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FROM POPULARITY TO ELECTABILITY: POLITICAL BRANDING OF CELEBRITY CANDIDATES IN THE 2024 BANDUNG REGENCY REGIONAL ELECTION

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Abstract

The involvement of artists in local politics is growing in Indonesia, and popularity has become one of the most important assets for gaining political support. This study aims to analyze the political branding built by candidates with artist backgrounds in the 2024 Bandung Regency Regional Head Election and explain their contribution to increasing electability. The research used a Quasi-Qualitative Design (QQD) approach, with data collected through interviews, observations, documentation, and questionnaires. Data analysis was carried out using NVivo 12. Here we show that political branding is built through candidate popularity, stakeholder support, political slogans, direct campaigns, and social media optimization. This strategy can foster a positive image and strengthen the candidate's relationship with the community. The study's findings also show that political branding contributes to higher perceived electability by boosting voter liking, willingness to vote, intention to recommend candidates to others, and the intensity of public conversations about candidates. Although popularity as an artist is the starting capital that facilitates the introduction of candidates, the increase in electability is more determined by the candidate's ability to build trust, demonstrate competence, and maintain consistency in political communication. This study confirms that political branding is an effective strategy in increasing the electability of candidates with artistic backgrounds in local political contests.

Keywords: political branding, electability, artists, political communication, local elections.

Abstrak

Keterlibatan artis dalam politik lokal semakin berkembang di Indonesia dan menjadikan popularitas sebagai salah satu modal penting dalam memperoleh dukungan politik. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis political branding yang dibangun oleh kandidat berlatar belakang artis pada Pemilihan Kepala Daerah Kabupaten Bandung tahun 2024 serta menjelaskan kontribusinya terhadap peningkatan elektabilitas. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan Quasi-Qualitative Design (QQD) dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara, observasi, dokumentasi, dan kuesioner. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan NVivo 12. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa political branding

dibangun melalui pemanfaatan popularitas kandidat, dukungan pemangku kepentingan, penggunaan slogan politik, kampanye langsung, serta optimalisasi media sosial. Strategi tersebut mampu membentuk citra positif dan memperkuat hubungan kandidat dengan masyarakat. Temuan penelitian juga menunjukkan bahwa political branding berkontribusi terhadap peningkatan elektabilitas melalui meningkatnya rasa suka pemilih terhadap kandidat, keinginan memilih, niat merekomendasikan kandidat kepada orang lain, dan intensitas pembicaraan publik mengenai kandidat. Meskipun popularitas sebagai artis menjadi modal awal yang memudahkan pengenalan kandidat, peningkatan elektabilitas lebih ditentukan oleh kemampuan kandidat dalam membangun kepercayaan, menunjukkan kompetensi, dan menjaga konsistensi komunikasi politik. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa political branding merupakan strategi yang efektif dalam meningkatkan elektabilitas kandidat berlatar belakang artis pada kontestasi politik lokal.

Kata Kunci: *political branding, elektabilitas, artis, komunikasi politik, pilkada.*

INTRODUCTION

Political communication is an important element in the democratic process because it functions as a means of conveying political messages between political actors, the media, and the public. In the development of modern democracy, political communication serves not only as a medium for conveying political information but also as a strategic instrument for building an image, influencing public perception, and gaining voter support. According to Cangara (2004), in his book *Introduction to Communication Science*, he said that "Without communication, it is impossible to form a society. On the contrary, without society, humans cannot develop communication". These developments have led to the emergence of various political marketing approaches that apply marketing principles to enhance the public's perception of candidates and political parties. Political marketing utilizes strategies to build candidate identities, attract support, and influence voter behavior (Sahid & Budianto, 2022). One concept that develops in the study of political marketing is political branding, the process of forming a political identity to build a positive image, increase public recognition, and

influence voter behaviour.

