

Algorithmic Governmentality and the Construction of Political Truth: A Foucauldian Analysis of TikTok’s Role in Prabowo–Gibran’s 2024 Campaign

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Abstract

The shift in political campaigning style ahead of the 2024 election has been largely driven by technological advancements. Candidates increasingly utilised social media, particularly TikTok, to attract the attention of Gen Z and Millennial voters. This study aims to examine how the TikTok algorithm functioned as a political marketing strategy for the Prabowo–Gibran pair and to analyse the power relations embedded within their digital campaign. Employing a qualitative methodology the research uses content analysis techniques underpinned by Michel Foucault’s perspective on discourse theory. Were gathered through a literature review and observation of TikTok content. While content analysis identifies specific campaign patterns and strategies, the Foucauldian lens reveals the power relations operating within algorithmic mechanisms. The findings demonstrate that the Prabowo–Gibran campaign used the ‘gemoj’ dance, viral jingles, and AI-generated cartoons to engage young voters. Through discourse practices that shape a new ‘regime of truth’, the ‘reversal to real’ strategy successfully transformed Prabowo’s public persona from a stern military figure into a populist one. Furthermore, the power relations within Jokowi’s political network were widely disseminated via TikTok, with algorithms serving as a ‘technology of power’ that governed voter preferences and contributes to the pair’s victory.

Keywords: Algorithms; campaigns; election; governmentality; marketing; TikTok

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Introduction

In the modern era, digital transformation has fundamentally altered the landscape of political communication, with technology and algorithms now serving as the primary connectors in the democratisation process and the formation of public opinion. The way political players engage with audiences has shifted as a result of the transition from traditional mass media to algorithmically driven social platforms. Broadcast approaches have been superseded by personalised, interactive, and data-driven techniques. This phenomenon is also evident in Indonesia, where the adoption of digital technology and social media has transformed political

campaign models from conventional format to more interactive and content-based ones. These technological developments have brought significant changes to civic life, including political practices in Indonesia. Technological advancements and internet access provide opportunities for political actors to utilise social media as a primary instrument in digital campaigns. Recent studies show that the use of social media has become an important component of political marketing for reaching young voters and establishing a two-way relationship between candidates and the public (Moslehpour et al., 2024).

The use of algorithmic platforms in political campaigns is not unique to

Indonesia. Similar phenomenon have been observed globally, such as the Cambridge Analytica scandal during the 2016 United States Presidential election, where big-data analysis was used to map voter behavior and tailor campaign messages to specific audiences (Yovana and Gatra, 2022). More recently, the 2022 Philippine presidential election saw Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. employs TikTok as a central platform to rehabilitate his family's politics legacy through nostalgic content, viral dances, and youth-oriented memes (Mendoza, 2022). A comparative study by Febriana and Rahman (2024) on TikTok's role in Southeast Asian elections confirms that the platform democratises political expression by

lowering barriers to participation; however, it simultaneously magnifies post-truth dynamic and risks marginalising dissenting voices through algorithmic bias. These cases demonstrate that algorithmic platforms have become active participants in the construction of political reality worldwide, making the Indonesian case both locally significant and globally relevant.

In the past, open rallies, television commercials, and grassroots mobilisation by community leaders were the primary components of Indonesian political campaigns. However, the 2024 election marked a crucial turning point, with internet platforms taking centre stage in the national

discourse. A survey conducted in December 2023 by Kompas Research and Development found that 40 per cent of voters obtained their election-related information from social media, significantly higher than from online media (23.9 per cent) or television (29.6 per cent) (Sakti, 2023). These data underscore a massive migration of political attention, particularly among younger demographics who are digital natives. In the context of the 2024 elections, TikTok emerged as the most prominent social media site. It serves as both a communication tool and a catalyst for high levels of engagement. TikTok distinguishes itself from other platforms through its capacity

to deliver captivating and viral material via short video formats, making it a crucial venue for political actors to establish a connection with younger voters.

