

## **Constructing Political Image in the Mediatized Era: Personal Branding of Indonesian Party Chairmen on Social Media**

**Dimas Subekti\***

Program Studi Ilmu Pemerintahan, Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu  
Politik, Universitas Jambi, 36361, Jambi, Indonesia  
[dimassubekti05@unja.ac.id](mailto:dimassubekti05@unja.ac.id)

**Dinda Rosanti Salsa Bela**

Program Studi Ilmu Pemerintahan, Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu  
Politik, Universitas Jambi, 36361, Jambi, Indonesia  
[dinda@unja.ac.id](mailto:dinda@unja.ac.id)

**Azira Novia Rizal**

Program Studi Ilmu Pemerintahan, Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu  
Politik, Universitas Jambi, 36361, Jambi, Indonesia  
[azira@unja.ac.id](mailto:azira@unja.ac.id)

**Suci Rahmadani**

Program Studi Ilmu Pemerintahan, Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu  
Politik, Universitas Jambi, 36361, Jambi, Indonesia  
[suci@unja.ac.id](mailto:suci@unja.ac.id)

### **Abstract**

This research aims to analyze the digital personal branding strategies of the chairpersons of the Democratic Party, PKB, and PAN on TikTok. This research uses a qualitative method with a comparative case study approach. The findings of this study indicate that Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono tends to use a formal communication style and content focused on political and professional activities, reflecting an image of institutional and professional leadership. Muhaimin Iskandar demonstrates a more balanced, integrative communication pattern by combining formal, informal, symbolic, and emotional elements with diverse content narratives. Meanwhile, Zulkifli Hasan emphasizes informal and entertainment content, demonstrating a strong adaptation to TikTok's participatory culture. In terms of public response, Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono received mostly positive sentiment, while Muhaimin Iskandar and Zulkifli Hasan

showed more varied sentiment patterns. Differences were also found in posting frequency strategies, ranging from momentum-based communication to consistent digital presence. Overall, this research shows that digital personal branding among Indonesian political leaders is diverse and reflects different approaches to political personalization in the digital era. This research highlights the increasing importance of social media in shaping political image, public engagement, and leadership legitimacy in contemporary Indonesian politics.

**Keywords:** *Personal Branding, Political Party, General Chairman, Social Media, TikTok*

## 1. Introduction

In a multiparty system, the position of party chairman is of significant strategic importance (Hamudy & Rifki, 2019; Hasrul et al., 2025). The chairman not only leads the organization and serves as the internal strategic decision-maker, but also serves as the party's main symbol in the public sphere (Slater, 2018). In the digital era, this symbolism is increasingly personalized through the party chairman's presence and social media activities (Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016). Thus, the party chairman's personal branding strategy becomes an important instrument for building leadership legitimacy, consolidating cadre support, and enhancing the party's electoral appeal (Vraga, 2016).

The development of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the patterns of political communication and party leadership (Perloff, 2021). Social media is no longer just a means of conveying political information; it has evolved into a strategic space for political actors to build personal branding, manage political identities, and establish direct relationships with the public (Alhaimer, 2023). In this context, short-form video-based social media platforms like TikTok have emerged as a new medium with wide reach, high engagement, and the ability to quickly shape political perceptions, especially among young voters (Cervi et al., 2023).

Digital technology, in the form of social media, in Indonesia has become a highly promising platform for use in the political sphere, due to its widespread use (Subekti, 2025). According to DataReportal (2025), Indonesia has 180 million social media users, of whom 56.3 percent are women. Meanwhile, the remaining 43.7 percent are men. If viewed broadly, the total number of social media users is equivalent to 62.9 percent of Indonesia's total population, estimated at 286 million people. DataReportal also mentions the social media platforms used, namely YouTube (151 million users), Facebook (121 million users), Instagram

(108 million users), TikTok (180 million adult users), and LinkedIn (37 million registered users).

This phenomenon is clearly being exploited by political elites, such as the use of the TikTok social media platform by the Chairpersons of the Democratic Party, the Kebangkitan Bangsa Party (PKB), and the Amanat Nasional Party (PAN). These three political party leaders actively use social media, especially TikTok. Based on empirical data from TikTok (January 2026), the Chairman of the Democratic Party, Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono, has around 1.1 million followers and 25.7 million likes. These figures indicate a relatively high level of visibility and engagement. Meanwhile, the Chairman of PKB, Muhaimin Iskandar, has around 377.1 thousand followers with a total of 6.1 million likes. On the other hand, the Chairman of PAN, Zulkifli Hasan, is recorded to have around 669.4 thousand followers with a total of 20.8 million likes.

The Democratic Party, the Kebangkitan Bangsa Party (PKB), and the Amanat Nasional Party (PAN) are national political parties with distinct historical, ideological, and sociological characteristics, yet they all face the challenge of adapting to the digital political era. The Chairman of the Democratic Party represents party leadership with a background in political dynasties and a narrative of leadership regeneration (Komarudin, 2024). The Chairman of PKB articulates a political identity based on religious-cultural roots (Nahdlatul Ulama) (Iskandar, 2021); while the Chairman of PAN brings a party identity based on reformism and modernist rationality (Kurniawan, 2025). These character differences make the three-party chairpersons relevant and comparable subjects for analysis in the context of personal branding strategies in the digital era.

Moreover, pragmatically, the three-party chairpersons also have great potential to contest as presidential or vice-presidential candidates in the upcoming 2029 elections. In fact, these three political parties have issued statements that the 2029 election will nominate Prabowo Subianto as the presidential candidate and appoint their respective party chairpersons as vice presidential candidates (Egeham, 2025; Persada, 2025; Tempo.co, 2025). Based on these factual data, it can be interpreted as a research problem that the era of digital technology today also extends into the political realm, particularly among party political elites who still have the opportunity and ambition to become Indonesia's national leaders in the upcoming 2029 elections. Therefore, it is important to discuss in more depth how the use of social media, particularly TikTok, by the three party leaders serves as a form of personal branding strategy.