Political branding is becoming increasingly relevant in contemporary political contests, which are characterized by high competition between candidates. Political Brand can be understood as a strategy to shape an image, win voters' hearts, and secure their support. Well-executed personal branding can attract relationships, associations, and expectations from the community (Athahirah & Meiyenti, 2023). In this context, candidates are not only required to have a strong work program but also to build a clear, easily recognizable political identity. According to Pich (2022), Political branding plays an important role in shaping public opinion and influencing voters' decisions in elections. The success of political branding ultimately reflects in candidates' electability. Electability is the level of public support for a candidate, typically measured through surveys or polls. The higher a candidate's electability, the greater the chance of winning political contests (Budiarjo, 2008).

An interesting phenomenon in Indonesian politics is the growing involvement of artists and celebrities in legislative and gubernatorial

elections. The popularity artists have achieved in the entertainment world is often social and political capital that can be used to gain public attention. The phenomenon of artists who change professions to become politicians is not new. In the international context, figures such as Ronald Reagan and Arnold Schwarzenegger built political careers after becoming public figures in the entertainment world. In Indonesia, a similar phenomenon continues to develop, marked by an increase in the number of artists elected to legislative seats and regional leadership positions. In the 2024 election, at least 21 members of the House of Representatives were artists, while several other celebrities participated in the 2024 Regional Head Election.

One of the interesting areas to study is Bandung Regency. In the 2024 Bandung Regency regional head election, there are two candidates with artistic backgrounds, namely Sahrul Gunawan and Ali Syakieb. The presence of the two public figures shows how the popularity gained from the entertainment industry is used in the local political arena. Previously, Sahrul Gunawan won the 2020 Bandung Regency Election as Deputy Regent of Bandung, receiving 56.01 per cent of the vote alongside the Dadang Supriatna couple. This condition shows that artists have considerable opportunity to gain political support if they can manage their political image and identity effectively.

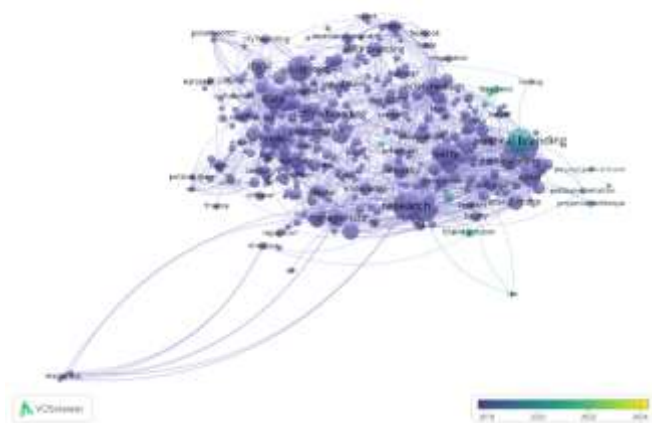
However, popularity is not always directly proportional to electability. Various studies show that an artist's success in politics is not only determined by popularity but also by the ability to build public trust, demonstrate competence, and manage political communication effectively.

Therefore, political branding is an important factor that can bridge popularity with electability. Political branding enables candidates to foster a more positive public perception by delivering consistent values, visions, character, and political identity.

Many researchers have conducted studies on political branding (Burns & Marchese, 2021; Denton, 2021; Mochla et al., 2025; Naik et al., 2019; Neihouser & Dubois, 2024; Parker, 2012; Serquiña, 2019; Umaryadi & Anom, 2024). Previous studies have discussed political branding in political campaigns, candidate communication strategies, and the phenomenon of celebrities entering the political world. However, most research still focuses on political branding in general or on the phenomenon of political celebrity, without specifically examining the relationship between political branding and the increased electability of candidates from among artists in regional head elections. Based on the search results using the Scopus database for the last 10 years, several studies were found, as shown in the following figure:

Figure 1.

