



# Interpretation of signs and markers in Whiteboard Journal writing in forming political communication for the 2024 Presidential Election

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## ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine how political communication messages are conveyed to the public through social media portals. Utilizing a qualitative approach with content analysis as the method, this study investigates posts from the Instagram account @whiteboardjournal. The analysis process is carried out objectively and systematically using semiotic theory, especially Ferdinand de Saussure's concepts of "sign" and "signifier." Data from @whiteboardjournal's content, supported by relevant communication theories and expert discussions, reveal the strategic use of social media, particularly TikTok, as a powerful tool for image restoration, reputation enhancement, and increasing political electability. The findings show that short, viral videos on TikTok can significantly reshape public perceptions, even of controversial leaders, by packaging light, entertaining content infused with subtle political messaging. This study contributes to the growing discourse on the intersection of digital media and political communication by providing new insights into how emotional appeals, symbolism, and algorithm-driven exposure on social platforms can influence political narratives. It highlights the transformation of TikTok from a mere entertainment medium into a political stage, especially in the context of the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. The research underscores the importance of critical media literacy among voters, especially Gen Z, who dominate social media usage. In conclusion, political communication in the digital era is no longer confined to traditional media but is increasingly shaped by the virality, visual language, and emotional engagement that platforms like TikTok afford.

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## 1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of the times has led to changes in all aspects of life, including the increasingly digital fields of technology and communication. One of the technologies that is currently growing rapidly is social media. Social media is a platform that the public can use to exchange information and establish networks in cyberspace. According to Kominfo2 data, in 2020, social media users in Indonesia experienced a significant increase of approximately 10 million



people from the previous year, with around 196.7 million Indonesians actively using social media (Fanaqi, 2021).

One of the social media platforms that has gained popularity and seen an increase in use among the public is TikTok. The TikTok application serves as a social networking platform aimed at providing entertainment by showcasing music and short videos on its interface. TikTok was first launched in September 2016 by Zhang Yiming from China, the founder of the global application Toutiao (Utami et al., 2021). During the first quarter (Q1) of 2018, TikTok positioned itself as the most downloaded application, with a total of 45.8 million downloads. This number surpassed several other popular applications such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and Instagram. Additionally, according to AppAnnie data, in 2019, TikTok had 625 million active users worldwide (Bulele & Wibowo, 2020). According to katadata.co.id, during the global outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of TikTok users increased to 2 billion. This figure exceeded the total number of Instagram users, which stood at 1.5 billion globally (Utami et al., 2021).

With the advancement of digital technology, TikTok, which was initially used by the public as an audio-video entertainment medium, has begun to be utilized for educational purposes, information exchange, and even political discourse. According to a report by We Are Social, there were 213 million internet users in Indonesia as of January 2023, representing approximately 77% of the total population (We Are Social, 2023). As of October 2023, approximately 106.52 million of these internet users were recorded as TikTok users, making Indonesia the second-largest TikTok user base after the USA, which has 141.41 million users. As indicated by the We Are Social report, the significant increase in internet usage in Indonesia opens up new opportunities for interaction and communication (Fahruji et al., 2023).

In this modern era, society tends to use social media for accessing information and communication, where social media can influence individuals' actions and opinions. This aligns with the phenomenon observed in 2023 and 2024 concerning the general election. The general election, abbreviated as "pemilu" is a democratic process used by the public to elect leadership candidates for government or other institutions. According to Law Number 7 of 2017, the general election, conducted based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, serves as a means of exercising the people's sovereignty by enabling direct, open, free, secret, honest, and fair elections for members of the DPR (House of Representatives), the president, and vice president, as well as members of the Regional Representative Council (Fahrudin & Billah, 2023).

In the past, or before 2024, the election process was conducted directly and openly by candidates who campaigned by meeting with the public or using traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, or television to carry out political communication. For example, during the 2019

presidential election ("Pilpres"), candidates tended to campaign through traditional media to gain public sympathy and conducted direct campaigns such as community visits ("blusukan"), where candidates interacted with and influenced the public through their opinions, delivered via interviews, open dialogues in traditional media, or direct speeches to the community. However, with the advancement of technology, social media has played a significant role in the 2024 presidential election. According (Moekahar et al., 2022), social media has the ability to reach a wide audience, interact directly with voters, and present campaign content creatively and engagingly. Therefore, social media plays a crucial role in the political communication conducted by candidates in the 2024 presidential election (Nurhidayah & Fadillah, 2024).