The study of personal branding in politics is deeply rooted in the literature of political marketing and the personalization of politics. Early

studies by Lees-Marshment, (2014); Scammell, (2014) emphasize that political actors are increasingly treated as "political products" that must be strategically packaged to attract public support. Subsequent developments are described by Holtz-Bacha et al., (2014); McAllister, (2015), who explain that political personalization drives a shift in focus from parties to leaders, especially in modern media-mediated democratic systems. In the context of digital media, several studies show that social media accelerates and deepens political personalization. Research by Enli & Skogerbø, (2013); Kruikemeier, (2014) found that using social media enables politicians to build a more personal, authentic, and interactive image than conventional media. Research by Olof Larsson & Moe, (2013); Stromer-Galley et al., (2015) also emphasizes that social media blurs the boundaries between formal and personal political communication, thereby strengthening the role of individual identity in shaping public perception. Based on the review, there is a lack of systematic research that integrates the concept of political personal branding with leadership theory and party institutionalization in the context of social media. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap.

However, most of these studies focus on electoral candidates or public officials competing for office, rather than on political party leaders as institutional actors. Research on party leadership, such as that conducted by Cross & Katz, (2013)It emphasizes the organizational and institutional dimensions of parties but has not yet integrated them with personal branding practices in the digital space. In Indonesia, studies on digital political communication generally focus on presidential and gubernatorial campaigns. Research by Suhendra & Selly Pratiwi, (2024) highlights the role of social media in political mobilization and public opinion formation. However, these studies have not specifically discussed how the personal branding of political party leaders is built and managed strategically through social media platforms. This research is positioned as a comparative study that analyzes variations in the personal branding strategies of party leaders across different parties with varying ideological and historical characteristics in Indonesia.

The study of TikTok as a medium for political communication is still relatively new. An international study by Medina Serrano et al. (2020) shows that TikTok promotes a more visual, emotional, and entertainment-oriented (politainment) style of political communication. In the Indonesian context, recent research by Apriel Simanullang & Prayetno (2025) examines TikTok in political campaigns and finds that personal, informal content is more effective at reaching young voters. However, the research still positions politicians as individual candidates, rather than as party

chairpersons with institutional authority. Therefore, there is little research positioning TikTok as a strategic arena for the personal branding of political party leaders, rather than merely as a medium for short-term election campaigns.

Building on the limitations of previous research, this study's novelty lies in several key aspects. First, this research positions the party chairperson as the main actor in digital personal branding, thereby filling the gap between the literature on political personalization and party leadership literature. Second, this research specifically uses TikTok as the locus of analysis, not only as a campaign medium but also as a platform for the sustainable formation of party leadership identity. Third, through a comparative case study of the Chairpersons of the Democratic Party, PKB, and PAN, this research offers a new understanding of how digital personal branding is influenced by ideological character, social base, and party organizational traditions within Indonesia's multiparty system. Therefore, this research poses two questions: first, what are the digital personal branding strategies of political party leaders in Indonesia on TikTok? Second, how do netizens' sentiments toward the activities of these political party chairpersons on TikTok?

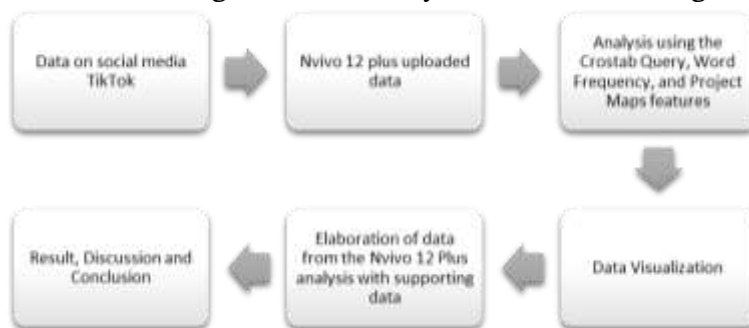
## **2. Method**

This research uses a qualitative method with a comparative case study approach. This approach was chosen to gain a deep understanding of the digital personal branding strategies used by political party chairpersons. The comparative case study allows researchers to identify patterns, differences, and similarities in personal branding strategies across cases while situating them in each case's social, ideological, and institutional contexts. The unit of analysis in this study is the digital personal branding strategies of political party chairpersons on TikTok. The research subjects include: the Chairman of the Democratic Party (Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono), the Chairman of the Kebangkitan Bangsa Party (PKB) (Muhaimin Iskandar), and the Chairman of the Amanat Nasional Party (PAN) (Zulkifli Hasan). The three subjects were purposively selected to represent different party character types (nationalist-reformist, religious-cultural, and reformist-modernist), thereby allowing for a rich and meaningful comparative analysis.

The data collection technique for this research uses non-participant observation based on digital media and documentation study. Non-participant observation is a data collection technique where researchers observe behaviors, events, or situations without directly engaging in the activities of the subjects being studied. Thus, the primary data source for

this research comes from the content uploaded by the three political party chairpersons on the social media platform TikTok. Chairman of the Democratic Party (Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono) with the account name AgusYudhoyono (AHY), chairman of PKB (Muhaimin Iskandar) with the account name A Muhaimin Iskandar, and chairman of PAN (Zulkifli Hasan) with the account name zul. hasan. The data collection period is from January to December 2025, as in that year the three party chairpersons fully carried out their duties as party leaders while also serving as Ministers in the Prabowo Subianto-Gibran Rakabuming Raka government. Subsequently, this data is elaborated and supported by data from credible online media outlets such as Kompas.com, mediaindonesia, cnnindonesia, and tempo.co, detiknews.com, and liputan6.com, as well as relevant journal articles.

The data analysis technique employed in this research is social media content analysis, which is conducted through a systematic and structured coding framework. The analysis examines political image construction through dimensions such as narratives, communication styles, audience interactions, and posting frequency on the TikTok platform. A coding scheme was developed based on relevant theoretical constructs and operationalized into specific indicators. To ensure reliability, inter-coder reliability testing was conducted using a subset of the data, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion and refinement of the coding categories. Furthermore, validity was strengthened through triangulation of data sources and iterative review of coding results. NVivo 12 Plus was utilized to assist in organizing, coding, and analyzing the qualitative data. The stages of data analysis are shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Data analysis flow

The data analysis flow in Figure 1 shows that the data obtained from the TikTok accounts of the three political party leaders were uploaded to NVivo 12 Plus. After the data was uploaded to NVivo 12 Plus, the Crosstab query feature was used to display data on the communication styles of the