VOSviewer's visualization of political branding



Source: Data processed by VOSviewer (2025)

The results of the literature mapping conducted in this study using VOSviewer show that research on political branding has developed quite widely. However, there are still limitations in research specifically linking political branding to the electability of regional head candidates with an artistic background. So this is interesting to research because this study not only seeks to identify the forms of political branding built by candidates, but also analyzes how these strategies contribute to increasing electability. Using the political branding framework from Philbrick & Cleveland (2015) as well as the concept of electability in the study of voter behaviour, this study is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of political communication and political marketing studies, as well as provide an empirical picture of the dynamics of artist involvement in local politics in Indonesia.

Based on this description, this study aims to analyze the political branding built by candidates with artist backgrounds in the contest for the 2024 Bandung Regency Regional Head Election and explain how efforts are made by candidates to increase their electability in voters' perception.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK/ LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of modern democracy has encouraged changes in political communication strategies. If in the past political competition focused more on ideology and party identity, now public attention is increasingly focused on candidate figures as the main representation of the values, vision, and political

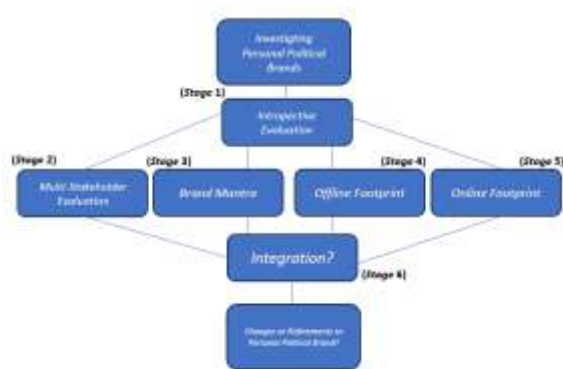
programs offered. This condition encourages the development of the concept of political branding as an approach in political marketing, aiming to build a strong, easily recognizable political identity among the public.

Political branding is a strategic process for forming an image, reputation, and political identity that distinguishes a candidate from others (Lees-Marshment, 2014). This concept adapts the principles of branding in commercial marketing to a political context. Through political branding, candidates seek to build positive public perceptions to gain voters' trust and support. Political branding is not only concerned with campaign symbols, slogans, and attributes, but also with political values, characters, track records, and narratives consistently communicated to the public.

According to Scammell (2007) Political branding is an important tool for fostering an emotional relationship between candidates and voters. In an increasingly competitive democracy, voters often base their political choices on candidates' images and perceptions. Therefore, the success of political branding is not only determined by a candidate's level of popularity, but also by their ability to build credibility, trust, and a sense of closeness with the community.

This study uses the political branding framework developed by Philbrick & Cleveland (2015), as shown in the following figure.

Figure 2.
Steps in Building a Political Brand



Sumber: Philbrick & Cleveland (2015)

The formation of political branding, based on steps, consists of six main dimensions: introspective evaluation, multi-stakeholder evaluation, brand mantra, offline footprint, online footprint, and integration. The dimension of introspective evaluation concerns the process of identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges candidates face before building a political identity. The multi-stakeholder evaluation dimension emphasizes the importance of the involvement of various parties, such as political parties, campaign teams, the media, and the public, in shaping and evaluating the image of candidates.

Furthermore, the brand mantra is the core of the political message, formulated as slogans or identities easy for the public to remember. The offline footprint dimension refers to political activities carried out directly through face-to-face campaigns, social activities, and community interactions. Meanwhile, the online footprint relates to the use of digital and social media for political communication. The integration dimension emphasizes the importance of consistency and integration of all branding elements so that the political message conveyed can be effectively accepted by voters (Philbrick

& Cleveland, 2015). Thus, political branding can be understood as a planned and sustainable process for building a political identity that increases candidates' attractiveness while strengthening the relationship between candidates and voters.

In addition, electability is an important indicator in the study of voter behaviour and political communication. In general, electability is defined as a candidate's likelihood of winning a political contest, based on public support as measured through surveys, polls, and voter preferences (Budiarjo, 2008). A high level of electability indicates that candidates have a greater chance of winning an election.