The presidential election ("Pilpres") represents a pivotal moment in Indonesia's political democratic system. In the 2024 electoral process, it is noted that social media can influence public opinion in determining their choices. Social media serves as a communication tool for interaction and information gathering related to the 2024 presidential candidates. Suhendra in the (Dania & Nisa, 2023), explains that social media is capable of enhancing public political participation because it facilitates users in obtaining and disseminating information quickly. Thanks to social media, Barack Obama won the presidential elections in the United States twice. The utilization of social media in the digital era during the current presidential elections of 2019 has a significant impact on public opinion, as it allows the public to observe how their potential leaders conduct their political campaigns within society.

TikTok has emerged as one of the most prominent digital platforms capturing public attention during the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. It is widely perceived as an effective tool for shaping public opinion and fostering coherent relationships in the context of political communication. This perception stems from the platform's initial function as an entertainment medium, which later evolved into a space for political campaigning by utilizing popular audio trends and short-form videos. The content disseminated on TikTok has a substantial influence on the public, as campaign messages are often crafted in a light-hearted and visually engaging manner that aligns with the preferences and tastes of users particularly Generation Z, who constitute both the majority of TikTok users and a significant portion of the 2024 electorate.

According to data from the General Elections Commission (KPU), out of a total of 204,807,222 registered voters, approximately 0.003 percent, or around 6,000 individuals, were 17 years old. Meanwhile, about 31.23 percent or approximately 63.9 million voters, were between the ages of 17 and 30. Voters aged 31 to 40 made up only 20.70 percent, while those over the age of 40 accounted for 48.07 percent, or roughly 98.4 million individuals (Ramadhan, 2023). Some experts have even dubbed the 2024 election the "TikTok Election," popularizing this term in light of the platform's growing influence on public discourse. This phenomenon reflects the understanding that political

content serves as a crucial component of campaign strategy, particularly in establishing relationships with the public, Lee & Moon as cited in (Hartanto, 2021). Consequently, a growing number of politicians now believe that leveraging TikTok can significantly enhance their electability.

The phenomenon observed in various countries, including the Philippines, notes that TikTok is believed to have a significant contribution to the victory of Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., the son of dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr., in the 2022 Philippine presidential elections. During his campaign, Bongbong engaged in political communication or campaigning through dance content and providing feedback dialogues in short audio-video formats on TikTok. He also used TikTok as a tool to revise the dark history of the Philippines and the corrupt regime of Marcos Sr. by utilizing snippets of short videos. This is because the majority of the Philippine population are young people aged below 40, thus Bongbong's campaign targeting this demographic successfully attracted the sympathy of young people who tend to enjoy relaxed and engaging content. This phenomenon is also similar to Indonesia, where the majority of voters participating in the 2024 presidential elections are a mix of millennials and Gen Z individuals.

The phenomena observed in the 2024 presidential elections have garnered attention from various parties, including the Instagram account @whiteboardjournal, which discusses topics related to the 2024 elections. Whiteboard Journal, or WBJ, is a social media account that covers topics related to human beings, culture, and ideas that are happening or are interesting to discuss in the current era. WBJ, being a popular account among Gen Z, often posts content with titles like "understanding how" related to current issues and actively provides opinions or perspectives regarding the 2024 presidential elections. One of WBJ's posts related to the 2024 elections is titled "understanding how problematic leaders capitalized social media frenzy to win public sympathy," which discusses how leaders utilize social media frenzy to gain public sympathy. The post, published on January 9, 2024, with 997 comments, discusses the inception of social media platform TikTok in winning over potential voters by linking events that have occurred in other countries with those in Indonesia.

The previous phenomenon has been studied by (Berliani Ardha, 2014), where social media as a tool for political communication in the 2014 elections could influence the public in garnering sympathy and support, particularly through social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. (Abdillah, 2014) conducted research on several political parties in Indonesia using social media for campaigning, with Facebook and Twitter being the most widely used platforms at the time. Research conducted by (Alfiyani, 2018), focused on how social media is used as a strategic tool in political communication. This reflects that social media is not only used for entertainment or political communication but also as a strategy in the overall political communication process.

