

The Portrait of Women in Election Campaign Advertisements

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ABSTRACT

Women are increasingly participating actively in the political sphere; However, their representation in political campaign media often remains entrenched in patriarchal discourse. This study aims to analyze the visual and textual constructions in two political campaign posters of female legislative candidates from the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI), which incorporate the terms in branding with "Mamah Muda" and "Mamah Semok" as part of their personal branding. Employing the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis approach (Kress & van Leeuwen), this research explores how the meaning of female body representation is constructed through the combination of imagery, text, color, and symbols in campaign posters. The findings reveal that the representation of female candidates continues to be framed through maternal yet sensual imagery and patriarchal aesthetics that emphasize visual appeal. Such portrayals reinforce softened femininity norms and internalize power relations that position women as visual objects. This study concludes that political campaigns in Indonesia have not fully escaped from gender-biased narratives, and that the political arena remains a non-neutral space in terms of gender.

Keywords: *Women Representation, Political Campaign, Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, Patriarchy, Branding*

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INTRODUCTION

The role of women in politics has undergone quite significant changes. Initially, women were marginalized in the political realm. The feminist movement and the struggle for women's rights have paved the way for them to be more active in politics. However, despite progress, women still face various challenges in politics, such as gender stereotypes, limited access to resources, and political dominance that is still dominated by men. In political campaigns, women often have to fight against traditional views that belittle their capacity as leaders or decision makers. Women's equality in social life and political contestation is also regulated in the 1945 Constitution, Article 281 paragraph 2, which states that "Everyone has the right to be free from discriminatory treatment on any basis and has the right to receive protection against discriminatory treatment". Based on this, women dare to advance in political contestation in Indonesia, both regionally and nationally. To strengthen women's position in political contestation, they must carry out a unique and attention-grabbing

personal branding process. Personal branding refers to efforts to shape other people's perceptions of various aspects of a person.

According to Lois & Candraningrum personal branding is a process in which a person forms, attracts attention, and maintains public opinion of the characteristics or qualities possessed by that individual (Lois & Candraningrum, 2021). Branding, in a political context, refers to efforts to create a strong and attractive identity for a candidate to influence public perception and build relationships with voters. In political campaigns, branding involves not only logos, slogans, or visual images, but also narratives and messages that are communicated to build trust and support. In the context of women, branding in political campaigns has its own challenges and opportunities that are influenced by gender dynamics, social norms, and societal expectations. Unfortunately, women in political contests in Indonesia tend to use sexist and sensual language in their personal branding posters. For example, there are 2 female legislative candidates who use the slogans *mamah semok* and *mamah muda* which are carried out by the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI) legislative candidates. Other legislative candidates in their personal branding are also made in such a way that they look beautiful and younger. In this study, researchers use two theories to examine the problems that arise. The first theory is Stuart Hall's representation theory. Hall emphasizes that representation is not just a reflection of reality, but a process of constructing meaning. In the context of gender, it helps to reveal how women are presented in certain positions. The second theory is Antonio Gramsci's hegemon theory. This theory explains how dominant ideology becomes "common sense". Campaign posters can be a tool of hegemonic reproduction that normalizes certain social positions and power relations.

Various studies on representation have been carried out, such as Marbun & Irawanto's (Marbun & Irawanto, 2023) research entitled "Multimodal Analysis of the Disabled Character Tyrion Lannister in the Game of Thrones Series (2011-2019)." uses the theory of multimodal critical discourse analysis developed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. Marbun & Irawanto's (2023) research focuses on how meaning is constructed through various semiotic modes, including text, images, and other visual elements. In the context of this research, the theory is applied to analyze the representation of the character Tyrion Lannister as a disabled figure by considering three main metafunctions, namely the representational metafunction to analyze how characters and objects are represented in the narrative, the interactional metafunction to examine the relationship between filmmakers, the characters represented, and the audience and the Compositional metafunction: Seeing how visual elements are arranged and presented to build meaning. By using this approach, research can reveal the prejudice and social stigma experienced by disabled characters and how these representations contribute to a broader understanding of disabled identities in the media. The discussion in this article also uses the same research method, namely Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's multimodal CDA.