Indonesia's digital landscape provides fertile ground for TikTok-based political campaigning. According to Data Reportal, Indonesia had 139 million social media users in January 2024, equivalent to 49.9 per cent of the total population. TikTok specifically had 126.8 million users aged 18 and above, making Indonesia one of the TikTok's largest markets globally (Kemp, 2024). The platform's unique algorithmic architecture, which prioritises content discoverability based on engagement metrics rather

than follower relationships, allows political messages to reach vast audiences regardless of account size, provided the content aligns with trending patterns. This is evident from Drone Emprit survey, which shows that the Prabowo-Gibran pair significantly outperformed rivals on TikTok, garnering 376 million interactions during the campaign period based on the keywords such as 'Prabowo', 'prabowosubianto', 'gibranrakabuming', and 'prabowogibran2024' (Fahmi, 2024). This interpretation suggests that the pair conducted a highly effective campaign on TikTok, attracting greater attention and interaction than to other candidates. The Prabowo-Gibran team used TikTok's

unique vernacular, music, dancing, and memes to rebuild their political brand, in contrast to their rivals who primarily used social media for policy platforms.

The algorithm is a key component of this digital strategy. Political exposure for specific voter segments is indirectly determined by algorithms on sites such as TikTok that filter and distribute information according to user preferences (Tufekci, 2015). Based on behavioural data points such as watch time, likes, and shares, algorithms function as 'unseen censors', shaping the political reality that users experience. Algorithms must be studied not merely as technological advancements but as social and political phenomena that

impact the distribution of power and discourse in digital spaces. Currently, algorithms are considered more than just mathematical formulas; they are imbued with value and power dynamics that shape social norms and political outcomes (Mujhid, 2025). Furthermore, algorithms are not impartial technological systems. Within Michel Foucault's discourse theory paradigm, they must be viewed as a component of a power mechanism, namely a collection of practices that methodically mould the subject under discussion through the processes of content selection and distribution (Foucault, 2013).

According to Foucauldian philosophy, discourse is not merely a collection of signs or word; rather, it is an activity

that systematically forms the objects of which it speaks (Foucault, 2013). Discourse establishes the parameters of what can be said, who is authorised to speak, and what constitutes 'truth' within a given society. The viral strategies used in Prabowo–Gibran's on TikTok content, such as the 'gemoy dance', catchy jingles, or AI-generated visuals, are viewed as discursive practices. These contents consistently shape and reinforce a specific political persona: Prabowo as a personable, approachable individual who resonates with the younger generation. A new 'regime of truth' is constructed through the strategic repetition of these visual and aural signifiers. This regime effectively displaces historical narratives of Prabowo's

military background, replacing them with a reconstructed identity centred on accessibility and pop-culture relevance.

Furthermore, according to Foucault (1977b), 'power and knowledge directly imply one another; there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge.' In the digital age, this power-knowledge nexus is mediated by data. Algorithms gather intimate knowledge of user preferences and vulnerabilities, which is subsequently utilised to exercise power by directing attention and shaping political subjectivities. Within the context of TikTok, power-knowledge relations are at play as the algorithm actively generates and reinforces

particular political knowledge. This includes determining who is deemed 'worthy' of visibility and whose are suppressed within the digital public sphere, in addition to regulating content.

Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, as described in *Discipline and Punish* (1977a), centres on the Panopticon, an architectural figure that facilitates continuous surveillance and encourages individuals to internalise the gaze of authority, thereby regulating their own behaviour. The power of the Panopticon lies not in direct repression, but in its capacity to induce self-discipline through the mere possibility of being watched.

Although Foucault developed this framework within the context of

eighteenth and nineteenth century institutions such as prisons, schools, and hospitals, his analytical framework can be productively extended to understand contemporary digital platforms. This study argues that TikTok's algorithmic architecture operates as a functional 'digital Panopticon'. Here, surveillance is automatic and pervasive, carried out through the continuous tracking of user data including watch time, likes, shares, and dwell time. The disciplinary power generated is not exercised by visible guards, but by an algorithmic logic that normalises specific behaviours, preferences, and political content, prompting users to regulate themselves

according to the platform's incentives. This form of power is subtle and pervasive; it does not coerce conformity but rather encourages users to self-regulate and align their actions with algorithmic incentives. Consequently, to remain relevant TikTok users must normalise their habits and preferences to fit the patterns established by the algorithm, a process that exemplifies governmentality (Foucault, 1991).

Examples of how digital power technologies are used to alter political discourse include the prevalence of Prabowo-Gibran content, the virality of the 'gemoy' dance, and the transformation of Prabowo's public image through the 'reversal to real' tactic. Similar phenomena

have been observed globally; for instance, during the 2022 Philippine election, Bongbong Marcos utilised TikTok to rebrand his family's political legacy, demonstrating a global trend where algorithmic platforms are employed to rewrite political narrative. Although earlier research often praised social media as a neutral and democratic infrastructure, contemporary analysis necessitates a critical examination of platform power (Benkler, 2006; Shirky, 2008). However, significant gaps remain in research that applies a Foucauldian lens to analyse how algorithms function as tools of power in shaping political discourse, particularly in the context of the 2024 Indonesian general election.