This underscores the importance of integrating social media into modern political communication strategies. This is in line with research conducted by (Alam, 2021) emphasizing the primary role of social media as a tool for political communication, demonstrating how politicians and stakeholders use digital technology to achieve political communication goals as an effective political communication strategy. Furthermore, research (Oktaheriyani, 2020), focused on analyzing the communication behavior of TikTok social media users, particularly in the context of students at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, UNISKA MAB Banjarmasin, providing insights into how specific social media platforms influence political interactions and discussions among the youth. Additionally, (Hidayati, 2021) research delved into the concept of political communication and the role of branding in influencing the image of political leaders through social media. In the same year, (Rahmah, 2021) conducted research on personal branding for Ganjar Pranowo to build political communication on Instagram, highlighting the strategies used by specific politicians, such as Ganjar Pranowo, in shaping their image and political communication.

**Table 1.** PREVIOUS RESEARCH USING THE PUBLISH OR PERISH APPLICATION

Cites	Authors	Title	Year	Source
193	Berliani Ardha (Ardha, 2014)	Social media as campaign medium for political parties in Indonesia 2024	2014	Journal of Communication Vision
79	Abdillah (Abdillah, 2014)	Social Media as Political Party Campaign in Indonesia	2014	Matrix Scientific Journal
64	S Rahmah (Rahmah, 2021)	Ganjar Pranowo' as personal branding as a strategy for building political	2021	Interaction Journal: Journal of Communication Science
62	N Alfiyani (Alfiyani, 2018)	Social media as a strategy for political communication	2018	Portrait of Thought
43	D Oktaheriyani (Oktaheriyani, 2020)	An Analysis of Communication Behavior Among TikTok Social Media Users (A Study of Students from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, UNISKA MAB Banjarmasin)	2020	Doctoral dissertation, Islamic University of Kalimantan MAB
31	S Alam (Alam, 2021)	The use of social media as a tool political communication.	2021	Avant Garde
19	FR Hidayati (Hidayati, 2021)	Political Communication and the Branding of Political Leaders Through Media Social: A Conceptual Paper a Conceptual Paper	2021	Journal of Lensa Mutiara Komunikasi

SOURCE: RESEARCHER DATA PROCESSING, 2024

This demonstrates that personal branding is an important strategy in building trust in political communication on social media. This indicates that personal branding has become a crucial strategy in building trust within political communication on social media. And recent research (Dania & Nisa, 2023), discusses the role and influence of social media in the 2024 presidential election campaign. Therefore, based on the research conducted by several researchers mentioned

above, it can be concluded that social media can be utilized by aspiring leaders in the electoral process to gain sympathy or support from the public. Social media can provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of political communication in the era of social media and digital technology. However, the research only addresses some strategies used by leaders using new media and tends to discuss old media as well, and this research only discusses the general connection between social media and elections.

Therefore, based on the background of the issue and previous research, the author aims to provide a new perspective on how the candidates for the 2024 presidential elections utilize social media, especially TikTok, to garner sympathy and win the hearts of potential voters. This research will examine the topic from the viewpoint of communication science. The focus of the study is political communication and TikTok social media using content analysis. This research is expected to provide insights and answers regarding the political communication carried out by candidate leaders in the 2024 elections through TikTok.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

One theoretical framework commonly used in content analysis is semiotic theory. This theory delves into the study of signs or symbols in texts, enabling researchers to identify and interpret the meanings contained within the text. By employing concepts such as denotation (literal meaning) and connotation (hidden meaning), researchers can uncover layers of meaning hidden within the text and understand how messages are conveyed to readers (Cobley & Machin, 2019).

This study analyzes the content of Whiteboard Journal's Instagram posts, particularly those discussing how social media especially TikTok plays a role in garnering public sympathy toward political leaders. The research adopts Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory as its theoretical framework, focusing on the concepts of "sign" and "signifier" as they appear in Whiteboard Journal's posts. De Saussure's semiotic theory posits that symbols or metaphors can function as signs or tools for interaction through communication, which are further refined through literary language shaped by systems and social conventions (Dayu & Syadli, 2023). A sign is defined as a unity between a form (signifier) and an idea (signified). In other words, the signifier refers to the meaningful sound or inscription that constitutes the material aspect of language what is said or heard, written or read. While the signified refers to the mental image, concept, or idea it represents (Sitompul et al., 2021).

In this study, semiotic theory aids the researcher in interpreting the symbols and signs embedded in Whiteboard Journal's Instagram content. The analyzed posts include several slides containing symbols that suggest how the social media activity of political candidates can emotionally influence the public. This emotional appeal, in turn, draws public interest and may reshape their perceptions of political figures. The meaning conveyed through these signs and

symbols highlights the powerful influence of social media particularly TikTok in shaping public opinion.

