

## Student Perception towards Personal Branding of Political Leaders on Twitter Ahead of Presidential Election 2014

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### Abstract

Recent developments in technology bring improvements for communication studies. *Computer mediated communication* (CMC) theory is potential base to assess rapid messages sent using computer with internet connection. Twitter is one of well-known social media, used by large number of societies, including Indonesian president candidates, e.g. Prabowo Subianto and Aburizal Bakrie. Majority of twitter users are teenagers, as this is an active society and the technology allows them to explore their upcoming president. Active society has been explained in *uses and gratification* theory. This study aims to identify college students' perceptions about politician's personal branding on twitter lately before the election on 2014. This research is a descriptive research using qualitative approach, and equipped with content analysis. Non probability sampling and *snowball sampling* method were applied to select the main informants. Results show that college students' perceptions towards Prabowo's twitter were better than Aburizal Bakrie's although Aburizal twitter's management is much better and friendly. Politician's personal branding does not influence the existence of active and positive responses from the students. From *the eight of law of personal branding*, Prabowo is known as a well behavior person with high nationalism while Aburizal has very well *law of visibility* in twitter's management.

**Key words** : Perception of college students, Twitter user, Politician's personal branding

### INTRODUCTION

The exploration of social media becomes a popular trend of research in the last few years. The findings suggest that social media has gained much attention from researchers, due to increasing phenomenon of social media users over years [1]. Developments in communication studies related to internet are stated in the theory of *computer mediated communication* (CMC) [2]. According to the theory, rapid messages sent using computers and internet is one form of social media. These text-based CMC such as e-mails, computer conference and chat system are different type of communication compare to face to face communication [3]. According to a report summary by eMarketer, rewritten by newmediatrendwatch.com site, it is predicted that Indonesia in 2014 will be the fourth largest social networking users in the world with numbers of social networking reach 79.2 million, an increase of 34.4 million than in 2011.

As explained by Hsieh and Shannon [4], *qualitative and directed content analysis* approach is commonly applied. Currently, a study

applied the method to examine *political branding* by Jokowi during the 2012 Jakarta governor election campaign in Twitter. It studied the use of social media for political interests [5]. Previous studies found that Twitter is an effective medium to create *personal brandings* for Chappy Hakim and Yunarto Wijaya [6]. Octavianto [7] found also that social media can be used to find the dialectical relationship between social media user in digital era with cultural communication.

In the modern political communication, media is useful to distinguish the product-political parties and candidates [8]. This concept is different from the traditional political communication process. Currently, the process involves systematic exchanges in various information, ideologies, values, norms and cultures in such an open society [9]. Common term to describe the situation is post-reform period, where democracy, political openness, free-to-express opinions, transparent, and open political competition are grown abundantly. This becomes a certain new trend in the political communication era [9]. Therefore, understanding the process of current political communication is impossible without an analysis on the media used [8].

To understand the figure of the next presidential candidates, the contestants need to introduce themselves publicly. This activity is

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crucial, thus the community can clearly recognize figures that will be the future leaders. It is known as personal branding, or raising one's personal brand in the minds of others.

*Personal branding* means controlling over others' judgment against a person before direct meeting [10]. This is sort of strategy to develop such a perception or assumption on someone's thought before others meet the person. Montoya [10] states there are eight concepts to develop personal branding (*the eights law of personal branding*). The communication, as the one of the law, is actually functioned to create social construction, i.e. the creation of the message.

Social construction theory takes a significant role in the formation of public's perception. The theory is rooted in the constructivist paradigm that observes social reality as social construction which is created by the free individual. Individuals have determinant parts in social context as they have such free will to construct the world and social reality. Humans in many ways have a freedom to act beyond the control limits and the structure of social institutions. The acts are responded through to the stimulus in the cognitive sector. Bandura's social cognitive theory describes there is a reciprocal relationship between humanism factors and cognitive, behavior and environment, which would create the perception generated later [11]. Ontology of constructivist approach perceives a reality as a social construction created by the individuals. However, the truth of social reality is relative and the reality applies to the relevant particular context by specific social actors. This study acknowledges various characteristics and substances of thoughts on social construction theory and thus, uses constructivist paradigm.

