotional resonance among his supporters. It is also very effective in fostering a sense of pride and nationalism, especially among voters who crave a leader who is brave and not easily intimidated by foreign powers.

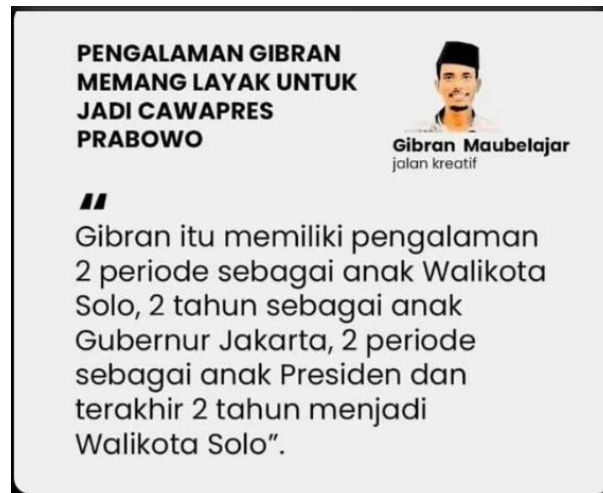*Gibran as a Young Innovator: Creative Experience in Politics*



**Figure 2.** Young Innovator Category Memes
Source: https://x.com/NenkMonica/

This meme highlights the figure of Gibran Rakabuming Raka with a narrative that sarcastically reinforces public perception of his political experience. The text "Gibran has the experience of 2 terms as the son of the Mayor of Solo, 2 years as the son of the Governor of Jakarta, 2 terms as the son of the President, and finally 2 years as the Mayor of Solo" presents a critical yet humorous perspective on Gibran's legitimacy as a Vice-Presidential candidate to accompany Prabowo Subianto.

The use of verbal symbols in this meme, such as "son of the Major", "son of the Governor", and "son of the President", emphasizes Gibran's background that is closely related to his family's position of power. Although on the surface it seems like humor that trivializes his political experience, this meme indirectly highlights how Gibran is considered capable of navigating the world of Indonesian politics thanks to the environment he grew up in, in a way that is close and relatable to the younger generation.

This meme also reinforces Gibran's image as a creative young leader with the phrase "creative path". This depiction implies that Gibran brings a new approach to politics, despite his background that is strongly associated with the political elite. The verbal symbols used contain elements of irony that make this meme able to touch young audiences, especially those who are familiar with the digital world and like a relaxed approach to politics that still contains deep meaning.

With 341,000 views, 512 reposts and 2,491 likes, this meme has clearly gained significant attention from the audience. The high number of interactions shows that this sarcastic narrative packed with humor is able to spark engagement and discussion on social media. For those who are more skeptical of dynastic politics, this meme may feel relevant. However, on the other hand, it also strengthens Gibran's position as a figure who adapts himself to modern politics in a more relaxed and creative style.

This narrative effectively combines sarcasm and humor to respond to public perceptions of Gibran's political experience, while still positioning him as a relevant leader of the times. This meme may be aimed at a skeptical audience, but it also strengthens Gibran's appeal among young voters who see him as a figure who is able to adapt to the modern political environment.

*Generational Contrasts: Prabowo and Gibran, a Mix of Experience and Innovation*
This meme visually shows the presidential and vice-presidential candidates, Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka, as two figures that represent a blend of experience and innovation. Prabowo is depicted with a serious face and wearing a military-style jacket that represents him as a figure with long experience in the military and politics, while Gibran appears younger and casual, which emphasizes his image as a more modern and innovative leader.

The big title "INDONESIA" at the top gives the impression that the combination of these two figures is the combination that will bring Indonesia to a better direction. This meme seeks to create a narrative that collaboration between an experienced senior leader and an innovative young leader is the

key to facing the nation's future challenges. Prabowo, with his military background and reputation as an assertive figure, is paired with Gibran who is identified with the new generation and a more modern vision.

This meme capitalizes on the visual and generational contrast between the two candidates to appeal to different segments of the electorate. Prabowo traditionally attracts older and conservative voters, while Gibran is positioned to appeal to the young and those more interested in innovation and change. With 187,000 views and 6,600 likes, the meme managed to create high engagement on social media, showing that the two-generation fusion message resonated strongly with audiences.