Thus, the semiotic theoretical framework in content analysis provides a crucial conceptual foundation for researchers to comprehend and analyze the meanings embedded within the examined texts or content. By applying the concepts inherent in this framework, researchers can develop a more structured and comprehensive analytical approach, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the meaning, context, and impact of the messages conveyed through the text or content under investigation.

### 3. Method

This research is conducted using the content analysis research method, a method in qualitative research approach used to understand and evaluate the content of a text, be it an article, a book, or even social media. In this study, researchers thoroughly analyze the content of the material under study to identify patterns, themes, or messages contained within it. Content analysis research can be conducted in various fields, ranging from social sciences, political science, to education. This method provides a deep understanding of the subject under study and enables relevant conclusions to be drawn from the data found (Yupi & Heryadi Putri, 2023).

One crucial aspect of content analysis research is the data collection process. Data collection is conducted by gathering materials that will be analyzed, whether in the form of written texts, audio recordings, or videos. The collected material must be representative and relevant to the research objectives. After the data is gathered, the next step is to read and systematically analyze the content of the material (Mayring, 2023). Researchers take note of emerging findings, such as main themes, specific patterns, or messages conveyed by the authors.

The content analysis process is conducted using an objective and systematic approach. Researchers identify analysis units, such as keywords, phrases, or sentences, which are then grouped based on similarities or relevance. Analysis is performed by comparing and contrasting these analysis units to identify consistent patterns or themes that emerge in the material under study. Additionally, researchers may use coding or categories to organize their findings in a more structured manner (Mayring, 2023).

The subjects of this study are categorized into primary and secondary data sources. The primary data subject is the Instagram account *@whiteboardjournal*, which serves as the main focus of the research. Meanwhile, the secondary data sources include social media platforms such as TikTok, websites, previous academic studies or journals, and relevant contemporary issues related to the research topic. The primary object of this study is presidential candidate number 02, who becomes

the central issue and subject of discussion within the *@whiteboardjournal* Instagram account as well as within the broader scope of the research.

The data validation technique employed in this study is data triangulation. Data triangulation is a method that combines various sources, techniques, theories, timeframes, or researchers with the aim of strengthening the credibility of the studied phenomenon. In this research, source triangulation is applied to verify data through multiple sources of information, such as user comments and Instagram posts, which are collected and subsequently analyzed. Source triangulation enhances the reliability of the data by cross-checking findings obtained during the research process with data drawn from multiple sources or informants. Furthermore, methodological triangulation is employed to analyze data using different techniques and sources (Sugiyono, 2016, 2017) as cited in (Alfansyur & Mariyani, 2020). In this study, triangulation is carried out by observing and analyzing data derived from previous academic journals, news articles, social media content, and posts from the *@whiteboardjournal* account.

The results of content analysis research can provide a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon or issue addressed in the material under study. For instance, the results of content analysis of a news article can give an overview of how a specific issue is presented or reported by mass media. Additionally, this research can contribute to the development of theories or conceptual frameworks in specific fields. The findings of content analysis are often used as a basis for formulating policy recommendations or follow-up steps in practical contexts.

However, like any other research method, content analysis research also has several limitations. One of them is the potential for subjective bias from researchers in interpreting data. Therefore, it is important for researchers to maintain objectivity and consistency in their analysis process. Additionally, the results of content analysis research can also be influenced by the complexity and diversity of the material under study, requiring a careful and systematic approach in the analysis process (Mayring, 2023). If depicted in diagram form, it can be observed in the following flowchart:

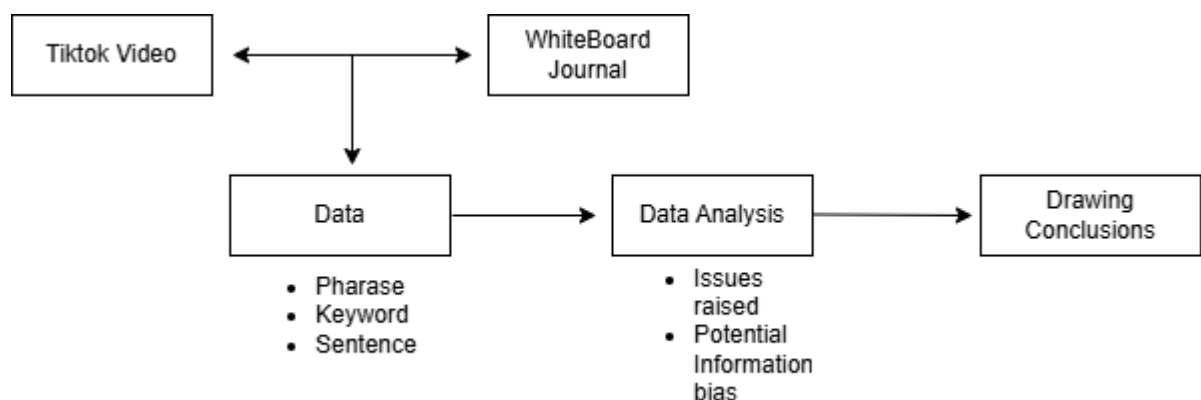
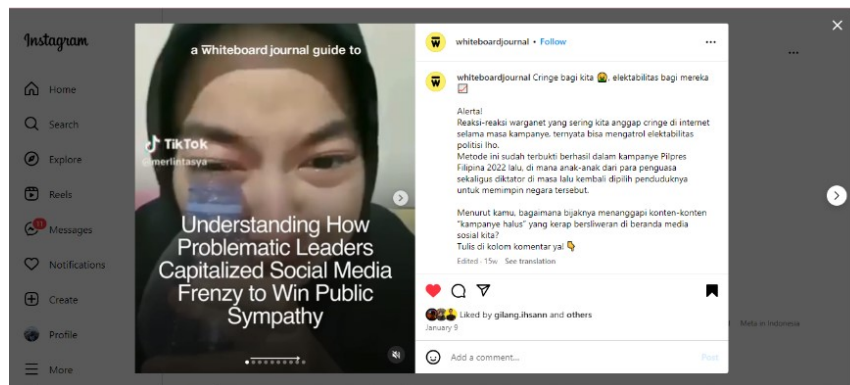


Fig. 1. Flowchart Content Analysis

In certain contexts, content analysis research can be an invaluable tool for understanding and evaluating various types of materials, ranging from written texts to social media. By employing an objective and systematic approach, this research can provide valuable insights into patterns and themes that emerge in the material under study (Mayring, 2023). As a flexible research method applicable across various fields, content analysis remains one of the primary tools in researchers' arsenal for comprehending the complexities of the ever-evolving world.

#### 4. Result and Discussion

The research conducted by the researcher focuses on Instagram posts by @whiteboardjournal, which discuss how leaders facing conflicts or issues in their lives attempt to reverse the situation by leveraging social media to garner public sympathy. This can be observed in the following post, which features the first slide of the @whiteboardjournal Instagram post from January 9, 2024.



**Fig. 2. Post Understanding How Problematic Leaders Capitalized Social Media Frenzy to Win Public Sympathy**

Source: Instagram @whiteboardjournal, 2024

On January 9, 2024, the Instagram account @whiteboardjournal posted about one of the prominent issues currently in Indonesia, namely the general election (PEMILU). The post, titled "Understanding How Problematic Leaders Capitalized on Social Media Frenzy to Win Public Sympathy," discusses how problematic leaders exploit the social media frenzy to garner public sympathy in the 2024 election.

The post features content depicting a woman crying, with her tears being collected in a bottle. This content suggests that the woman is expressing sadness over current events. However, it appears that her emotional display is forced or merely a "gimmick." Alongside the video, a caption mentions the numerous reactions from netizens circulating online, which can influence public perception and boost a politician's electability. The caption includes the phrase "cringe for us, electability for them" accompanied by a vomiting emoticon. This implicitly critiques the Instagram post by @whiteboardjournal, suggesting that the content posted by politicians or their actions leading up to the 2024 election is making netizens nauseous and wary, as many of these actions are fabricated or misaligned with reality. These actions and content are created solely to enhance the

politicians' electability by exploiting social media trends. Consequently, the reactions posted by netizens on social media regarding politicians' behaviors can influence public perception and elevate the politicians' electability.

Furthermore, the caption of this post also explains that a similar event occurred in the Philippines in 2022, where the children of former rulers and dictators were once again elected by the public to become the nation's leaders. Utilizing social media as a method of "subtle campaigning" proved successful in garnering public sympathy during the election.

The @whiteboardjournal post also invites netizens to share their opinions regarding the subtle campaign content frequently appearing on their social media feeds. This indicates that the Instagram account actively encourages and engages the public to comment on the events summarized by @whiteboardjournal in the post.