Existing literature tends to prioritise communication strategies or quantitative engagement metrics, often overlooking the structural power dynamics embedded within and operated by the algorithmic infrastructure itself.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine how the TikTok algorithm functioned within the Prabowo-Gibran pair's political marketing strategy for the 2024 general election and to critically elaborate on the mechanisms and roles of power, discourse, and digital governmentality in influencing the political choices and perceptions of Indonesia's youth. This study utilises a qualitative desk-study methodology, combining critical analysis of

existing literature with digital ethnographic observation of TikTok content. Data collection was conducted from the start of the official campaign period on 28 November 2023 until polling day on 14 February 2024, covering the entire digital dynamics of the campaign.

This study focuses on Indonesia youth, defined as users aged 17-35 years, encompassing both Generation Z and Millennial demographics. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select and analyse 15 influential TikTok accounts that were central to the discourse surrounding the Prabowo–Gibran campaign. The observed accounts were categorised into three types: (1) official campaign channels (e.g., @prabowosubianto08,

@gibran_rakabuming); (2) content hubs generated by well-known supporters; and (3) influential political observers. Content was systematically tracked using a set of campaign-specific hashtags, including #prabowogibran and #koalisiindonesiamaju. Foucault’s discourse analysis framework, was subsequently applied to examine how TikTok’s algorithmic mechanisms function as a ‘technology of power’ that shapes voter subjectivity and regulates the visibility of political debate.

This study is grounded in Michel Foucault’s analysis of power, knowledge, and governmentality. Several key concepts are used as analytical guides. Governmentality refers to the

ensemble of institutions, procedures, analyses, and tactics that facilitate the exercise of power over a population; it transcends national borders to encompass various forms of knowledge and normalisation (Foucault, 1991). In the digital age, this concept has been expanded into ‘algorithmic governmentality’, which refers to modes of governance that rely on automated data processing and algorithmic logic to predict, pre-empt, and regulate social behaviour, often bypassing human consciousness and democratic deliberation (Rouvroy, 2020).

A central concept in understanding political campaigns is the ‘regime of truth’, a historical system that determines what is

considered true and who is authorised to speak the truth (Foucault, 1977b). Within this framework, power operates not only repressively but also productively through ‘disciplinary power’. This functions through continuous surveillance and internalised normalisation, as illustrated by the Panopticon architectural model (Foucault, 1977b). In the digital context, platform architecture functions as a ‘digital Panopticon’, facilitating continuous algorithmic surveillance.

Furthermore, discourse is understood not merely as language but as a practice that systematically shapes the objects it claims to describe (Foucault, 1972). Finally, this study employs the concept of ‘political technology’, defined

as a set of tools, techniques, and procedures through which power is exercised over a population (Foucault, 1977b). Collectively, these concepts provide a lens through which to analyse TikTok's algorithmic mechanisms as a 'technology of power' within the 2024 Indonesia general election.

Results and discussions

The analysis shows that TikTok's algorithmic architecture functions as a core mechanism of political power within the 2024 Prabowo–Gibran campaign, operating through two interconnected logics. First, the algorithm acts as a non-human political technology that systematically curates and amplifies content to shape the public image and

campaign narrative of the candidates. Second, the campaign harnesses this algorithmic logic to execute a highly effective digital marketing strategy by constructing and normalising a new 'regime of truth' that successfully reconfigured Prabowo's historical persona and mobilised youth support. The following sections delineate these processes, analysing the technical operations of the algorithm, the campaign's adaptive tactics, and the resulting power dynamics and social implications.

The mechanism of TikTok algorithm in political content distribution

This study finds that the TikTok algorithm functions as a sophisticated system that

determines the distribution of political content to users. Based on text and metadata analysis, the algorithm operates through four fundamental stages. To ensure adherence to the platform's community guidelines, the algorithm first examines the video. This initial screening act as a digital gatekeeper, ensuring that content does not violate policies regarding hate speech or misinformation, although the definitions of these categories can be ambiguous and subject to algorithmic bias. Secondly, the technology utilises factors such as hashtags, captions, popular music, visual effects, geography, and language to predict an appropriate audience. This predictive capability is central to the

algorithm's power, as it categorises users into micro-segments based on their potential interest, effectively creating personalised political feeds.