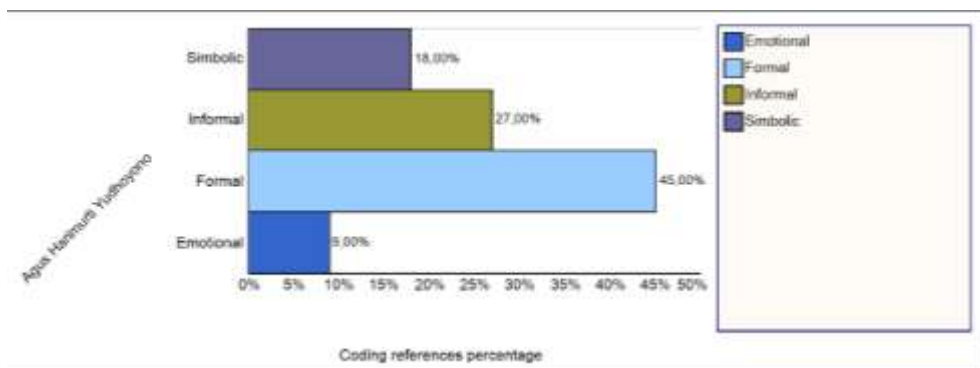
political party leaders on the TikTok social media platform. Next, using the word frequency feature to display the narrative content data disseminated on the TikTok social media platform. Then, using the project maps feature to display data on post frequency. Furthermore, after the data has been obtained and visualized, it will be elaborated with supporting data from online media coverage or relevant journal articles. The final step is to interpret the data as research findings and draw conclusions.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 The Digital Personal Branding Strategies of Political Party Leaders in Indonesia on TikTok

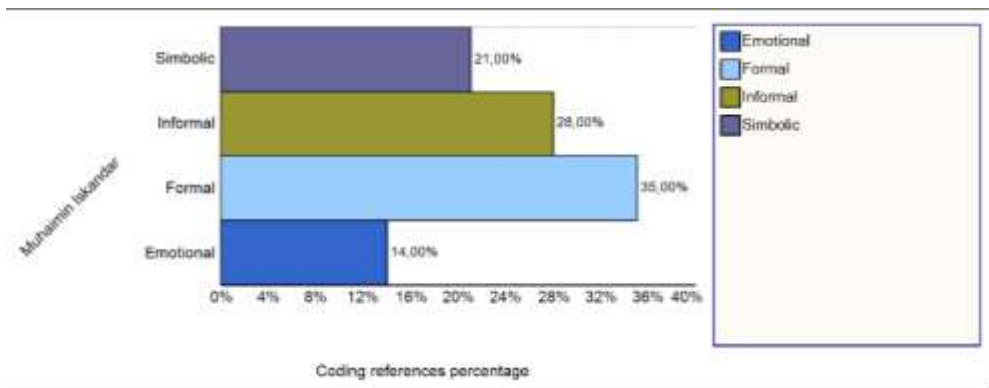
##### 3.1.1 Political Communication Style on TikTok

Data presented in Figures 2, 3, and 4 illustrate the communication styles of Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono, Muhaimin Iskandar, and Zulkifli Hasan on TikTok as a form of personal branding construction. In this study, communication styles are operationalized into four analytically distinct categories, formal, informal, symbolic, and emotional, each grounded in established literature on political communication and digital self-presentation. Formal communication refers to structured, policy-oriented, and institutionally framed messages; informal communication denotes conversational, everyday, and personalized interactions; symbolic communication captures the use of visual, cultural, and party-related symbols to convey identity and affiliation; while emotional communication reflects the expression of affective cues aimed at eliciting audience engagement. These categories were developed as part of the coding framework to systematically capture variations in how political actors construct their digital personas on TikTok.



**Figure 2.** Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono's Communication Style on TikTok  
Source: Processed by the author using NVivo 12 with the crosstab query feature (2026)

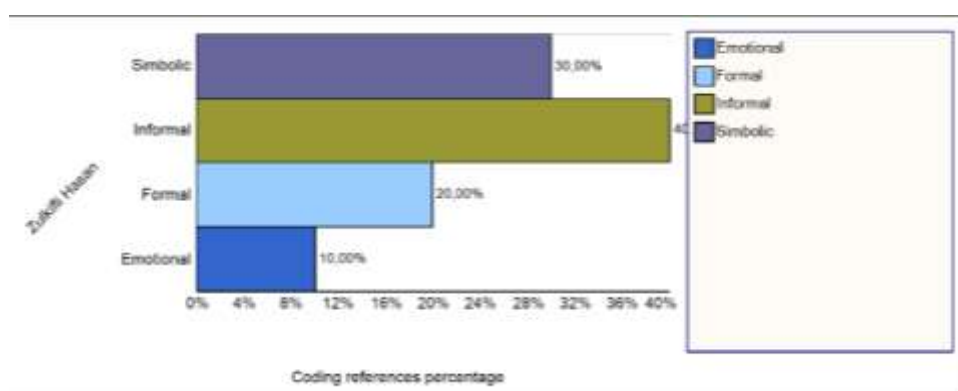
Based on the data in Figure 2, the digital communication style of Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono (AHY) as the Chairman of the Democratic Party shows a composition dominated by a formal style (45%), followed by informal (27%), symbolic (18%), and emotional (9%). This distribution indicates that the digital personal branding strategy being built emphasizes institutional and professional dimensions more than a populist-emotional approach. The dominance of formal style reflects a tendency toward structured, normative communication focused on delivering programs, policies, and official party stances. On the other hand, the proportion of informal style shows an adaptation to the characteristics of social media, which demand closeness, authenticity, and the humanization of political figures. The symbolic dimension shows the use of party attributes, historical values, and ideological representation in digital communication. The low emotional proportion in this data indicates that the communication strategy emphasizes rationality and image stability over sentiment exploitation.



**Figure 3.** Muhaimin Iskandar's Communication Style on TikTok  
 Source: Processed by the author using NVivo 12 with the crosstab query feature (2026)

Based on the data in Figure 3, Muhaimin Iskandar's digital communication style is composed of formal (35%), informal (28%), symbolic (21%), and emotional (14%). This distribution shows a relatively balanced communication pattern, where the institutional dimension remains dominant but not overly hegemonic, while elements of social closeness, identity symbolism, and emotional expression gain significant space. This configuration indicates a personal branding strategy that combines institutional legitimacy with the strengthening of social roots and affective connectivity. A significant informal dimension indicates efforts to expand the base of political resonance beyond the formal party structure.