**Fig. 3. Campaign period and tiktok's secret weapon**

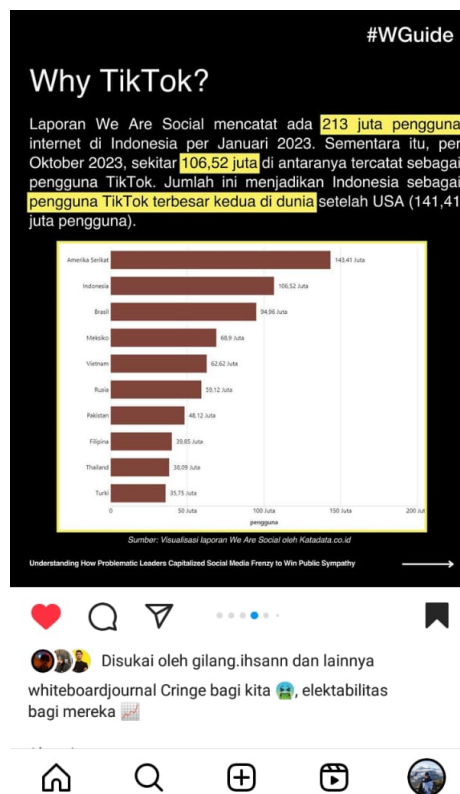
Source: Instagram @whiteboardjournal, 2024

The next slide in the same post features content related to this year's campaign period, which is conducted not only in the streets or in person but also through social media. This is illustrated in the post with the statement, "The campaign period not only pollutes the streets but also our digital realm." This is followed by an explanation with data from the Independent Electoral Awareness Committee (KISP), concluding that politicians during the 2024 election campaign have conducted promotions or campaigns on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, with a total of 11,026 advertisements aimed at garnering sympathy and winning the hearts of citizens who tend

to use social media. Thus, the more content they post on social media, the more familiar netizens become with the politicians. This tactic is employed by the political elite to enhance their electability in the eyes of voters, particularly young people who are voting for the first time..

"More or less, this is indeed similar to the courting process," reads an additional quote at the bottom of the post, accompanied by a screenshot of a popular romance film among young people and a video recording of a political party dancing to a trending social media challenge, especially on TikTok. Indirectly, this post on the @whiteboardjournal account illustrates that politicians are akin to young individuals trying to woo their partners. This approach must begin with engaging in activities that the prospective partner enjoys, followed by employing diction and actions that can attract their sympathy and affection, ultimately winning their support.

The previous post discussing political elites campaigning in the virtual world is reinforced by another post highlighting that the secret weapon politicians use to win the hearts of the public is "TikTok." According to Virdika Rizky Utama, a researcher at PARA Syndicate, although traditional campaigns are still conducted, online campaigns have a significant impact on global politics, including in Indonesia. TikTok is considered capable of boosting political electability and influencing public opinion. Consequently, the 2024 election is referred to by experts as the "TikTok Election" because the app enhances political influence, and video posts on TikTok significantly affect political discourse.



**Fig. 4. Tiktok user data**  
Source: Instagram @whiteboardjournal, 2024

The post above explains why TikTok is considered one of the most influential social media platforms for the 2024 election in Indonesia. The @whiteboardjournal account presents data from We Are Social, showing that as of January 2023, there were 213 million internet users in Indonesia, and by October 2023, around 106.52 million of them were TikTok users. This makes Indonesia the second-largest TikTok user base in the world, after the USA with 141.41 million users. From this data, it can be concluded that TikTok is one of the most influential social media platforms in Indonesia, frequently used for branding and increasing engagement. Indirectly, Whiteboard Journal also emphasizes that many Indonesian politicians are using TikTok as a medium to influence the public and boost their electability leading up to the 2024 election. The ability to leverage social media to rewrite the history of his father's administration in the Philippines serves as an example.



**Fig. 5. Philippines and manipulation**

Source: Instagram @whiteboardjournal, 2024

This post invites us to reflect on the victory of the political dynasty in the Philippines. The conditions of the general elections in Indonesia and the Philippines in 2022 share similarities, where Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.'s victory is believed to have been significantly influenced by TikTok. Bongbong used TikTok to campaign to the public by showcasing himself through short videos, creating content to answer public questions, and engaging in entertainment activities like dancing. He used these TikTok videos to revise the dark history of the Philippines and the regime led by his father, Marcos Sr. Instead of holding press conferences or attending interviews with TV stations and journalists, he preferred using TikTok to address questions or handle crises. One of Bongbong's posts on his TikTok account claims that the vast wealth of the Marcos family did not come from plundering the Philippine treasury but from his father's income as a lawyer.