As mentioned above, social media is a means that leads dramatic changes in the structure of mass communication in this current interactive digital era [1]. Politicians can broadcast messages, raise public attentions during the political campaigns and establish such relationships with voters. Indonesian current politicians, Prabowo Subianto and Aburizal Bakrie use one of social media, Twitter, for conveying their figures to the public and creating personal brandings as 2014 presidential candidates. Seemingly, different backgrounds of the two political leaders lead them to apply different strategy in the use of Twitter

Twitter is a popular social means among Indonesians, especially young generations and students. According to Abas [12], students, as a

*net generation*, keep updated to current technology so they can be regarded as an active user of social media such as Twitter. For this reason, this study examines the development of personal branding in the students' level.

Following constructivist paradigm using symbolic interaction theory, this study assumes that students are free to choose what media will be used and what information they want to know. However, this study focuses on the user of Twitter. The implication of constructivist paradigm can not be separated from the three basic reasons of message, i.e. expressive, conventional, and rhetorical [13]. Especially, expressive reason views communication as a method of showing self expression, the use of properties for distributing message open for publics, people usually react naturally and have less attention of others' desire.

This study, however, does not emphasize on Twitter as a medium to change the attitudes and behaviors of *followers* of Bakrie and Prabowo. Through Twitter, the active followers (students) can achieve the need of information about the two politicians. In this process, the politicians use the media to build such perceptions about their figures. This is what is known as the outcome of communication. In constructivist paradigms, this interaction manifests *uses and gratification theory*. This theory was applied by Cigdem [14] in a study of the habits and motives of 3-6 years children to watch television.

Through current developed information technology, political actors deliver a pack of messages that helps differentiate themselves from the existing political competitors [8]. In this way, the political actors broadcast messages in attempt to build personal branding and good political image of their personalities. This study aims to describe students' *tweet* response on Twitter of the political leaders, and students' perceptions on *personal branding* of the two political figures.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Using qualitative approach, the researchers interviewed informants to achieve in-depth information. A qualitative approach is a process that aims to describe holistic phenomenon or social issues, and reports the information in detail by using various scientific methods [15, 16]. Likewise Moleong [15] and Kriyantono [17], this study used a systematic, factual and accurate description and information about the facts and

the properties of the population or particular object.

### Data Collection

As described above, this study applied students as the informants. They were taken by using a *non-probability sampling* technique. Purposively, the study selected particular informants who were suitable with these following criterias: 1) the students have an active Twitter account, and 2) the students follow the twitter accounts of Prabowo and Bakrie.

Along with using in-depth interviews, the researchers observed informants and the twitters of the two political figures, and documented the informants' tweets and examined the contents. To get the next informant, the researchers applied *snowball sampling* method [18].

In addition to the interviews, we used content analysis – a research technique for making valid interpretation and translation of the text into context. Content analysis is used on the authority of the researcher. Content analysis provides new viewpoint, improving researchers' understanding of a particular phenomenon or informing any practical activity [19]. It is focusing on the characteristics of language as communication channel particularly to the content or contextual meaning of the text [4].

### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis model referred on Miles and Huberman [20]. We performed assessment repeatedly from data collection until all the data was collected. The data is reduced by the problem limitaton, followed by the presentation of the data and the final inference or verification.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Political figures carried out in this study were Prabowo Subianto and Aburizal Bakrie. The following were responses of students to both political figures' tweets.

### Prabowo's Twitter

Figure 1 describes activity between Prabowo with his followers (Fig. 2). First student, Mohamad Hartawan provided an active reaction. In his tweet, it is described that he hoped providing positive input for Prabowo.

The second student, Julian, also gave a positive response to Prabowo. He *tweeted* the expectation for Prabowo to develop agriculture, tourism and mining sector. This active feedback

in twitter also provided positive support for Prabowo.

The next student, Davi, *tweeted* to response Prabowo in active and positive way. Davi asked about Indonesian labor (TKI) consignment if Prabowo become the president. This response occurred because TKI is often violated, thus Davi want to determine Prabowo's settlement on this unresolved case.



Figure 1. Informant Tweet on Prabowo  
(Source: [www.twitter.com/Prabowo08](http://www.twitter.com/Prabowo08) and [www.twitter.com/davisyahputra](http://www.twitter.com/davisyahputra))

According to the results of interviews, all three informants had active and positive responses on the tweets of Prabowo, although the followers perceived that the twitter management was not the finest and friendly. Davi also thought the answers from Prabowo was unfriendly due to the short reply.