In modern political practice, electability is influenced by various factors, including popularity, candidate image, political track record, the effectiveness of political communication, and the quality of the campaigns (Purwanto & Mujab, 2021). Popularity is often the initial capital that helps a candidate become known to the public. However, popularity does not always guarantee high electability if it is not accompanied by a positive perception of the candidate's competence and capacity to govern.

Ramadhan (2018) explained that electability can be measured by four main indicators: likability, desire to choose a candidate (vote intention), intention to recommend candidates to others (recommendation intention), and intensity of talking about candidates (talkability). Candidate preferences reflect the level of public acceptance of certain political figures. The desire to vote indicates voters' tendency to support a candidate at the time of the election. Meanwhile, the intention to recommend describes voters' willingness to invite others to

support the same candidate. The intensity of a candidate's talk indicates the extent to which a candidate has attracted public attention in social and media communication.

In this study, electability is understood as a consequence of candidates' political branding success. Effective political branding will increase public recognition of candidates, build a positive image, strengthen public trust, and increase the likelihood that voters will support candidates. Therefore, the relationship between political branding and electability is important to examine, especially for candidates with artistic backgrounds.

METHODS

This study used the Quasi-Qualitative Design (QQD) approach developed by Bungin (2020). This approach was chosen because the research aims to gain a deep understanding of the process of forming the political branding of candidates with artistic backgrounds in the 2024 Bandung Regency Regional Elections and to integrate various data sources to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under study.

In contrast to conventional qualitative research, which generally relies on a single data collection technique, QQD allows the integration of data from interviews, observations, and open-ended questionnaires without changing the research orientation, which remains dominated by qualitative analysis. The use of multiple data sources makes the research results more contextually rich and strengthens the interpretation of the findings (Creswell, 2014), while minimizing interpretation bias through

cross-source confirmation (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Research data was collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and open-ended questionnaires. Interviews were conducted with six purposively selected informants: four representatives of the supporting political parties (PKB, Golkar, Gerindra, and PKS), and two members of the winning team. The informant was chosen because he had direct involvement and adequate knowledge of political branding strategies in the 2024 Bandung Regency Elections.

In addition, the study involved 36 voter respondents, recruited through the snowball sampling technique, who completed an open-ended questionnaire. Data collection is stopped once the information obtained indicates data saturation, i.e., no new themes or information relevant to the focus of the research are found. Interview data is used as the primary source of analysis, while observational data and open-ended questionnaires are used to enrich, validate, and confirm the findings obtained from the interviews. Therefore, the selection of informants and respondents is not intended to provide statistical representation, but rather to obtain rich and relevant information about the phenomenon under study.

Data analysis was carried out using NVivo 12 through the stages of data transcription, open coding, grouping codes into categories, and thematic analysis. The coding process begins with the identification of important concepts from the results of interviews, observations, and open questionnaires, which are then grouped into categories based on the dimensions of political branding proposed by Philbrick and Cleveland

(2015), namely, introspective evaluation, multi-stakeholder evaluation, brand mantra, offline footprint, online footprint, and integration. Furthermore, a thematic analysis was carried out to identify the pattern of relationships between categories. NVivo 12 is used to support the coding process, theme development, data visualization, and integration of analysis results from various data sources.

To increase the credibility of the findings, this study applied source triangulation and method triangulation. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing information obtained from political parties, winning teams, and voter respondents, while method triangulation was carried out by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and open questionnaires. The integration of the three data sources is carried out at the thematic analysis stage so that each key finding is based on a consistent pattern of information from various sources. Findings are declared credible if they receive consistent support from various data sources and have achieved data saturation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section is prepared to answer two research objectives, namely: (1) analyzing the political branding built by candidates with artist backgrounds in the 2024 Bandung Regency Regional Election and (2) explaining the efforts made by the candidates to increase their electability.