Other research related to political attributes, especially campaign posters, was conducted by Priyanto & Purbantina (2021), they examined the campaign posters of the *Rassablement National (RN)* party in the 2015 and 2017 legislative elections. Through this analysis, the study aims to identify the characteristics of extreme right-wing

populism, especially in the context of refugee issues, racism, and rejection of the existing system. This study uses the concept of Right-Wing Populism as a theoretical basis, using the CDA method which emphasizes the oppositional attitude towards government elites and national identity. According to, right-wing populist parties believe in individual sovereignty in the context of the state, often related to immigration and security issues. In addition, the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method developed by Machin & Mayr was used to analyze the elements in the text and images on campaign posters, focusing on how political messages are conveyed through visuals and text. This study offers a new contribution by combining visual and text analysis in the context of political campaigns in France, especially in understanding how extreme right-wing populist parties use posters as a tool to convey political messages that focus on sensitive issues such as immigration and security. In addition, this study enriches the literature on right-wing populism by providing insight into the visual communication strategies used to attract voters (Priyanto & Purbantina, 2021). The researcher sees that there are still few who analyze campaign posters using the CDA method, therefore, this article will further explore this critical discourse through the text and visuals of the campaign posters of the DKI Jakarta DPRD Candidate for Central Jakarta Electoral District no. 7 and the campaign posters of the Depok City DPRD Candidate for Sukmajaya Electoral District no. 15.

In other studies, women have always been the main attraction in the realm of advertising, one of which is a study entitled "Discourse of Women's Body Construction in Advertising and Promotion 'Lovely Nia' and 'Alitaren'", Kusnadi (2022) discusses the construction of women's bodies in advertisements using a critical discourse analysis approach by Norman Fairclough. This study is very relevant to reveal how patriarchy and gender ideology are exploited in the beauty industry. By choosing the objects of advertising and social media promotion from "Lovely Nia" and "Alitaren", the article successfully shows how beauty narratives are used to strengthen gender dominance, especially in the context of patriarchal culture. The use of Fairclough's theory provides a solid analytical foundation for exploring the relationship between text, discursive practice, and social practice. The similarities between this study and the research conducted by the researcher are the analysis of text, visuals, and exploring the relationship between discursive practice and social practice. The method used is Fairclough's critical discourse analysis and the research conducted by Kusnadi concluded that the "Lovely Nia" advertisement reproduces a patriarchal discourse that positions women as objects of male satisfaction. In addition, this advertisement shows how the "male gaze" is still present even though there is no explicit male figure in the text (Kusnadi, 2022).

This study aims to explore the portrait of women on 2 regional election posters, namely the poster of the DKI Jakarta DPRD Candidate for Central Jakarta Electoral District no. 7 and the campaign poster of the Depok City DPRD Candidate for Sukmajaya Electoral District no. 15 using CDA Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a multimodal critical discourse analysis methodology developed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. This method

aims to understand the meaning contained in visual texts and how ideology and power relations are displayed in regional election campaign posters. In this study, the researchers adopted a qualitative approach using a multimodal critical discourse analysis methodology developed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. A qualitative approach is fundamentally dependent on human interpretation and aims to understand the meaning contained in the object of study. This study chose a qualitative approach because it aims to reveal the meaning contained in visual texts. Meanwhile, the multimodal critical discourse analysis method is used to identify the ideology present in the film and the power relations reflected in it. The multimodal study developed by Kress and van Leeuwen is rooted in Halliday's theory of language functions and social semiotics. Semiotics has three metafunctions in the formation of meaning, namely ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Halliday, 1978). Kress and van Leeuwen (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006) then developed this metafunction in their work *Reading Images*, into representation, interaction, and composition.

In the metafunction of representation, researchers analyze the relationship between represented participants and other objects in the image. Represented participants can be living or non-living objects in the image, and the analysis is carried out by considering the process, participant, and circumstance components. This includes whether the represented participant participates in an interactive process. This interaction is depicted through a vector, which needs to be analyzed from the direction of its origin and destination. In this case, the vector can describe whether the represented participant acts as an actor, respondent, object, or destination, and the relationship between represented participants can be transactional, non-transactional, bidirectional, or conversion.

Meanwhile, the audience or audience who sees the image is called an interactive participant. In the interactional metafunction, the analysis focuses on the relationship between the creator, the viewer, and the object in the image. This relationship is depicted through elements such as gaze, framing, frame size, and angle. These elements describe contact, social distance (intimate, close, distant, or public), and the relationship between the object and the viewer. Meanwhile, the compositional metafunction looks at how the representative participants are arranged and presented. The arrangement and presentation of objects in the image have a major impact on the meaning produced. State that multimodal texts have three main compositional principles, namely information value, salience, and framing. Information value refers to the value of information that can be seen from certain zones in the image, such as right and left, top and bottom, or center and edge. Salience emphasizes certain elements that stand out, such as color contrast and image sharpness. Framing refers to the boundary lines that separate and connect objects in the image, providing markers for certain parts that have special meaning (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006).