### Bakrie's Twitter

Tweets addressed to Bakrie commonly were the responses of guest lectures (Fig 2.). This political leader often performed the lectures on campuses fairly. Many of his activities are related to the education sector. A student, Kuku, explained that the activities were much shared on twitter. Kuku and Anifatul tweeted that they

thanked Bakrie for coming in their colleges as a guest lecture.

These two students' tweets on Bakrie's twitter were relatively positive. They welcomed Bakrie in visiting their campus. But, not all tweets from informants for political figures in this case were consistent with the fact.

According to the result of interview, Anifatul actually was eager to go to Bakrie's occasion as a guest lecture at the campus. But, due to some reason, she was unable to attend. She tried to tweet Bakrie about the occasion on her campus, and she received a response from Bakrie. However, Bakrie's responses seemed do not all correspond to the experienced reality and perceived by the informants.



Figure 3. Informant Tweet on Bakrie  
(Sources: www.twitter.com/aburizalbakrie)

### The Use of Prabowo and Bakrie Twitter

This current study proposes students' twitters were positively active in respond to *personal branding* of Prabowo and Bakrie although they perceived the management of Bakrie's twitter is better and friendlier than Prabowo's twitter. Informants from Bakrie Twitter account actively and positively respond the tweet shared by him. Bakrie also managed his twitter well and tended to share such complete and interesting information.

Table 1. Personal Branding of Prabowo and Bakrie

Personal Branding	Prabowo	Bakrie
Specialization	Assertive attitude, straightforward, and has high sense of nationalism	Has a very good strategy to use twitter as a medium for personal branding, and well managed
Leadership	Good leadership skills due to his military background	His leadership quality is doubtful. His background feared to be more business oriented than affairs of state
Personality	Consistent to the Constitution of '45 and Pancasila as fundamental basis on policy decision making	Innovative, hard work and resilient, considering his success in business
Distinctiveness	A figure that did not sell out promises. He did not promise free schools nor health, but everything is made with an affordable price, to educate people not to be lazy	Besides active on twitter, he is also actively visits schools or universities to get closer to youth
Visibility	The twitter considered to not optimal, and tends to monotonous and less attractive to his followers. The used language is inflexible. Direct visitation to public is also less.	His twitter is interesting, because it completed by additional information or photos. The used language was also easily understood
Unity	Military background made him portrayed as a tough and disciplined person, seen on his twitter	His business background creates the perception that he has a less sense of nationalism. His effort to construct nationalism is not work properly
Persistence	Constantly practicing Constitution of '45 and Pancasila in the planning of future development of Indonesia	Consistent in carrying out the strategies, which one of it is twitter
Goodwill	He got a good perception, so there is no significant rejection on his presidential candidacy	The Lapindo mud case is unresolved. It makes people have negative perceptions on Bakrie

Table 1 explains students' perception towards personal brandings of the two political figures. Students perceived that the *personal branding* of Prabowo were positive, although they observed that the Twitter management was not decent. Prabowo has been assessed as a good, distinctive, and consistent leader to the Constitution of '45 and Pancasila.

This study proposes that the personal branding of Prabowo is more positive than Bakrie; although Bakrie's Twitter management seemed to be better and friendlier than Prabowo. This study develops a major proposition that followers respond actively and positively to personal brandings of Prabowo and Bakrie on Twitter. And, the responds were not affected by friendly tweet.

### CONCLUSION

We conclude that the students, as Twitter users, provided active and positive responses to the Twitters of the two political figures (Prabowo and Bakrie). They asked about both forward visions and missions for the 2014 presidential election.

Perception of students toward Prabowo's personal branding was apparently positive. He was perceived as a figure that has a good leadership, high nationalism, charismatic and thoughtful. Students viewed he does not like to sell off the promises.

In other side, although students had good impressions toward Bakrie's personal branding, students perceived Bakrie's was lesser than Prabowo's. Students' perception towards Bakrie's was not so good, although Bakrie was viewed having a better Twitter management. Bakrie was assessed as a person who has a good innovation, hardworking, and tenacious. However, it becomes negative when related to the case of Lapindo mud.

### SUGGESTION

We suggest that person who applies personal branding should select appropriate media to achieve the expectations. Personal branding on Twitter either for individuals or organizations should be made as attractive as possible. Monotonous contents would make followers reluctant to check and read the messages, even to start communicating. Consistency and distinctiveness are crucial for personal branding.

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