Bongbong's posts are believed to have successfully reversed public perception of the dark history of the Philippines during his father's leadership, particularly concerning human rights and corruption. He transformed the function of TikTok from a platform primarily used for entertainment into one now utilized for political purposes.

Additionally, according to CNN Philippines, approximately 56% of voters out of the country's total population of 65.7 million are under the age of 40. This means that more than 50% of the population were either not born or were too young to be aware of what happened during Marcos Sr.'s regime. This situation is very similar to Indonesia, where the General Elections Commission (KPU) has recorded 204,807,222 registered voters for the 2024 election, with 56.45% of them being a combination of millennials (33.60%) and Gen Z (22.85%). Thus, it can be seen that the majority of voters in Indonesia's 2024 election are individuals born in an era where information and education are easily accessible through dynamic entertainment media. Most of these voters are young people who were either not born or too young to evaluate the dark history of the past. The similarities between the situations in Indonesia and the Philippines indicate that the 2024 election will be significantly influenced by short video content on social media, particularly TikTok.

"The nature of courtship always carries the risk of manipulation," a phrase displayed in the @whiteboardjournal post, suggests that the approaches taken by politicians in the 2024 election tend to be insincere or fabricated. Most of these contents primarily provide entertainment and enhance their image as good leaders, thereby transforming TikTok into their political platform. Similar to building a relationship, when engaging with the public, some aspects are manipulated or altered to enhance reputation and maintain a positive image. Thus, indirectly, the @whiteboardjournal account uses diction to imply that the prospective leaders in Indonesia are prone to manipulation or deceit in order to win the hearts or votes of the people.



Fig. 6. Familiar

Source: Instagram @whiteboardjournal, 2024

The above post subtly conveys that the situation being described is more frightening than a horror film: the political dynasty established by the leaders in the Philippines. This is because these leaders are the children or descendants of former presidents who abused their power. For instance, Ferdinand Marcos Sr., the father of Bongbong, and Rodrigo Duterte, the father of Sarah Duterte, both faced issues related to human rights violations and corruption during their presidencies. Bongbong ran for president, and Sarah Duterte rose to the vice presidency as her father, Rodrigo Duterte, ended his term as president in 2022.

What makes this even more unsettling is that these presidential candidates use TikTok to erase the dark history associated with their families by posting content that causes people to forget those events. Consequently, power is inherited within the government, circulating among the families of problematic leaders.



**Fig. 7. From sad to Cute**

Source: Instagram @whiteboardjournal, 2024

The next slide in the @whiteboardjournal post highlights two video contents titled "From Adorable to Pitiful." One video clip shows Prabowo Subianto dancing adorably during an interview or event. In the same post, there is a TikTok video from the @shahrinz account, which features a clip from Prabowo Subianto's presentation of his 2024 presidential vision and mission. The TikTok content is titled "POV: Seeing an old man with a sad face makes me cry," followed by the account owner reacting with tears, sadness, mockery, and seemingly ridiculing Prabowo's expressions during his presentation. The final part includes a trending comment from the @coffebeet account, replying to @zarryhendrik's post with the phrase "2 funny words, Crying over a presidential candidate." In no time, this comment trended with the keyword "presidential candidate".

These three contents illustrate how TikTok can significantly influence and rapidly change public perception. It starts with content featuring clips that are sad, mocking, or endearing. As explained by Jonathan Corpus Ong, a disinformation researcher from Harvard University, unlike Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, TikTok's algorithm can catapult an account to "fame" within a few days with just a single piece of content.

TikTok is believed to have the ability to change public perception and increase user engagement simply by creating viral content, especially if the content from the user's account hits the "For You Page" (FYP). Due to the viral content related to the presidential election, many people join in and create similar content to achieve their own virality. Consequently, in addition to the benefits gained by users from creating viral content, the politicians featured in such content also become more well-known to the public, thereby potentially increasing their political electability.



**Fig. 8. Dark Historis**

Source: Instagram @whiteboardjournal, 2024

The subsequent content in the post titled "same shit, different country" implies that what happens in Indonesia and the Philippines is essentially the same, only differing in terms of the country involved. The @whiteboardjournal account, in its post, asserts that the actions taken by politicians, governments, and the populace who condone such actions are akin to what happens in the Philippines. There, people have allowed the two biological children of the authoritarian ruler to assume power again after what their parents did to the Philippines in the past. TikTok, dancing, and the collective impunity of the younger generation represent tactics that have successfully reversed

the situation and altered the perception of Philippine society, which previously opposed the leadership of Ferdinand Marcos Sr and Rodrigo Duterte.