States that modality refers to the use of various semiotic modes to construct meaning. These semiotic modes can be elements such as layout, music, sound, gesture, images, and others that are usually used in visual communication. The modes are interrelated and together form meaning (Kress, 2009). Leeuwen adds that to create coherence between the modes, four principles are needed, namely rhythm, composition, information linking, and dialogue. Rhythm serves to guide the temporary

movement of modals, such as in conversation. Composition organizes modals spatially, such as in screen layout. Information linking connects information in text, while dialogue occurs through the exchange of actions and reactions. The choice in using these modes is greatly influenced by the decision of the producer of meaning, who considers which mode is most effective in conveying the intended message. These semiotic modes are contextual and are only understood by individuals who are in certain social groups or communities (Leeuwen, 2005).

Through this multimodal critical discourse analysis approach, the researcher wants to reveal the meaning of representation that is intended to be conveyed by the posters of the DKI Jakarta DPRD Candidates for the Central Jakarta Electoral District and the campaign posters of the Depok City DPRD Candidates for the Sukmajaya Electoral District. This study will explore the multimodal critical discourse analysis tools of Kress and van Leeuwen within the framework of critical concepts to answer the formulated research questions.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

RESEARCH RESULT

The political campaign posters analyzed in this study display visual and textual constructions that represent the figures of “young mamah” and “semiok mamah” as female candidates. This representation cannot be separated from the context of gender discourse, ideology, and power relations in a patriarchal society. With the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis approach (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006), it is seen that the choice of body poses, facial expressions, use of clothing, and placement of texts create meanings that are not neutral, but rather loaded with ideological interests.



Figure 1. Campaign Poster for DKI Jakarta DPRD Candidate no. 7 from the PSI party

The first poster that the researcher analyzed was a poster from the Jakarta DPRD Candidate Desi Dwi Jayanti. From the textual analysis, the poster used the jargon "Mamah Muda". This sentence indicates that Desi Dwi Jayanti is a young woman and has become a housewife. In a political context, this phrase can be used to attract voters, especially housewives and young female voters. The use of the phrase "Mamah Muda" can be a strategy to strengthen Desy Dwi Jayanti's image as a figure who is close to the community, especially young mothers and working women. In the Critical Discourse Analysis of Multimodality, this visual mode conveys the narrative that women can be present in the political space without eliminating their domestic identity. However, this phrase can also be debated as a form of stereotypical gender roles in politics where the phrase also has negative connotations. Then the second text in the poster is "Ready to work, ready to serve, ready to be supervised". This phrase emphasizes the values of hard work, public service, and accountability where Desy is ready to be supervised by the community during her working hours, all of which are important in electoral politics. Textually, color also plays a role in building public perception. In Desy's poster, the typography is dominated by red and black and is printed in bold. The names of the legislative candidates are written in large, bold letters, reflecting strength and authority, while the combination of red and black gives a firm and bold impression.

The second poster is a poster of a Depok City DPRD Candidate, Lydia Octavia. In terms of visuals, Lydia Octavia is shown as a woman with long hair and wearing a PSI jacket with a pose and smile, showing an image of self-confidence and closeness to the community. The presence of two men in the background, namely Jokowi and Kaesang, can be interpreted as a symbol of support or hierarchy of power in politics. The presence of Jokowi and Kaesang in the background is a representation of the strength of supporters. Lydia's placement in the center of the frame, framed by the male figures behind her, depicts a subordinate position while also being supported by masculine power.



Figure 2. Campaign poster for Depok City DPRD candidate number 15 from the PSI party

In Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal analysis, visual components such as pose, clothing, color, and direction of view become forms of discourse that contain certain meanings. If Lydia's body pose in the poster displays a feminine posture that tends to be "fashionable" or sensual, then this is inseparable from the visualization strategy that adjusts the female body to the masculine tastes of the majority of voters. In the study of social semiotics, this form of representation is not only decorating, but

also regulating the power relations between the subject and the audience (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006).