The red rose symbol at the bottom of the image adds an emotional element, depicting love for the country and aspirations for a better future for Indonesia. Prabowo as a symbol of decisiveness and experience, and Gibran as a symbol of innovation and renewal, create a strong visual and narrative balance.

This meme is effective in illustrating the harmony between the two generations: Prabowo as a figure who represents stability and security, while Gibran represents innovation and the future. This combination is not only relevant for those looking for strong leadership, but also for the younger generation who yearn for change.



**Figure 3.** Generation Contrast Category Memes
Source: https://www.tiktok.com/@tom.liwafa/

*Emotional Resonance and Political Criticism in Memes*

*Humor as an Engagement Tool: Dance Icon "Gemoy".* This meme features cute and adorable animated characters, who are shown dancing in a playful style to the text "Dance Icon Gemoy." The use of humor through these animated characters succeeded in creating a light and entertaining atmosphere, capturing the attention of viewers across various social media platforms. The character, designed in a gemoy (adorable) style, aims to invite smiles and emotional engagement, especially among young viewers who are more familiar with meme culture.

With 16 million views and 1.3 million likes, this meme has gained immense resonance among social media users. Its popularity emphasizes how effective humor and animation can be in capturing the attention of the masses, especially in the political sphere where overly serious content is often not very appealing to a more casual audience. This meme also proves that lighthearted approaches, such as dance and animated characters, can be very powerful tools to increase campaign visibility.

In addition to the comedic element, this meme can also be understood as an attempt to bring political figures closer to young audiences in a relaxed and non-confrontational way. In the world of political campaigns that are often characterized by serious discussions, this meme offers a moment of relaxation that makes the candidate look more approachable and humane. The text "Dance Icon Gemoy" adds a light personal touch, creating a positive interaction and building a deeper emotional attachment with the audience.

The high engagement suggests that these memes not only serve as entertainment, but also a tool to extend political outreach in a more casual manner. In this case, humor proved to be an effective tool to provoke audience participation and reinforce the campaign narrative in a fun and relatable way.
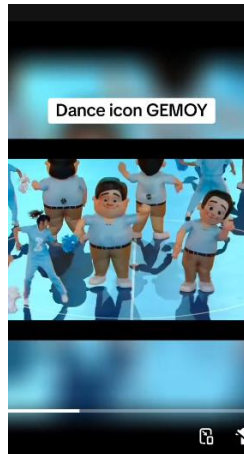
**Figure 4.** Tool for Engagement Category Memes
Source: https://www.tiktok.com/@florianshop

*Critical Memes: Prabowo's Mocking Expressions During the Presidential Debate*

This meme features a moment from the presidential debate where Prabowo Subianto appears to make an expression that is perceived as "teasing" his opponent. The text accompanying this meme, "Do we deserve this kind of leader??" followed by a thinking emoticon, emphasizes the criticism of Prabowo's behavior during the debate. This meme attempts to raise doubts about Prabowo's credibility and suitability as a viable leader candidate through non-verbal expressions that are considered not in line with expected leadership norms.

This meme clearly uses visual symbols to convey criticism implicitly, where Prabowo's expressions that appear relaxed or even mocking his opponent are juxtaposed with rhetorical questions that invite the audience to question whether this kind of attitude is appropriate for a presidential candidate. With 1.02 million views and 14,700 thousand likes, this meme has managed to capture the attention of the public, showing that this critical narrative of Prabowo has gained wide resonance on social media.

The use of visual criticism through body gestures and facial expressions that are perceived as belittling his political opponents is effective in creating conversations among social media users. This meme targets audiences who may have doubts about Prabowo's leadership and uses humor and subtle criticism to reinforce the narrative that an ideal leader should have a more serious and professional demeanor.

With a high number of interactions, this meme shows how criticism delivered visually, particularly through bodily expressions, can have a significant impact in shaping public perception. These mocking expressions are then used by Prabowo's critics to question his credibility as a leader. This meme is very effective in getting the audience to think and position Prabowo in a more negative context.



**Figure 5.** Critical Category Memes
Source: https://www.tiktok.com/@2045.tv/

*Political Polarization and the Use of Memes*



**Figure 6**. Existing Beliefs Category Memes
Source: https://www.tiktok.com/@billymambrasar1/

*Strengthening Existing Beliefs: Prabowo, Ganjar, and Anies in a Dialogue Like a Personal Relationship.* This meme depicts the debate between three presidential candidates-Prabowo Subianto, Ganjar Pranowo, and Anies Baswedan-in the form of a narrative that resembles personal relationship dynamics. With texts that parody relationship situations, "the guy who's already holding his emotions is being blamed" for Prabowo, "the friend who wants to go home" for Ganjar, and "the girl who brings up the guy's past mistakes" for Anies, these memes combine everyday humor with subtle political criticism.

