



A Visual Hermeneutics Study of Political Ads in Governor Election Campaigns on Instagram

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ABSTRACT

The increasing use of social media, particularly Instagram, as a primary platform for political campaigns demands an in-depth understanding of how visual elements influence public perception. This study addresses two main research problems: first, what meanings are embedded in the images of gubernatorial political advertisements on Instagram? Second, how can a hermeneutic approach uncover the visual dimensions within such campaigns? The purpose of this study is to analyze the visual messages in gubernatorial political campaigns on Instagram and understand the contextualization and visual interpretation of political advertisements using a hermeneutic approach. Using a qualitative method based on visual hermeneutics, data in the form of political advertisement images were analyzed through visual mapping and semantic interpretation. The results show that campaign advertisements featuring the gubernatorial candidate alongside the music group Slank successfully built a connection between the candidate and strong social and cultural identities, particularly among young voters. Visual elements such as facial expressions, color schemes, and image composition reinforced the political message and created an image of the candidate as a progressive figure closely connected to the community. Hermeneutic analysis further revealed that these advertisements not only conveyed political messages but also constructed cultural narratives linking the candidate to values of change and solidarity. This study contributes to enriching the understanding of the role of visual elements in political campaigns on social media and demonstrates how these elements can be strategically utilized to shape public perception, enhance the candidate's image, and influence voter preferences in an increasingly digital and visual electoral context.

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INTRODUCTION

Hermeneutics, as a theory and methodology of interpretation, initially developed in the context of philosophy and theology, focusing on understanding classical texts such as the Bible and other ancient works. Initially, hermeneutics sought to understand the original intent of the author or speaker through historical and cultural contexts. In its development, modern hermeneutics, pioneered by figures like Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, introduced the understanding that interpretation is a dynamic dialogue between the interpreter and the text, influenced by life experiences and cultural context (Dean, 2019; Greenwood et al., 2019; Gleason & Hansen, 2023). This approach is not only applied to written texts but can also be used to analyze visual elements, such as images and symbols, present in mass media, including social media. Visual hermeneutics helps uncover hidden meanings in images, symbolism, colors, and compositions used in political advertisements. This is highly relevant to understanding how visuals in political campaigns on Instagram function to convey complex messages and influence audience perceptions (Josephson et al., 2020; Bock, 2020; Farkas & Bene, 2021).

With the development of digital technology, social media has transformed the landscape of political campaigns, where platforms like Instagram have become primary tools for candidates to interact directly with their audience. Instagram enables political campaigns to leverage images and videos that are easily consumed to build an image and attract voters' attention (Male, 2019; Schroeder, 2020; Hooper-Greenhill, 2020). Visuals in political advertisements on Instagram are often used to portray candidates in various situations designed to shape public perception, convey political messages, and create a strong identity. Political campaigns through social media are becoming increasingly dynamic and personalized, utilizing platform algorithms to target audiences based on demographics and specific interests, allowing for more focused and relevant message delivery (Kreiss & McGregor, 2019; Dhanesh & Rahman, 2021). In this context, political advertisements not only serve as a medium for delivering verbal messages but also as a strategy to create a public identity for candidates through carefully selected images (Celhay et al., 2020; Serafini & Reid, 2023; Lalancette & Raynauld, 2019).

Visual communication in politics demonstrates that images do not merely function to depict reality but also to shape perceptions and convey narratives that form public opinion. In the context of political advertisements, images can be used to reinforce political messages, build a candidate's image, and influence voters' decisions. Visual elements such as facial expressions, color selection, image composition, and symbolism can provide deeper meaning to how audiences perceive a candidate (Lim, 2021; Madisson & Ventsel, 2020). For instance, images showing candidates against the backdrop of national or social symbols can evoke a sense of patriotism or closeness to the people. Conversely, more informal images can create an impression of closeness or togetherness with voters (Briandana et al., 2020; Steffan, 2020). Thus, visuals play a significant role in shaping public perceptions of candidates, and these elements can be used to manipulate or enhance the political messages being conveyed.

Research on political advertisements in social media, particularly Instagram, has grown along with the shift in campaign strategies to digital platforms. Several studies have shown how visuals are used to build personal images and strengthen political messages on social media. For example, research by Enli and Skogerbø (2013) showed how politicians in Norway use images and videos to build emotional connections with voters through social media. In Indonesia, research by Andi (2020) examined how images in gubernatorial campaigns on social media were used to create candidates' political identities and attract young voters. However, there is still

limited research applying a hermeneutic approach to the visual analysis of political advertisements on Instagram. Most studies focus more on textual or verbal narratives in political advertisements, while visual elements are often regarded as complementary or supplementary. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by applying a visual hermeneutic approach to analyze images in gubernatorial political advertisements on Instagram and uncover hidden messages that may not be immediately apparent to audiences.