DISCUSSION

In terms of visuals, Desy's poster is dominated by the colors red and white, indicating that it reflects national identity and affiliation with the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI). Red symbolizes courage, while white shows transparency and honesty. Red and white are also in line with the Indonesian flag. The next visual analysis is the placement of the candidate's photo in the middle and flanked by two male figures. The placement of the candidate's photo in the middle shows Desy as the main focus with a confident expression. Her fashion style and smiling pose depict gentleness, friendliness, and motherhood that are familiar to the public. Desy's photo is flanked by Jokowi and Gibran as an effort to build political legitimacy through association with popular figures. This poster can also show that the candidate is affiliated with the values fought for by Jokowi and Gibran as the General Chairperson of PSI. By including the image of Jokowi and the PSI logo dominantly, this poster communicates a connection with a pro-people and progressive political platform. Through Gunther Kress's approach, this poster utilizes multimodality (a combination of text, color, images, and typography) to build the image of a candidate who is young, energetic, hard-working, and affiliated with Jokowi and PSI.

Based on Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, gender is not something inherent, but rather is formed through repeated social practices. In this context,

the image of "**mamah muda**" is produced as a performative form that conforms to normative expectations of women: feminine, gentle, motherly (Judith Butler, 1990). This kind of representation normalizes patriarchal power relations, where women can only be accepted in public spaces (including politics) if they continue to display an image that is in accordance with domestic and heteronormative nature. Connell calls this a form of emphasized femininity, namely the construction of femininity that is formed as a complement to hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). In the poster, this can be seen in the way women's bodies are displayed sensually but still framed in maternal and domestic images, such as through the phrase "**mamah muda**." Thus, this campaign indirectly conveys that to become leaders, women must still submit to patriarchal aesthetics.

Furthermore, Judith Butler through the concept of gender performativity states that the body is not only a location of identity, but also a medium of performance that repeats gender norms through style, action, and expression. In this poster, the body of a female politician is not only interpreted as a political subject, but also as a tool for performance - as a showcase (Judith Butler, 1990). Politics, in this context, is no longer just a space for ideas, but becomes an arena for feminine, sensual, and "entertaining" body performativity.

Textually, the poster shows the phrase "**Mamah Semok**". The phrase has an informal nuance, using language that is closer to the general public than the rigid political language. Semok itself is an informal language that tends towards connotations that contain elements of gender representation. The word "**Mamah**" emphasizes the

role of motherhood, while **“Semok”** has a physical connotation that has an informal nuance or even objectification. This shows how female candidates in politics are often represented not only based on their political capacity, but also their personal and physical aspects. The term **“mamah semok”** is sensual, giving rise to stereotypes of women’s bodies (body image) as part of the political image. Thus reinforcing the stereotype of women as visual objects. The term **“semok”** in Indonesian popular culture refers to a woman’s body that is considered sexually attractive, especially those with certain curves or body shapes. Thus, the use of this term in the context of a political campaign is not neutral or innocent; it is a visual and textual discourse that shrouds sexuality with symbols of motherhood. The term **“Mamah Semok”** becomes a representation of a woman’s body that is very thick with the meaning of sexualization and objectification. This reinforces the focus on the body as the primary identity sold to the public, rather than on the ideas or political platforms offered.

The slogan **“Siap Melayani Depok”** is interpreted as service to the community, which in the context of female candidates can be associated with the traditional role of women as caregivers or servants of public needs. The use of the word **“ready to serve”** can also contain an ambiguity of meaning between public service and implicit sexual meaning. The pose, clothing, and appearance are arranged to be visually attractive to activate the masculine audience gaze (male gaze). In this case, the female body is used as a sign (signifier) to form a double meaning: as a gentle mother (mamah), as well as a **“busty”**, sensual and attractive visual object. Hall explains that meaning is formed not directly, but through standardized cultural codes. Thus, this poster not only contains visual information, but also reproduces patriarchal ideological codes.

According to Stuart Hall, representation is not a reflection of objective reality, but rather a way to create meaning through language, images, and symbols. Hall asserts that **“representation is the production of meaning through language and images.”** In this context, Lydia Octavia’s campaign poster does not merely depict a female figure, but reproduces a certain way of viewing women’s bodies that is rooted in patriarchal culture (Stuart Hall, 1997). The phrase **“semok”** used in the poster is part of popular Indonesian slang that refers to women with full, plump, and sensual bodies. This term has a light erotic nuance and tends to be used in the context of objectifying women’s bodies. In political use, this term becomes a symbol of the commodification of women’s bodies, where the body is not only present as a representation of political humans, but also as a visual persuasion tool that targets dominant gender expectations.