Political Branding of Artists in the 2024 Bandung Regency Election Contest

The results of the study show that the political branding of candidates with an artistic

background is built through six dimensions, as stated by Philbrick and Cleveland (2015): introspective evaluation, multi-stakeholder evaluation, brand mantra, offline footprint, online footprint, and the integration of all branding dimensions.

a. Introspective Evaluation

The first stage involves identifying the candidate's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and obstacles. The study's results show that popularity is the main asset of candidates with an artistic background, as the public already knows them before they enter the political arena. In addition, survey and poll results are used by political parties to assess a candidate's electability before determining political support. The results of data processing at this stage are:

Figure 3.

Cloud Word Introspective Evaluation



Source: Data processing results using NVivo 12, 2025

These findings show that popularity is not just social capital, but it becomes an initial foundation in the formation of a candidate's political identity.

b. Multi-Stakeholder Evaluation

Political branding is not built individually, but involves political parties, success teams, community leaders, and campaign volunteers. The presence of stakeholders serves as an

intermediary in conveying the candidate's vision, mission, work program, and character to the community. The success of political branding is greatly influenced by the ability of support networks to expand the reach of political communication.

c. Brand Mantra

This study found that each candidate pair had a strong slogan identity and was easy for the public to remember. The Sahrul Gunawan–Gun Gun Gunawan couple uses the slogan *Bandung Menawan*, while the Dadang Supriatna–Ali Syakieb couple uses the slogan *Bandung BEDAS*. Both slogans have been proven to strengthen candidate differentiation and increase public memory of candidate pairs. As shown in the following figure.

Figure 4.

Cloud Word Brand Mantra



Source: Data processing results using NVivo 12, 2025

The brand mantra represents the values the candidate wants to convey to the public. So that it makes it easier for the public to remember the candidate.

d. Offline Footprint

Political branding is also built through various face-to-face campaign activities and physical campaign media, such as billboards, banners, brochures, pamphlets, and direct public outreach. The presence of candidates directly is likely to strengthen emotional closeness with

voters. This stage focuses on the physical or offline footprint needed to develop the identity as expected. During the 2024 Bandung Regency Regional Election campaign, candidates for regents and deputy regents who have an artistic background build their political branding through physical footprints, such as billboards, banners, and pamphlets, to introduce themselves to the public so that the public knows well their identity, character, work program, vision, mission, and so on. As shown in the following picture.

Figure 5.

Cloud Word Offline Footprint



Source: Data processing results using NVivo 12, 2025

These findings show that in-person interaction remains an important role even as digital campaigns grow.

e. Online Footprint

The results of the study show that social media is the primary tool for political branding of candidates. As many as 75% of respondents obtained information about candidate pairs through Instagram. As shown in the following figure.

Figure 6.

Cloud Word online footprint



Source: Data processing results using NVivo 12, 2025

These findings confirm that social media has become an important arena for shaping political imagery in the digital age, as seen with Sahrul Gunawan, who has around 1.3 million Instagram followers, and Ali Syakieb, who has around 2.3 million followers. Through social media, the two candidates built an image as family figures, religious, caring for the community, and close to the younger generation.

F. Political Branding Integration

Research has found that all dimensions of political branding complement and reinforce each other. Self-evaluation, stakeholder support, political slogans, direct campaigns, and social media must be run consistently to produce effective branding.

Figure 7.

Cloud Word Full-stage integration



Source: Data processing results using NVivo 12, 2025

Overall, the political branding of artists in the 2024 Bandung Regency Regional Elections is built through a combination of popularity (known), political communication, and image management, which is carried out in an integrated manner.

Artists' Efforts to Increase Electability

This study uses four electability indicators: liking candidates, willingness to choose, intention to recommend, and intensity of candidate discussion. In the indicator of **candidate liking**, popularity as an artist is the main factor driving public liking for candidates. The informant admitted that they had known Sahrul Gunawan and Ali Syakieb long before the two were involved in the Bandung Regency Election. This popularity is then strengthened by a positive image built through political branding. The indicator of **willingness to choose** shows that the desire to choose arises when the community trusts the branding built by the candidate and assesses the candidate's track record positively. Consistent political branding increases voters' confidence to provide political support.