Thirdly, in order to evaluate performance ratings based on interactions such as comments, likes, saves, and shares, TikTok restricts the initial audience group of its videos to a test group of 300-500 accounts. This 'test phase' is crucial as it democratises viral potential to some extent, even accounts with few followers can achieve virality if their content resonates strongly with the initial group. However, this also necessitates that content be immediately engaging to survive this filter. Fourthly, only video with the highest interaction quality will have

their distribution increased; the algorithm determines the ratio by comparing a video's performance with similar content (The Infinite Agency, 2022). The cyclical nature of this process creates what may be termed 'algorithmic co-production', where content creators and the algorithm work in tandem to optimise for engagement. Each interaction, whether a like, comment, share, or even the viewing duration, feeds back into the system, refining its predictive models and adjusting future recommendations.

Furthermore, research by Brady et al. (2017) demonstrates that the algorithm exhibits 'engagement bias', a systematic preference for content that provokes strong

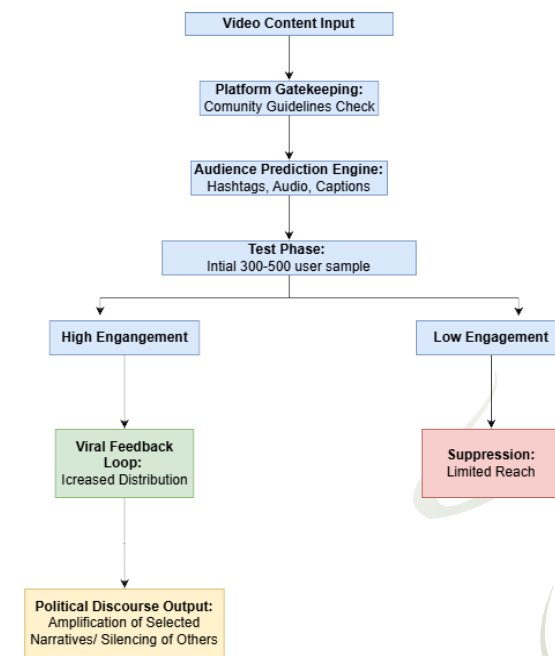
emotional responses. Their study found that the presence of moral-emotional words in social media messages increased their diffusion by approximately 20 per cent for each additional word. Consequently, political content that evokes emotions such as joy, outrage, or surprise tends to generate higher engagement and thus receives greater algorithmic amplification. This structural incentive has profound implications for political discourse, as it rewards affective appeals over reasoned deliberation and prioritises entertainment value over informational accuracy. This iterative process creates a feedback loop where high-engagement content is continuously

amplified while low-engagement content is suppressed, regardless of its factual merit or political importance. The mechanism can be visualised in figure 1.

This scheme illustrates the step-by-step process used by

TikTok's algorithm to regulate the visibility of political discourse. The process begins with automatic uploading and filtering, where the algorithm predicts the audience, test content on micro-segments, and expands or suppresses

Figure 1. The mechanism of TikTok algorithm in the distribution of political content



Source: Author's original illustration

distribution based on engagement levels. We refer to this process as 'algorithmic co-production'. This mechanism functions as a form of non-human digital filtering and a technology of power that shapes what becomes visible and normalised as political truth.

The fact that algorithms are more than just neutral technical systems is confirmed by this finding. Algorithms function as power structures that control the visibility and dissemination of political speech in digital space. Unlike traditional censorship which operates by suppression, algorithmic power operates by production and promotion. It does not necessarily forbid speech, but

rather drowns out certain discourses by amplifying others that align with its logic of engagement. According to Sianipar et al. (2025), algorithms operate as a 'digital Panopticon' that uses biopower technology to monitor and control user behaviour, establishing a 'regime of truth' that defines digital subjectivity and regulates information distribution. Users are not merely watched in this digital Panopticon; their actions are constantly examined in order to improve the system that govern them.

In this context, TikTok's algorithm systematically shapes political objects, namely the candidate's public image with campaign

narrative and voter preferences through selection and distribution mechanisms concealed behind the platform's technical interface. Empirical evidence from observed campaigns illustrates this process. The algorithm consistently reinforced content this performed well in engagement metrics (likes, shares, and watch time), such as the viral 'gemoy' dance video featuring Prabowo with influencers such as Ria Ricis, which generated 83,2 million views, funny AI-generated cartoons depicting Prabowo as 'cute', and catchy campaign jingles 'Oke Gas'.