The text colors in the poster are dominated by red and white, which are often associated with nationalism and courage in the context of Indonesian politics. In the analysis of the poster, both visual and text elements work together to create an image that is closer to the community, but also reflects how women in politics are still often represented differently than male candidates. The use of gender-based and physical identities reflects how politics in Indonesia still often uses personal aspects in campaigns, especially for female candidates.

According to Stuart Hall (1997), representation is the way language and symbols are used to construct meaning about the social world. In this case, the female body is used as a sign (signifier) to form a double meaning: as a gentle mother (mamah), as well as a visual object that is **“busty”**, sensual and attractive. Hall explains that

meaning is not formed directly, but through standardized cultural codes. Therefore, this poster not only contains visual information, but also reproduces patriarchal ideological codes. In Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) multimodal analysis, visual components such as pose, clothing, color, and direction of view become forms of discourse that contain certain meanings. If Lydia's body pose in the poster displays a feminine posture that tends to be "fashionable" or sensual, then this cannot be separated from the visualization strategy that adjusts the female body to the masculine tastes of the majority of voters. In the study of social semiotics, this form of representation is not only decorating, but also regulating the power relations between the subject and the audience.

Furthermore, Judith Butler (1990) through the concept of gender performativity states that the body is not only a location of identity, but also a medium of performance that repeats gender norms through style, action, and expression. In this poster, the body of a female politician is not only interpreted as a political subject, but also as a tool to appear as a showcase. Politics, in this context, is no longer just a space for ideas, but becomes an arena for feminine, sensual, and "entertaining" body performativity. This aspect can also be read as part of cultural hegemony, as stated by Antonio Gramsci (1971), that ideological domination occurs not through coercion, but through a cultural consensus that is considered "normal." (Antonio Gramsci, 1971),. Women who appear in the public political arena, but remain "curvy," are a form of compromise to patriarchal hegemony: women may participate, but may not leave the framework of sexual or domestic images accepted by society. This creates counter-productivity for women's emancipation in politics because women ultimately feel they have to dress up in a normative gender manner to be accepted as candidates.

Within the framework of Judith Butler's (1990) gender performativity theory, this strategy can be read as a form of gender performance that adapts to society's visual and symbolic expectations of women. Butler states that gender is not something that is owned, but something that is done repeatedly through actions, gestures, and representations (Judith Butler's, 1990). Thus, when a female legislative candidate consciously presents herself as "**Mamah Semok**", she is playing a gender performance in a political context that is still very masculine. In the Indonesian context, this phenomenon can also be read through the lens of "maternal politics" as described by Lies Marcoes (2018), where the identity as a "mother" is used as a tool for social negotiation so that women are accepted in the political space (Lies Marcoes, 2018). However, what happens in this poster is the overlap between "mother" and "sexual object" which is confusing, and has the potential to reduce women's position to just a symbol, not a political subject with critical ideas. Criticism of this body politics can also be drawn from Julia Suryakusuma's (Julia Suryakusuma, 2011) thoughts on State Ibuism, namely the state ideology that constructs women as mothers in all public and private roles. In this context, Lies Marcoes (2018) adds that the narrative of motherhood is often used by female politicians to negotiate a masculine political space so that they remain accepted by voters (Lies Marcoes, 2018). However, this strategy risks strengthening the hegemony that actually limits women's political agency.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the representation of female candidates in political campaign posters is still heavily influenced by the construction of patriarchal gender discourse. Through the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis approach, it was found that the use of visual elements such as body poses, facial expressions, fashion styles, and textual terms such as "Mamah Muda" and "Mamah Semok" construct women's bodies in the political realm as visual objects that are subject to masculine aesthetics.

This kind of representation reproduces the norms of emphasized femininity and domesticity, which is in line with Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity. In this context, the female candidate's body is positioned as a visualization tool that adapts to the dominant tastes of male voters, not as a critical and independent political agent. Thus, the political space becomes a negotiation arena that is not gender neutral, but rather perpetuates patriarchal norms through symbols of motherhood and the sensuality of the female body.

This phenomenon reflects that women's involvement in Indonesian politics has not been completely free from the ideology of body representation. Body politics and the symbolic use of women's bodies in campaigns show that women's agency in the political space is still conditioned by binding and limiting gender norms.

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