This narrative symbolizes Prabowo as a figure who holds back his emotions, as if he is always being blamed and questioned for his achievements - a subtle criticism of his position as Minister of Defense and the various evaluations of his work. On the other hand, Ganjar is portrayed as a "friend who wants to go home", indicating disinterest or fatigue in the intense political debate, while Anies is portrayed as a figure who keeps bringing up past mistakes, representing a constant criticism of Prabowo's leadership.

This meme utilizes relational humor to convey deeper political messages, where the audience can easily understand the analogy through their daily life experiences, making the political narrative feel closer and more relevant. Prabowo is placed as a figure who is "always to blame," which strengthens the narrative of criticism towards his tenure as Minister of Defense, while Anies is presented as a figure who continues to remind the public of Prabowo's mistakes or failures.

With 187,000 views and 23,000 likes, this meme has clearly gained significant attention from social media users, suggesting that audiences feel connected to a narrative that reinforces existing beliefs, especially for those who are skeptical of Prabowo. The criticism of Prabowo's achievements as Defense Minister is emphasized through this "personal" interaction, where Ganjar and Anies become figures that reflect the majority view that questions Prabowo's success in his role so far.

This meme effectively utilizes symbolic interaction through narratives of interpersonal relationships to create an easy-to-understand representation, while also affirming the view that Prabowo is not immune to criticism for his achievements. Audiences who are already skeptical of his leadership will find this meme reinforces their views, making it an effective tool to maintain the polarization that already exists in political debates.

*Building Collective Identity: Free Milk Program*
This meme features two animated characters associated with candidates Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka, standing in front of the "Free Milk" program icon with a large milk bottle visual in the middle of the image. This milk bottle symbol is used to highlight one of the main campaign programs offered, which is the free milk distribution program. This meme promotes a narrative of social welfare and concern for public health, especially for children, with milk as a symbol of concern for the nutrition and future of the younger generation.

With 1.2 million views and 52.3 thousand likes, this meme managed to build widespread engagement among the public, especially those who feel that programs that focus on people's basic needs are key to the nation's future. The use of simple yet adorable animated characters make it easy

for audiences to connect with the social message, which is a commitment to the health and welfare of the people.

The free milk program became a strong visual symbol that represented an attempt to form a collective identity among the candidates' supporters. The meme foregrounds the narrative that Prabowo and Gibran are focused on concrete solutions to welfare issues, creating a sense of togetherness and solidarity among their supporters. The symbol of milk as a symbol of youth health reinforces a commitment to a better future, with the candidates portrayed as protectors and drivers of programs that directly impact people's daily lives.

Milk here is not just a consumption product, but a metaphor for the political nutrition offered by Prabowo and Gibran to the people, promising healthy growth and sustainability for Indonesia. This light-hearted yet meaningful visual invites many positive interactions from the public who feel that a program like free milk is a representation of politics that prioritizes the needs of the people. This meme creates a narrative that good leaders are those who think of real solutions for the common welfare



**Figure 7.** Collective Identity Category Memes
Source: https://www.tiktok.com/@generasigemoyindo/

*The Impact of Memes on Political Engagement*



**Figure 8**. Viral Category Memes
Source: https://www.tiktok.com/@gibran_rakabuming/

*Viral Memes and Increased Political Participation: Gibran's "Local Shoes".* This meme features Gibran Rakabuming Raka interacting with a crowd of supporters at a campaign event, where Gibran bends down to give his shoes to the audience, accompanied by the statement, "Those who get my shoes, take good care of them. Local has it." This action not only shows Gibran's closeness to the community, but also highlights his support for local products as a symbol of national economic independence.

With 42.3 million views and 3.9 million likes, this meme went viral and effectively increased political participation, especially among young voters who tend to engage in issues that touch on the values of favoring local products and direct interaction with their potential leaders. The moment captured in this meme showcases leadership that is up-close and personal, where Gibran looks down-to-earth and is willing to symbolically share with his supporters.