The algorithm's preference for emotionally resonant and actively entertaining content actively builds a new

campaign narrative, namely the transformation of Prabowo's public image from a stern military figure to a friendly, approachable, and populist figure. As a result, this algorithm influences voter preferences through repeated exposure to normalised positive imagery, while content containing policy criticism or historical discussion receives far less attention and visibility. Foucault (1972) defined discourse as a 'practice that systematically forms the objects it speaks about' (Febriana and Rahman, 2024). By giving preference to stories that are emotionally charged, visually appealing, and easily consumable qualities that the Prabowo-Gibran campaign mastered, the algorithm

functions as a non-human discourse construction.

Political marketing strategy of Prabowo–Gibran campaign

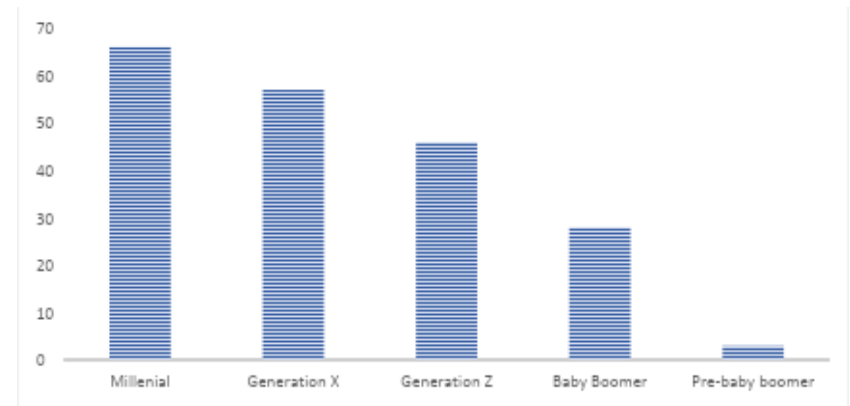
The analysis shows that the Prabowo–Gibran campaign team implemented a political marketing strategy that was highly adaptive to the logic of the TikTok algorithm. This strategy was built upon three core components of political marketing outlined by Firmanzah (2012): segmentation, targeting, and positioning. Crucially, specific campaign tactics are not treated as separate analytical layers; rather, they are analytically intergrated into each of these three stages, demonstrating a cohesive and algorithmically optimised campaign architecture. By aligning their tactics with

the platform’s features, the campaign team effectively ‘outsmarted’ the algorithm to maximise reach and influence.

a) Segmentation

In the segmentation stage, the campaign team identified the dominant user demographics on TikTok, namely Generation Z and Millennials, who together constitute approximately 56,45 per cent of the total voters in the 2024 election (Muhammad, 2023). This segment is characterised by digital savviness, a degree of political apathy towards traditional rhetoric, and a clear preference for authentic and entertaining content. The decision to utilise TikTok as the primary campaign tool was strategically based on this segmentation.

Figure 2. Voter composition in 2024 Indonesian election by age group



Source: Databoks Katadata (2023)

This integrated segmentation strategy was executed through two primary tactical channels. Firstly, ‘gemoy’ dance content involving high-profile influencers such as Ria Ricis, directly appealed to the cultural and aesthetic interests of this demographic. Secondly, AI-generated cartoons featuring a humorous and ‘gemoy’ depiction of Prabowo were

specifically tailored to the visual and entertainment-oriented consumption habits of young users.

b) Targeting

Targeting is carried out by utilising user behaviour data to identify potential voter groups and existing trends. The campaign uses data analysis to identify voting trends, visual styles, and topics that resonate with

segmented audiences, ensuring that content is tailored to algorithm preferences. Integrated targeting tactics include coordinated hashtags (e.g. #prabowogibran) to increase visibility and facilitate algorithmic grouping; viral jingles (e.g. 'Oke Gas') and memorable closing song utilise trending audio formats to increase shareability and engagement; and collaborations with influencers expand reach to established followers bases, effectively micro-targeting niche communities.