Then, the symbolic style of 21% shows that collective identity remains an important element in the communication strategy. The symbolic dimension in this data is not merely a visual ornament, but part of a strategy to strengthen collective cohesion. Meanwhile, the emotional dimension at 14% indicates a more pronounced intensity of affective expression than in a highly rationalistic communication model. Messages that evoke empathy, hope, or concern can increase audience engagement with the issues they raise. An emotional proportion of 14% indicates a strategy that is quite adaptive to the psychological dynamics of social media audiences without fully falling into the rhetoric of confrontational populism.



**Figure 4.** Zulkifli Hasan's Communication Style on TikTok

Source: Processed by the author using NVivo 12 with the crosstab query feature (2026)

Based on the data in Figure 4, Zulkifli Hasan's digital communication style shows an informal composition (40%), symbolism (30%), formality (20%), and emotion (10%). This distribution shows a different pattern from more institutional models, with the informal dimension becoming the most dominant element, followed by the symbolic, while formality occupies a secondary position. This configuration indicates a digital personal branding strategy that is more oriented toward social closeness and collective identity representation than toward merely asserting structural authority.

The dominance of informal style indicates that digital communication is built through a fluid, interactive, and contextual approach. Politics is not only present in official forums but also in everyday practices and seemingly ordinary social interactions. The symbolic dimension of 30% is also very significant. As the General Chairperson of the National Mandate Party, I view the use of symbols as related to the party's ideological identity, party

history, and its supporting social base. The high symbolic dimension in this data shows that personal branding is inseparable from the need to maintain party identity cohesion. Meanwhile, the formal style, which accounts for only 20%, suggests that communication grounded in official statements, policy speeches, or normative arguments is not the focus of the digital strategy. Contemporary leadership tends to abandon overly bureaucratic communication patterns and shift toward more dialogic models. Social media encourages leaders to be adaptive and responsive to public dynamics. The low proportion of formal elements in this data can be interpreted as an adjustment to the expectations of the digital audience, who tend to be less responsive to overly procedural or rigid messages.

### 3.1.2 Narrative Content

Based on the data presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3, the narrative content on the TikTok accounts of Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono, Muhaimin Iskandar, and Zulkifli Hasan is systematically categorized using a predefined coding framework. The content categories were developed based on relevant theoretical references and operationalized into clear analytical indicators to avoid arbitrary classification. To ensure the consistency and reliability of the categorization, inter-coder reliability testing was conducted on a subset of the data, and discrepancies were resolved through iterative discussion and refinement of coding definitions. Therefore, the resulting classification reflects a structured and methodologically grounded analysis of narrative content rather than subjective interpretation. The content categories used are Work and Political Activities (this content relates to job activities such as being a minister and political activities carried out while being the party chairman), social activist (related to activities conducted with the community), entertainment (content of activities that are entertaining), religion and culture (this content relates to religious and cultural activities conducted by the party chairman), personal life (content that shows personal and family life).

**Table 1.** Content Narrative of Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono on TikTok

No	Content Categorization	Occurance
1	Work and Political Activities	278
2	Social Activity	20
3	Entertainment	32
4	Religion and Culture	8
5	Personal Life	9

Source: Processed by the author using Nvivo 12 plus the word frequency feature (2026)

Based on Table 1, Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono's (AHY) TikTok content shows strong dominance in the Work and Politics Activity category, with 278 posts throughout the year. This number far exceeds other categories such as Entertainment (32), Social Activities (20), Personal Life (9), and Religion and Culture (8). This pattern indicates that AHY's digital communication strategy on TikTok is more focused on strengthening his image as an active and representative political leader rather than exploring personal or entertainment aspects.

Temporally, there is high intensity in February (39), May (45), June (36), and July (39), indicating communication momentum that correlates with the dynamics of the political agenda or party activities. The consistency of content production across work and politics indicates that TikTok is used not merely as an entertainment space but also as a channel for reproducing political legitimacy. Political actors do not just follow public issues; they actively shape attention priorities through the intensity and frequency of their communication. With the dominance of political work content, AHY appears to be striving to maintain visibility as a productive figure engaged in strategic activities. With a very high proportion of posts on political activities, AHY builds a platform that highlights competence, busyness, and leadership capacity. This strategy aligns with the image of the Democratic Party's General Chairman, who seeks to be perceived as a professional and institutional figure.

On the other hand, the Personal Life category, which consists of only 9 posts, shows that personalization in the intimate or domestic sense is relatively limited. This data shows that the personalization being done is still controlled and does not dominate the narrative. This can be interpreted as a strategy to maintain the boundary between the public and private spheres, thereby preserving the impression of statesmanship. This finding differs from the trend of several global politicians on TikTok who highlight family life or leisure activities to enhance emotional closeness.

**Table 2.** Content Narrative of Muhaimin Iskandar on TikTok

No	Content Categorization	Occurance
	Work and Political Activities	102
2	Social Activity	29
3	Entertainment	48
4	Religion and Culture	31
5	Personal Life	16

Source: Processed by the author using NVivo 12 plus the word frequency feature (2026)

Based on the data in Table 2, Muhaimin Iskandar's distribution of TikTok content narratives is more varied than the pattern that is heavily

centered on formal political activities. The Work and Politics Activity category remains the highest, with 102 posts, but its share is not particularly dominant compared to other categories such as Entertainment (48), Religion and Culture (31), Social Activities (29), and Personal Life (16). This configuration shows a more diversified and adaptive digital communication strategy that aligns with the character of the TikTok platform.

Although work and political activities are at the top, the gap with the entertainment and religious-cultural categories is not too great. This shows that Muhaimin Iskandar's use of TikTok is not only a medium for conveying formal political agendas but also a space for articulating social and cultural identities. The presence of significant religious and cultural content (31 posts) demonstrates the use of value-based narratives to build resonance with the social base. As the General Chairperson of the National Awakening Party, I see the religious and cultural dimensions as integral to the party's historical character, which has strong roots in the socio-religious traditions of Nahdlatul Ulama. Thus, the proportion of religious and cultural elements in this table indicates a strategy of integrating political messages with community values.