Gibran's act of giving away locally-made shoes creates a strong narrative of his support for the people's economy and small businesses, a message that is highly relevant among people who want to see leaders who support and strengthen domestic products. Not only does this meme spread a political message, but it is also an effective tool to build an emotional bond between Gibran and his supporters, especially those who appreciate this simple yet meaningful act.

With such high virality, this meme also succeeded in mobilizing more supporters to be actively involved in the political campaign, both through attendance at Gibran's events and through discussions on social media. The action of giving shoes to supporters reflects a caring and empathetic attitude that is an added value for Gibran as a young leader candidate who is considered to understand the needs and aspirations of the people.

This simple yet meaningful message, especially the focus on local products, shows that politics is not just about big issues, but also about concrete actions that support the local economy and interact directly with the community. This meme successfully combines humor, simplicity, and nationalism in one package that triggers greater political engagement among young voters.

*Memes as Political Marketing Tools: A Joint Prayer for the Country's Leaders*

This meme features Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka flanked by various famous artists, celebrities and influencers in a cheerful and energetic pose. Titled "Doa untuk Pemimpin Negeri," this meme aims to garner public support through the influence of popular figures coming together to show solidarity and hope for the future of the nation under the leadership of Prabowo and Gibran.

The celebrities and influencers present in this image reflect a smart political marketing strategy, where their popularity and reach on social media are leveraged to extend the campaign's message to a younger and more dynamic audience. This meme serves as a powerful political marketing tool, using famous faces to create emotional appeal and closeness with the audience, as if the celebrities are personally supporting and praying for the candidates.



**Figure 9:** Memes in the Political Marketing Tool category
Source: https://www.instagram.com/ (Instagram account @raffinagita1717)

With 2.5 million likes and 71.4 thousand comments, this meme has clearly attracted huge attention among social media users. Influencer marketing is becoming a dominant tactic in modern political campaigns, and this meme is an example of how celebrities and public figures can reinforce a positive image and narrative for a candidate pair. The presence of various artists in this image reinforces

the message that Prabowo and Gibran have broad support from various elements of society, including the entertainment world, which has a strong influence on public perception.

The dominating use of blue, as well as the positive and optimistic expressions of the figures in this image, give the impression of harmony, unity and peace. This meme conveys the message that prayers and shared hopes are an important part of the campaign, and Prabowo-Gibran are seen as figures worthy of support by all, including celebrities who are idolized by many.

With strong appeal among young people, this meme successfully positioned the Prabowo-Gibran pair as an inclusive choice, supported by the younger generation and creative groups. This tactic proves that utilizing celebrities and influencers in political campaigns is not only effective in increasing visibility, but also in reinforcing a positive narrative about the candidates.

## Conclusions

Political memes have become an effective instrument in building images and influencing public perceptions of political figures, especially among young voters. Through a symbolic interaction approach, this research shows that memes not only convey humor and criticism in a lighthearted manner, but also carry symbols that represent political power, innovation, and collective identity.

The use of visual symbols, such as images of Prabowo in a military uniform or Gibran with his symbol of young leadership, creates a narrative that is effective in influencing public perception. The images of Prabowo as an assertive leader and Gibran as a young innovator reinforce the idea of a blend of experience and renewal in Indonesian politics. These symbols are received and interpreted differently by different groups of people, which makes memes a flexible tool capable of crossing demographic and geographic boundaries.

Furthermore, humor in memes plays a significant role in inviting emotional engagement and reinforcing the political narrative being spread. Memes that poke fun at Gibran's experience or sarcastically highlight Prabowo's assertiveness, for example, appeal to younger voters with their relaxed yet sharp communication style. This shows that political memes are able to expand participation in politics, mobilize support, and construct political discourse on social media in a way that is relatable to digital-native voters.

This research also reveals that social interaction on social media plays a major role in shaping the meaning contained in memes. Memes are not only a one-way communication tool, but a forum for dialogue where audiences participate in the formation of political meaning through their interactions, both in supporting and criticizing candidate pairs. The process of decoding messages in memes allows audiences to interpret political meaning in accordance with their beliefs.

Overall, this study concludes that political memes, through the use of visual and verbal symbols, have successfully shaped significant political perceptions among young voters, increased political participation, and strengthened the collective identity of Prabowo-Gibran supporters. This phenomenon shows that in the digital era, social media has become the main arena in political campaigns, where memes act as a highly effective and influential communication tool in shaping political images and mobilizing public opinion.

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