Subsequently, the @whiteboardjournal account added two videos depicting the actions of two mascots supporting Bongbong Marcos and Sara Duterte, who were dancing and had videos made of them similar to the "gemoy dance" performed by Prabowo Subianto. This trend of the gemoy dance could make the presidential candidate more recognizable to the public due to the association of "gemoy dance" being embedded in their minds. When looking at past events, it's noted that Prabowo has faced issues related to human rights violations. Finally, the @whiteboardjournal account poses a question that asserts, "Will dark history or past events repeat themselves?" This account encourages netizens to comment and critically think again when choosing leaders wisely by examining their track record from the past.



**Fig. 9. QnA**

Source: Instagram @whiteboardjournal, 2024

The post concludes by displaying an image of a "QnA" box containing questions related to tips for saving loved ones from political drama. The @whiteboardjournal account encourages netizens to think critically, comment, and choose leaders wisely to avoid making mistakes. The account uses the term "saving," suggesting that Whiteboard Journal disagrees with and does not support the actions of the presidential candidate. Whiteboard Journal seems to urge people not to support and not to engage young people or those who are not aware or hypnotized by viral TikTok content and dances performed by the presidential candidate. They encourage people to share tips and tricks that can change public perception and prevent them from getting caught up in political drama and dynasty politics that have occurred in the Philippines and may occur in Indonesia.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the findings of this study reveal that the interpretation of signs and signifiers in posts by the *@Whiteboardjournal* account plays a significant role in eliciting public sympathy and empathy, thereby contributing to the electability of presidential candidates in the 2024 election. By employing semiotic theory and content analysis methods to thoroughly examine the meanings embedded in symbols and the narratives presented by Whiteboard Journal, this research demonstrates that the posts and content shared by political candidates have the potential to influence public sentiment during the 2024 presidential election.

Social media, particularly TikTok, which is predominantly used by Generation X and Z the majority of voters in the 2024 election has had a profound impact. TikTok, originally intended as a platform for entertainment, has now shifted to serve as a medium for political communication. Through the strategic use of viral and engaging content, TikTok has proven to be more effective in enhancing the visibility and electability of political candidates compared to traditional methods such as in-person campaigns or speeches. This is largely due to TikTok's substantial influence and its significant role in shaping public opinion.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the Instagram account *@whiteboardjournal*, it can be concluded that TikTok has emerged as the most influential social media platform utilized by politicians during the 2024 Indonesian presidential election to enhance electability. Initially designed as an entertainment platform, TikTok has evolved into a powerful tool for political communication, allowing candidates to craft strategic narratives through short, viral, and emotionally engaging content. These contents not only influence the public's perception of political figures but can also rehabilitate the image of controversial leaders by generating public sympathy through seemingly light-hearted communication. This study reveals that the *@whiteboardjournal* account, through semiotic signs and rhetorical strategies, plays a significant role in shaping public discourse by providing critical commentary on how digital platforms are used for political purposes. However, the tone and content of the posts often focus on a particular candidate pair, which raises questions about neutrality and suggests an implicit bias. Nonetheless, the findings of this research contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital media, especially TikTok, functions as a strategic space for political branding and perception management in the digital era. This research is limited by its focus on a single Instagram account (*@whiteboardjournal*) and one social media platform (TikTok), which may not fully represent the broader political communication strategies employed across other platforms or by other candidates. Additionally, the interpretation of content is subject to the researchers' subjective readings, despite the application of a systematic content analysis method. Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on political

communication in the digital age by highlighting the role of semiotics in understanding how political messages are embedded within popular social media culture.

Future research should explore comparative analyses involving multiple social media platforms (e.g., YouTube, Twitter/X, Instagram, and Facebook) and a broader range of political actors to gain a more comprehensive view of digital campaign strategies. Researchers may also consider conducting audience reception studies to understand how voters, especially those in Generation Z and millennial demographics, interpret and respond to political content on TikTok. Furthermore, future studies could incorporate quantitative methods such as engagement metrics or sentiment analysis to complement the qualitative insights and provide empirical validation of social media's impact on political attitudes and behaviors.

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