The entertainment category, which reached 48 posts, is also quite prominent. The relatively high presence of entertainment content indicates an adaptation to the platform's algorithmic logic, which prioritizes visual creativity, music, and viral trends. Social activities (29 posts) and personal life (16 posts) indicate that personalization is also part of image construction. Social media audiences can feel a sense of intimacy with public figures through regular exposure to the personal and social aspects of their lives. The presence of personal and social content helps create a perception of authenticity, becoming an important factor in building digital trust.

**Table 3.** Content Narrative of Zulkifli Hasan on TikTok

<b>No</b>	<b>Content Categorization</b>	<b>Occurance</b>
1	Work and Political Activities	118
2	Social Activity	84
3	Entertainment	132
4	Religion and Culture	11
5	Personal Life	64

Source: Processed by the author using NVivo 12 plus the word frequency feature (2026)

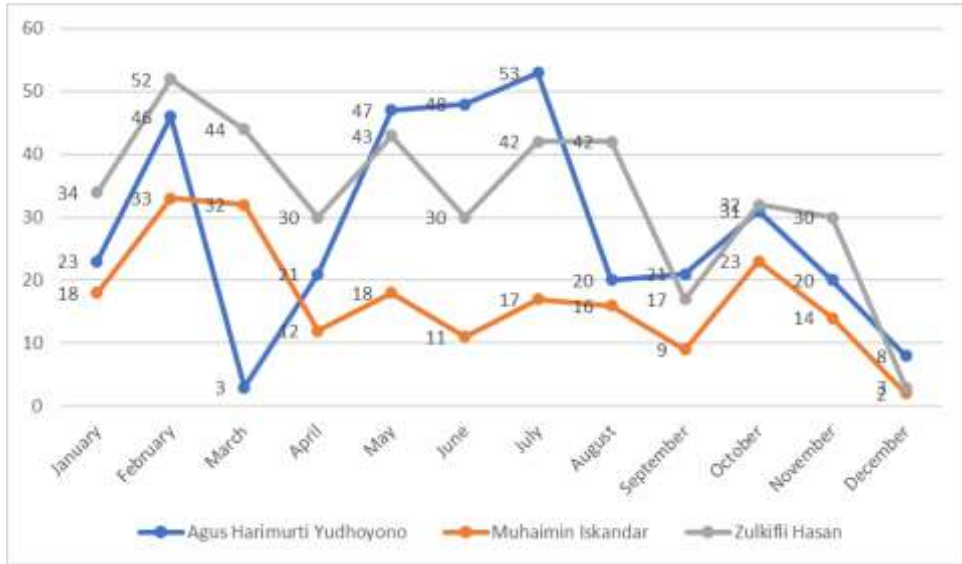
Based on Table 3, Zulkifli Hasan's TikTok content narrative shows a different distribution compared to the two previous figures. The

Entertainment category is the most dominant, with 132 posts, followed by Work and Political Activities (118), Social Activities (84), Personal Life (64), and Religion and Culture (11). This configuration demonstrates a highly adaptive digital communication strategy that aligns with TikTok's character as a platform based on creativity, entertainment, and personal expression. With the highest amount of entertainment content, Zulkifli Hasan seems to adapt to this participatory culture.

Although entertainment is dominant, the categories of work and political activities remain significant (118 posts). This shows an effort to maintain a balance between popular image and formal legitimacy. Political actors do not just convey policies, but also present leadership as a symbolic performance that must convince the audience. TikTok has become a stage where political activities are presented visually and dynamically, not just through official statements. Thus, political activities are not eliminated, but packaged in a format more suited to digital culture. The relatively high scores for social activities (84) and personal life (64) indicate a strong degree of personalization.

### *3.1.3 Frequency of Content Posting*

Based on the frequency graph of TikTok posts by the three party chairpersons, Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono (Democrat), Muhaimin Iskandar (PKB), and Zulkifli Hasan (PAN) in Figure 8, different patterns of intensity and consistency in digital communication can be observed throughout January to December. This difference can be interpreted as a variation in digital personal branding strategies within the context of political competition and party positioning in the online public space. In addition, the analysis accounts for potential confounding variables, including algorithmic visibility and external socio-political events that may influence engagement patterns on TikTok. These factors were considered through contextual interpretation of spikes and declines in posting frequency, supported by cross-referencing with relevant external developments during the observation period. Consequently, the frequency trends should be understood as context-dependent patterns rather than solely as indicators of posting intensity.



**Figure 8.** Frequency of Posts by Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono, Muhaimin Iskandar, and Zulkifli Hasan on TikTok

Source: Processed by the author using NVivo 12 plus feature project maps. (2026)

Based on the frequency data of TikTok posts by Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono (Democrat), Muhaimin Iskandar (PKB), and Zulkifli Hasan (PAN) from January to December, there are notable differences in intensity and consistency patterns that reflect variations in their digital personal branding strategies. Importantly, these patterns should be interpreted in relation to broader political contexts, including party agendas, electoral dynamics, coalition negotiations, and national political events that potentially shape communication behavior on social media.

Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono shows a fluctuating pattern with significant spikes in February, May, and June, peaking in July, while there was a drastic decline in March. These fluctuations can be linked to specific political moments, such as post-election consolidation following the 2024 general election, internal party meetings, and responses to national political discourse, including cabinet composition debates and opposition positioning. The spike in mid-year may also correspond to increased political visibility efforts during periods of elite political negotiation and public issue escalation. This pattern indicates a momentum-driven exposure communication strategy, in which posting intensity is strategically increased during key political moments to maximize public attention.

On the other hand, Muhaimin Iskandar demonstrates a relatively moderate and stable posting frequency. After reaching a relatively high

level in February and March, potentially linked to post-electoral positioning and coalition alignment dynamics, his activity remained within a consistent medium range throughout the year. This stability reflects a strategy of maintaining continuous engagement across different political contexts, including routine party activities, legislative discourse, and ongoing public communication regarding policy issues. In this regard, his communication pattern suggests an effort to sustain political relevance without over-reliance on specific high-intensity political events.