The research problems in this study are: first, what meanings are contained in the images of gubernatorial political advertisements posted on Instagram? Second, how can a hermeneutic approach reveal the visual dimensions in gubernatorial political campaigns on Instagram? The purpose of this study is to analyze the messages contained in the visual images of gubernatorial campaigns on Instagram and use hermeneutic theory to understand the contextualization and visual interpretation of gubernatorial political advertisements on Instagram. This study is expected to enrich the understanding of how images in gubernatorial campaigns on social media shape public perceptions and influence voters' decisions in the electoral context.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a visual hermeneutics method to analyze three images of gubernatorial political advertisements posted on Instagram during the 2024 election campaign in NTB. The images were sourced from the Inside Lombok Instagram account. This research focuses solely on visual elements and does not involve interviews or dialogues. The data consists of political advertisement images from the winner of the 2024 NTB gubernatorial election. The analysis process begins with visual mapping to identify key elements, followed by semantic interpretation to understand the meanings embedded in the images and contextualization of the images within the local social and cultural framework of NTB. The aim is to uncover hidden messages within the images that may not be immediately apparent to the audience.

This research does not rely on text or verbal narratives but focuses entirely on how the images function in conveying political messages and shaping the identity of the gubernatorial candidates. Using a visual hermeneutics approach, the researcher will identify visual elements such as facial expressions, symbolism, colors, and composition used in the images, and relate these elements to the broader political and social context. The study aims to enrich the understanding of how images in gubernatorial campaigns can influence public perception and voter decisions without depending on verbal narratives or direct interaction with the audience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Meaning of Visual Texts and Social Context

The campaign advertisement showcased images of the two gubernatorial candidates, Iqbal and Dinda, alongside the popular Indonesian band Slank. Slank, a band with a massive fan base, especially among the younger demographic, has long been associated with activism, youth culture, and the working-class ethos. Their music often reflects themes of social justice, anti-authoritarianism, and the struggles of ordinary people. The inclusion of Slank in the campaign was not accidental; it was a deliberate choice to connect the candidates with a certain social and cultural identity that resonates with a broad segment of the electorate.

The presence of Slank in the campaign advertisement can be interpreted as a symbolic gesture. By associating themselves with the band, Iqbal and Dinda were signaling to voters that

they were in tune with the values and concerns of the youth, a demographic that plays an increasingly important role in modern elections. The use of a popular and culturally significant band like Slank in the campaign was intended to create a connection with the audience, particularly young voters, who may view the candidates as being more relatable and aligned with their interests.

More than just a visual representation, the relationship between the candidates and Slank communicates a deeper message. The band's image, associated with ideals of freedom of expression, authenticity, and solidarity with the masses, is strategically used to reinforce the candidates' positions as approachable and empathetic figures. This association is crucial in shaping the narrative of the campaign, positioning Iqbal and Dinda as individuals who understand the concerns of everyday citizens and are committed to addressing their needs. This connection between the candidates and the band also functions to establish credibility and trust, important factors in political campaigns.

2. Symbolism and Ideological Significance

Symbolism plays a critical role in political campaigns, particularly in the context of visual advertisements. In this campaign ad, Slank serves as a powerful symbol of rebellion and resistance against the status quo. For many Indonesians, Slank is seen as a voice for the underdog, and the band's association with social and political activism gives the candidates a certain cachet among voters who are critical of the existing political establishment.

The use of Slank's image also taps into the broader cultural and ideological landscape of Indonesian politics. Slank's anti-establishment reputation aligns with the political positioning of Iqbal and Dinda, particularly if their platform includes promises of change or reform. By aligning themselves with this symbol, the candidates effectively communicate their willingness to challenge the status quo, thereby appealing to voters who are dissatisfied with the current political leadership and are looking for a fresh approach.

This symbolism is not limited to the political realm but extends to the social and cultural dimensions of Indonesian life. Slank, with its roots in the rock music scene, represents an alternative cultural narrative that contrasts with the traditional political elite. In this sense, the candidates are not just selling political ideas—they are also marketing a cultural identity that speaks to the frustrations and aspirations of a large portion of the population.

The campaign ad, therefore, does more than simply present a political message. It constructs an image of the candidates that resonates on a deeper cultural level, positioning them as figures who are capable of bridging the gap between the traditional political structures and the more progressive, youth-oriented forces in society. This symbolic use of Slank as a cultural touchstone is designed to appeal to voters who are seeking leaders who can inspire change and represent their values.