Furthermore, in the indicator of **recommending intention**, voters with a positive perception of the candidate tend to recommend them to family, friends, or their social environment. Strong political branding creates an interpersonal communication effect that helps broaden political support. Finally, in the indicator of **intensity in talking about candidates**, the popularity of candidates makes them more frequent topics of public conversation, both in direct interactions and on social media. The high intensity of these talks expands the candidate's exposure and strengthens the public's recognition of the political identity that is constructed.

The study's findings show that political branding significantly increases the electability of candidates with artistic backgrounds. A candidate's popularity serves as initial capital to gain public attention, but it does not automatically generate political support. Political support arises when such popularity is strengthened by branding that builds trust, emotional closeness, and a perception of competence.

The results of this study support the theory of Philbrick and Cleveland, which emphasizes the importance of integrating various dimensions of branding in building a strong political identity. In addition, the study's findings reinforce the view that electability is not only influenced by the level of public recognition but also by candidates' ability to manage their political image consistently across offline and online media.

Thus, political branding has proven to be a strategic instrument that helps candidates with an artistic background turn popularity into political support, as reflected in increased voter likeness,

willingness to vote, intention to recommend, and the intensity of public discussion about candidates.

CONCLUSION

Political branding of candidates with artistic backgrounds in the 2024 Bandung Regency Regional Elections is built on six main dimensions, as outlined by Philbrick and Cleveland: introspective evaluation, multi-stakeholder evaluation, brand mantra, offline footprint, online footprint, and integration. At the introspective evaluation stage, the candidate's popularity as an artist becomes the primary force in shaping political identity. Furthermore, the support of political parties, success teams, community leaders, and volunteers is important for spreading political messages within the community. Political branding is also strengthened through memorable political slogans, direct campaign activities, and social media as a means of political communication. All of these dimensions are carried out in an integrated manner so as to form a consistent political image that is easily recognizable by the public.

Then, efforts to increase the electability of candidates with artistic backgrounds are carried out by leveraging previously established popularity, strengthened through a planned political branding strategy. The results show that political branding was found to contribute to stronger public preference for candidates, encourage voting, increase voters' tendency to recommend candidates to others, and strengthen the intensity of public conversations about candidates. Thus, popularity as an artist serves as initial capital, while political branding becomes

an instrument that turns that popularity into more real political support.

This study found that the success of candidates with an artistic background in increasing electability is not determined solely by popularity, but also by their ability to build a positive image, demonstrate political competence, maintain consistency in political communication, and build closeness to the community. Therefore, effective political branding is an important factor in increasing a candidate's electability in local political contests.

Based on the research, candidates with an artistic background need to build popularity as initial capital, supported by leadership capacity, government competence, and an understanding of community needs. Political parties also need to consider the candidate's track record, integrity, and competence in the recruitment process, not just their level of popularity. In addition, campaign teams need to develop an integrated political communication strategy between direct and digital campaigns, using social media not only to increase popularity but also to substantively convey work programs, development visions, and candidate achievements. On the other hand, election organizers and political education institutions need to improve people's political literacy so that voters can judge candidates based on their capacity, integrity, and the quality of the programs offered, not just popularity.

This research still has limitations, so future research is recommended to use a quantitative approach to objectively measure the influence of each dimension of political branding on electability. Future research may also develop models that link political branding to other

variables, such as political beliefs, voting behaviour, political participation, and candidates' personal branding. In addition, similar studies can be conducted across different regional contexts and types of elections to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of political branding for candidates with artistic backgrounds in Indonesia. Along with the development of digital technology, further research is needed to examine the roles of social media, artificial intelligence, and digital political communication in shaping political branding and candidate electability in modern political contests.

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