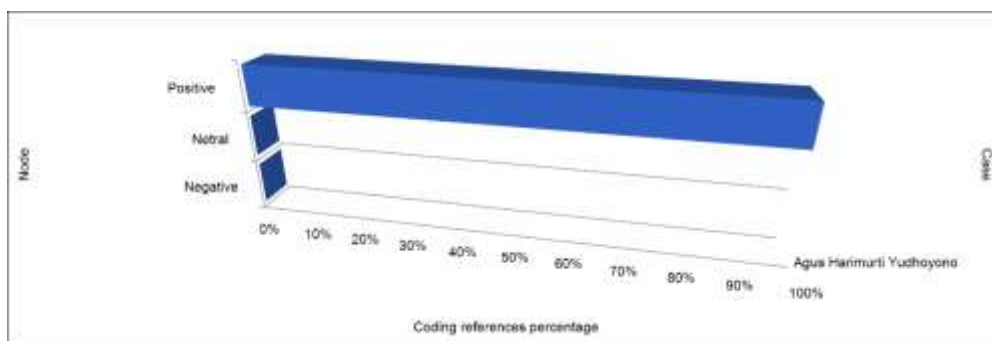
Meanwhile, Zulkifli Hasan exhibits the most consistent pattern, particularly from early to mid-year, with relatively high and stable posting frequency across most months. This consistency may be associated with his role in government and involvement in ongoing policy communication, economic issues, and public service narratives, which require continuous engagement. Additionally, routine party consolidation and grassroots outreach activities contribute to maintaining a steady digital presence. Although there is a slight decline toward September and the end of the year, possibly reflecting reduced political intensity outside major national events, his overall communication rhythm remains structured and sustained.

Overall, these differences highlight three distinct strategic orientations: Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono emphasizes moment-driven visibility linked to key political events such as post-election dynamics and elite political contestation; Muhaimin Iskandar adopts a balanced engagement strategy across coalition politics and routine political communication; and Zulkifli Hasan prioritizes consistent and sustained communication aligned with governance activities and ongoing public engagement. Thus, the observed frequency patterns should not be interpreted as purely technical posting behavior, but as context-dependent strategies shaped by electoral cycles, coalition dynamics, and broader national political developments.

### ***3.2 Netizens' sentiment toward the activities of these political party chairpersons on TikTok***

The data in figures 5, 6, and 7 show netizens' sentiment toward the three party chairpersons on TikTok. The data presented in Figures 5, 6, and 7 illustrate netizens' sentiment toward the three party chairpersons on TikTok; however, these findings are derived from a systematic sentiment analysis procedure rather than being treated as purely objective measurements. Sentiment classification was conducted using a structured coding approach based on a predefined sentiment framework (positive, negative, and neutral categories). The coding process combined automated text analysis with manual validation to improve accuracy, particularly in

addressing contextual nuances such as sarcasm and irony that are prevalent on TikTok. A subset of the data was independently coded to assess consistency, and discrepancies were resolved through iterative refinement. In addition, the lexicon and classification criteria were adapted to the socio-political context of Indonesian online discourse to enhance validity. Therefore, the reported sentiment distribution should be interpreted as an analytically derived representation rather than an absolute measure of public opinion. Inter-coder reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa coefficient, demonstrating a satisfactory level of agreement.

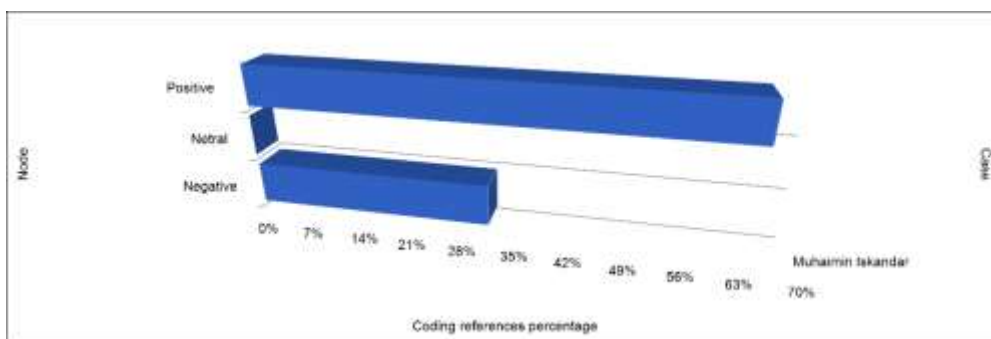


**Figure 5.** Netizen sentiment regarding Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono on TikTok

Source: Processed by the author using NVivo 12 with the crosstab query feature (2026)

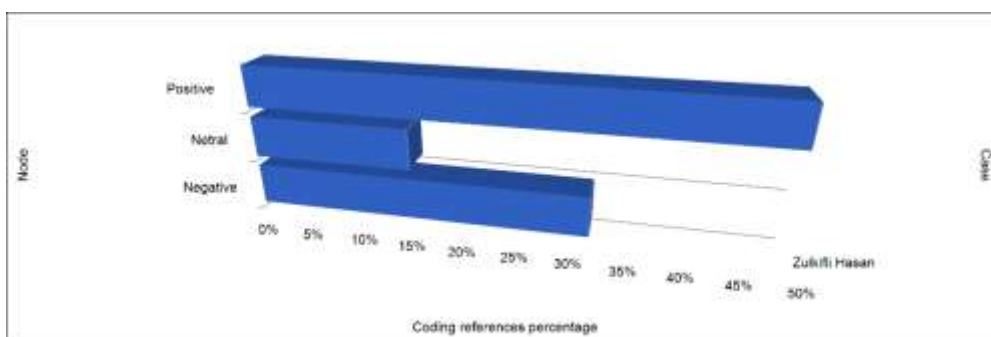
Based on netizen sentiment data, there is a noticeable difference in acceptance levels and opinion polarization among the three party chairpersons. AHY, as the Chairman of the Democratic Party, received 100% positive sentiment, with no negative or neutral sentiment. Muhaimin Iskandar, as the Chairman of the National Awakening Party, received 66% positive and 33% negative sentiment, with no neutral sentiment. Meanwhile, Zulkifli Hasan, as the Chairman of the National Mandate Party, received 50% positive, 35% negative, and 15% neutral sentiment. This comparison shows three different patterns of digital public response: absolute support dominance, majority support with polarization, and relatively balanced opinion competition.

The achievement of 100% positive sentiment for AHY explains that social media users tend to interact in spaces that reinforce their initial preferences. Additionally, a consistently constructed and minimally controversial image tends to reduce triggers of negative sentiment. The AHY account, with strict message curation and strong comment moderation, displays a highly positive sentiment distribution.