3. The Role of Music in Political Campaigns

Music has long been a powerful tool in political campaigns, used to evoke emotions, create solidarity, and convey messages that resonate with voters. In the case of this gubernatorial campaign, the inclusion of Slank's music in the ad adds an additional layer of meaning. Music, as a universal language, transcends barriers of age, gender, and socioeconomic status, allowing political messages to reach a wider audience.

Slank's music, known for its rebellious and youthful energy, serves as an ideal vehicle for conveying a message of change and renewal. The band's songs often address themes of social justice, political corruption, and the struggles of ordinary people, all of which align with the political platform that Iqbal and Dinda are trying to promote. By using Slank's music in the ad, the campaign capitalizes on the band's established cultural capital and associates the candidates with these important social issues.

Moreover, the use of music in political campaigns can also foster a sense of community and belonging. In the case of this campaign, the inclusion of Slank serves to unite potential voters under a shared identity, one that is informed by the values and principles espoused by the band. This sense of community is particularly important in a political campaign, as it creates a sense of solidarity among voters who feel that they are part of a movement or a cause.

The music also serves to energize and mobilize voters. Music has the power to inspire action, and by associating the candidates with a band that is known for its ability to rally crowds and inspire passion, the campaign is able to tap into this dynamic. The energetic and youthful vibe that Slank brings to the ad is intended to motivate voters to take action, whether it be through participation in rallies, voting in the election, or spreading the campaign's message to others.

4. Media and Representation of Political Leaders

The use of media to represent political leaders is an important aspect of modern political campaigns. In this case, the ad serves as a representation of the candidates, carefully crafted to highlight their alignment with the values and concerns of the electorate. The visual elements of the ad, including the inclusion of Slank, are designed to create a particular narrative about the candidates and their political priorities.

The choice of imagery is particularly significant. By presenting the candidates in the context of a popular cultural event, the campaign is signaling that Iqbal and Dinda are not distant or detached political figures, but individuals who are actively engaged with the cultural and social life of their constituents. This representation is important because it helps to humanize the candidates and make them more relatable to the average voter.

Additionally, the ad functions as a form of media manipulation, in that it seeks to control how the candidates are perceived by the public. By aligning themselves with a popular cultural symbol like Slank, the candidates are able to craft an image that resonates with a specific demographic, namely the youth. This representation is crucial in shaping public opinion, as it creates a narrative that can influence how voters understand the candidates' motivations and goals.

The media, in this case, serves as a tool for constructing political identity. The ad constructs a particular image of the candidates—one that is youthful, progressive, and in touch with the concerns of ordinary people. This construction of identity is a key feature of modern political campaigns, where media plays a central role in shaping the way political leaders are perceived by the public.

5. Hermeneutic Approach to Media Analysis

The hermeneutic approach to media analysis emphasizes the importance of interpreting the underlying meanings and messages conveyed through texts, including advertisements. In this campaign ad, the images of Iqbal, Dinda, and Slank can be seen as a text that requires

interpretation. The ad does not simply present the candidates as political figures; it constructs a narrative that ties them to certain social, cultural, and political values.

The hermeneutic approach encourages us to consider the broader context in which the ad was created. In this case, the political context of the NTB gubernatorial race, the cultural significance of Slank, and the social dynamics of the youth demographic all contribute to the interpretation of the ad. By analyzing these factors, we can gain a deeper understanding of how the campaign is trying to shape public perception and mobilize voters.

Furthermore, the hermeneutic approach encourages us to consider the audience's role in interpreting the ad. Different viewers may bring their own experiences, values, and beliefs to the text, which can lead to varying interpretations. For some, the association with Slank may evoke feelings of nostalgia and solidarity, while for others, it may represent a symbol of rebellion and resistance. Understanding the audience's role in the interpretation of the ad is crucial for understanding its effectiveness as a political tool.

CONCLUSION

The gubernatorial campaign advertisement that features Iqbal, Dinda, and Slank serves as a rich example of how political campaigns utilize media, symbolism, and culture to construct a narrative and shape public perception. By associating themselves with the popular band Slank, the candidates position themselves as progressive, youthful, and in touch with the concerns of the electorate. Through the hermeneutic lens, we can see how the ad functions as both a political message and a cultural symbol, aiming to resonate with voters and create a sense of solidarity and shared identity. This analysis highlights the complex ways in which media and culture intersect in the realm of modern political campaigning.

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