**Figure 6.** Netizen sentiment regarding Muhaimin Iskandar on TikTok  
 Source: Processed by the author using NVivo 12 with the crosstab query feature (2026)

Unlike that pattern, Muhaimin Iskandar shows a more polarized distribution, with 66% positive and 33% negative (Figure 6). The absence of neutral sentiment indicates that the developing discourse tends to be evaluative, either supportive or rejecting, without many ambivalent positions. The 33% negative figure indicates a significant level of opinion competition, which in the literature of digital political contestation is understood as a consequence of high visibility in the online public arena.



**Figure 7.** Netizen sentiment regarding Zulkifli Hasan on TikTok  
 Source: Processed by the author using NVivo 12 with the crosstab query feature (2026)

Meanwhile, Zulkifli Hasan shows the most competitive sentiment composition, with 50% positive, 35% negative, and 15% neutral (Figure 7). The presence of relatively higher neutral sentiment compared to the other two figures indicates an audience that is not fully emotionally or partisanship-bound. The proportion of negative sentiment approaching positive indicates a fairly strong level of polarization, but not extreme. In the context of negativity bias, the public tends to be more responsive to

problematic or controversial issues, so figures with sharper policy exposure or public positions often receive higher negative sentiment.

Holistically, this data affirms that public sentiment on social media results from the interaction among political actors' framing strategies, the characteristics of digital platforms, and the psychological dynamics of the audience. Fully positive sentiment can indicate successful image management and audience segmentation, but it can also reflect the homogeneity of the discussion space. On the other hand, a more balanced distribution between positive and negative indicates a higher level of openness and contestation in the digital public space. Thus, sentiment analysis not only reflects popularity levels but also reveals patterns of political interaction and communication structures within the social media ecosystem.

#### **4. Discussion**

In the context of the communication style of the Democratic Party's chairman, Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono, on TikTok, the findings reflect a hybrid political branding model that combines institutional orientation with elements of personalization in a controlled manner. The dominance of formal communication contributes to the construction of legitimacy and credibility, while limited informal and emotional expressions function as complementary devices to enhance relatability without undermining institutional authority. This pattern is more closely aligned with the typology of professional and institutional leaders (institutional statesman) than with a populist communication model.

Within the framework of the professionalization of politics (Lilleker & Negrine, 2002) This pattern can be interpreted as a manifestation of strategically managed political communication, where message discipline, consistency, and image control are central. The emphasis on formality and structured narratives indicates that social media is utilized primarily as an extension of institutional communication practices rather than as a space for spontaneous or audience-driven interaction. In this sense, TikTok does not fundamentally transform the communication logic but is instead incorporated into an already professionalized communication strategy. This finding is consistent with Karlsen & Enjolras, (2016), who argue that actors from established parties tend to use digital platforms to reinforce institutional legitimacy rather than to pursue purely personalized popularity.

In contrast, Muhaimin Iskandar's communication style reflects a more integrative model in which institutional and relational dimensions are simultaneously developed. While formal communication remains

dominant, the presence of informal, symbolic, and emotional elements is more pronounced and systematically integrated. To better understand this pattern, the theory of mediatization of politics (2014) is employed, not as interchangeable with professionalization, but as a distinct analytical lens. Mediatization highlights how political actors adapt to media logic, including the need for personalization, emotionalization, and audience engagement.

From this perspective, Muhaimin Iskandar's communication strategy demonstrates an active negotiation between institutional logic and platform-specific affordances. Rather than simply adopting a pre-defined "TikTok logic," the actor selectively incorporates informal and emotional elements to increase visibility and resonance while maintaining a degree of institutional coherence. This indicates that mediatization operates not as a deterministic force, but as a set of constraints and opportunities that are strategically navigated by political actors.

Meanwhile, Zulkifli Hasan's communication style reflects a model that prioritizes social proximity and the representation of collective identity. Informality serves as the primary mechanism for building connection, supported by symbolic references that reinforce party identity, while formal and emotional elements appear in more limited and situational forms. This pattern suggests a communication strategy that is more fully oriented toward the interactive and experiential dimensions of social media.

Importantly, this finding should not be understood as a simple reflection of an inherent "TikTok cultural logic." Instead, it demonstrates how platform affordances, such as short-form video, algorithmic amplification, and participatory engagement, are actively appropriated and performed by political actors. In line with Gil De Zúñiga & Chen, (2019) Social media can be seen as a performative space in which political identity is constructed through everyday interactions and narrative practices. Furthermore, Kreiss, (2016) emphasizes that informal communication styles can produce a sense of perceived intimacy, even when such closeness is strategically staged.

Taken together, these variations indicate that professionalization and mediatization should not be conflated but understood as complementary yet distinct processes. Professionalization emphasizes the persistence of institutional control and strategic message management, while mediatization draws attention to how political communication is reshaped through engagement with media environments. The three cases demonstrate different configurations of these dynamics: Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono reflects a stronger orientation toward professionalized communication, Muhaimin Iskandar represents a negotiated balance

between institutional and media logics, and Zulkifli Hasan illustrates a more adaptive approach that leverages platform affordances to construct social proximity and audience engagement.

Then, the comparison of content narratives explains that Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono, in the distribution of content narratives, illustrates a digital personal branding strategy that emphasizes political productivity and institutional legitimacy as the main foundation. Entertainment and social elements serve as a balance to keep the content relevant to the platform's character, while personal and religious dimensions are kept to a minimum. This pattern shows that TikTok is not merely a space for personal expression, but rather a strategic channel for strengthening the image of active, professional leadership within the digital political communication ecosystem.

Meanwhile, Muhaimin Iskandar reflects a plural digital personal branding model based on identity integration. Political activities remain the foundation of legitimacy, but they are reinforced by entertainment as a tool for expanding reach, religion and culture as enhancers of collective identity, and social and personal content as instruments of emotional closeness. This pattern shows that communication strategies on TikTok are not solely oriented toward reproducing formal authority, but rather toward forming an adaptive leader image rooted in community values and responsive to logic. Effective political narratives not only convey policy information but also include stories, symbols, and experiences that foster emotional closeness and collective identification (Trevisan et al., 2025).

Then Zulkifli Hasan distributes narrative content that reflects a highly integrated digital personal branding model with platform culture. Entertainment serves as the main entry point to attract attention, political activities maintain legitimacy, social and personal content reinforce authenticity, while the religious dimension plays only a minimal role. This pattern shows a communication strategy that utilizes TikTok as a space for popular culture, where leadership is presented through a combination of performance, social proximity, and participation in the dynamics of digital trends. The dominance of the entertainment category indicates that TikTok is used not only as a channel for conveying political agendas but also as a performative space that aligns with the platform's vernacular, namely, its distinctive communication style (Gibbs et al., 2015). TikTok has a different cultural logic from other social media because it relies on music, viral trends, humor, and short visual formats (Apriel Simanullang & Prayetno, 2025). Political participation in the digital era is no longer always mediated by formal organizational structures, but through content-based connectivity that is easily shareable and lightweight. High entertainment

content has the potential to expand audience reach and strengthen the organic spread of messages (Apriel Simanullang & Prayetno, 2025).

Next, regarding posting frequency, there are differences in strategies for maintaining digital visibility. Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono exhibits a fluctuating communication pattern, with spikes at certain points. Muhaimin Iskandar tends to be consistent with a moderate frequency throughout the year. Meanwhile, Zulkifli Hasan shows that the most stable and sustainable posting frequency is a strategy for maintaining a digital presence. According to the theory of personal branding proposed by (Rangarajan et al., 2017) Branding effectiveness is determined by clarity, consistency, and constancy. Furthermore, from the perspective of the mediatization of politics theory (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014). This difference illustrates how political actors adjust their communication strategies to the logic of digital media, which demands intensity, visuality, and alignment with platform algorithms like TikTok. These platforms tend to favor active, consistent accounts, making a sustained presence strategy potentially more compatible with algorithmic logic than highly fluctuating patterns. In terms of outcomes, consistent posting patterns are more likely to sustain audience attention and algorithmic visibility over time, whereas fluctuating intensity may generate short-term spikes in engagement but less stable audience retention.

These findings also align with (Nofiard, 2022) Research on digital political communication in Indonesia shows that the frequency and consistency of postings contribute to increased public awareness and engagement. Politicians who are regularly active find it easier to build top-of-mind awareness among young TikTok users. However, spikes in intensity at certain moments have also proven effective in generating widespread public attention, especially when linked to significant political events. Therefore, the effectiveness of each strategy should be understood as context-dependent: some strategies are more effective in building long-term recognition and trust, while others are more effective in generating short-term visibility and public attention. Thus, the differences in posting frequency among the three party chairpersons not only reflect variations in digital communication styles but also represent different choices in personal branding strategies to build image, strengthen party positioning, and adapt to the dynamics of politics and the digital media ecosystem.

Furthermore, the sentiment pattern reveals variations in communication strategies and the dynamics of the digital audience. The AHY model describes image consolidation with highly concentrated support. If the engaged audience is dominated by supporters or sympathizers, then the comments that emerge will tend to be

homogeneous and positive (Kaluža, 2022). The Muhaimin Iskandar model shows majority support with clear emotional polarization. Emotions play a crucial role in shaping political responses; actors involved in strategic or controversial issues tend to elicit stronger emotional reactions, both positive and negative (Neuman et al., 2018). Research by Subekti (2023) on political polarization on social media also emphasizes that the greater a figure's exposure to public issues, the greater the potential for antagonistic responses. Zulkifli Hasan's model shows a more open contestation of opinions with the presence of a neutral audience. In the theory of the digital public sphere (Bernholz et al., 2021), the comment section can become a deliberative arena where various positions meet, including support, criticism, and observational stances.

## **5. Conclusion**

The findings of this study demonstrate that digital personal branding among political party chairpersons in Indonesia reflects not merely stylistic variation but strategic efforts to negotiate institutional political logic and platform-specific affordances. The differences identified in communication style, content narrative, sentiment patterns, and posting frequency reveal distinct configurations of how political actors construct visibility, legitimacy, and audience engagement within the digital environment.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to the refinement of the relationship between the professionalization of politics and the mediatization of politics. Rather than treating these frameworks as interchangeable, the findings show that they operate as distinct yet intersecting dynamics. Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono's communication pattern reflects a stronger orientation toward professionalization, where TikTok is used as an extension of institutional communication to reinforce credibility and leadership competence. Muhaimin Iskandar demonstrates a hybrid model that actively balances institutional legitimacy with relational and affective engagement, indicating a negotiation between political and media logics. In contrast, Zulkifli Hasan's approach reflects a more adaptive strategy that leverages platform affordances, such as informality and entertainment, to maximize visibility and social proximity. These variations highlight how political communication strategies are shaped not only by internal party identity but also by how actors selectively respond to the opportunities and constraints of digital media.

At a broader level, these findings offer important implications for understanding digital democracy in Indonesia. Social media platforms

such as TikTok do not uniformly enhance democratic communication; instead, they produce differentiated patterns of engagement. Institutional-oriented communication tends to consolidate support among existing audiences, while more entertainment-driven strategies may expand reach but risk reducing the depth of political discourse. As a result, digital platforms function simultaneously as spaces of political engagement, image construction, and performative visibility, where the quality of democratic interaction depends on how communication strategies are designed and executed.

From a practical perspective, this study underscores that effective digital political communication depends on the alignment between communication style, narrative construction, and audience expectations. Consistency and strategic integration of content appear more sustainable for maintaining engagement over time, while moment-driven intensity can generate short-term visibility. However, these strategies involve trade-offs between reach, control of message, and depth of political engagement.

This study has several limitations. Methodologically, content analysis and sentiment classification, although systematically conducted, remain limited in capturing complex audience interpretations, including sarcasm and passive engagement. Additionally, the study does not directly measure political outcomes such as voter behavior or changes in public opinion, limiting the ability to assess the actual effectiveness of personal branding strategies. Theoretically, the analysis is primarily framed within professionalization and mediatization perspectives, without fully incorporating other approaches such as algorithmic influence or platform governance.

Future research should adopt a cross-platform comparative approach to better understand how political actors adapt their communication strategies across different digital environments. Moreover, integrating quantitative engagement metrics and longitudinal data would allow for a more robust analysis of the relationship between digital communication and political outcomes. Greater attention should also be given to audience reception to examine how political messages are interpreted and negotiated by diverse user groups.

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