c) Positioning

Positioning was carried out through a 'reversal to real' strategy, which systematically changed Prabowo's public image from a stern military

figure to a friendly, humorous, and approachable person (Lubis & Wijayanto, 2023). This rebranding was a discursive shift designed with values oriented toward the younger generation. Integrated positioning tactics include the 'gemoy' dance and AI-generated cartoons visually reinforce the new, softer image; viral jingles and meme friendly content integrate the campaign into pop culture, positioning the candidate as relatable and contemporary; the integration of narratives with Jokowi's legacy (continuing Jokowi's programmes) is disseminated through engaging formats, transferring symbolic capital and legitimising the ticket. These create a widespread culture presence on the

platform, making the campaign feel less like political propaganda and more like a participatory pop culture phenomenon. Figure 3, which features 'gemoy' dance content with fans and influencers illustrates how this concept is implemented.

Data from Drone Emprit show the effectiveness of this strategy, with views of Prabowo–Gibran content soaring from 6 billion to 24 billion, resulting in a total of 376 million interactions during the campaign period (Fahmi, 2024). A study by Fulcrum

Figure 3. Examples of Prabowo–Gibran's 'gemoy' dance campaign content on TikTok



Source: (a) tiktok.com/@riaricis; (b) tiktok.com/@indonesiamajubanget

Singapore confirmed that the Prabowo campaign utilised all of TikTok’s features, including choreographed video, meme-able content, AI-generated visuals such as animations, and viral trends, to connect with young voters in a way unmatched by other media. The photober2.ai application recorded over 2.5 million uses within six weeks, turning ordinary user into amplifiers of Prabowo’s rebranding efforts (Jalli et al., 2025).

From Foucault’s perspective, these discursive practices are not merely communication strategies, but are also linked to mechanisms of power knowledge production. The campaign produced a new form of political knowledge where

‘authenticity’ and ‘relatability’ became the primary markers of leadership suitability, displacing traditional metrics like policy competence or human rights record. Political video dance ‘gemoy’, jingles, and memes are ‘statements’ within a discursive formation that repeatedly construct and legitimise specific political ideals. The more frequently that statement is replicated and consumed, the more dominant its position becomes as a ‘regime of truth’ accepted by young voters (Foucault, 1977b). This regime of truth effectively rendered alternative narrative, such as critiques of dynastic politics or past human rights abuses as irrelevant or ‘noise’ within the dominant algorithmic discourse.

Table 1. Voter preference for Prabowo–Gibran based on exit poll Indicator 2024

| Category | Percentage |
|------------------------------|------------|
| Generation Z | 71% |
| Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) | 59.3% |
| Income 1-2 million | 60.9% |
| Rural areas | 60.7% |
| Junior high school graduates | 63% |

Source: Indikator, 2024

The data presented in Table 1 reveals several significant patterns that merit further analysis. The overwhelming support from generation Z (71 per cent) confirms the campaign’s success in reaching its primary target demographic through TikTok. However, equally noteworthy is the strong support from voters affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (59.3 per cent), a traditionally moderate Islamic organisation that has

historically maintained different political alignments. This cross-over appeal suggests that the algorithmic campaign successfully transcended traditional political boundaries by creating a cultural phenomenon that resonated across diverse demographic segments. The high support from rural areas (60,7 per cent and lower education level (63 per cent among junior high school graduates) also raises

important questions about the relationship between algorithmic campaigning and information access. These findings indicate that TikTok's reach extends far beyond urban, highly-educated demographics, positioning it as a truly mass medium for political communication in Indonesia.

Echo chamber effect and political polarisation

This research also identifies algorithmic impacts such as the reinforcement of 'filter bubbles' and 'echo chambers' in the context of political campaigns. TikTok's algorithm tends to present similar content to users based on their previous preferences, creating a homogeneous information environment

(Pariser, 2011). A filter bubble is an individualised information universal that is highly dependent on how a person interacts with the internet, while an echo chamber is an environment where an individual is exposed only to opinions or information that support their existing views (Geschke et al., 2018). The echo chamber phenomenon on TikTok exhibits distinctive characteristics that differentiate it from similar effects on other platforms. Due to TikTok's emphasis on passive content consumption through the For You Page (FYP), users are less likely to actively seek out diverse perspective compared to platforms where content discovery is driven by search

or social connections. The algorithm's optimisation for 'watch time' means that users are continuously served content designed to keep them engaged, which typically means content that confirms their existing preferences rather than challenges them.

From Foucauldian perspective, this creates a fragmented discursive space where different 'regime of truth' operate in parallel, each reinforced by its own algorithmic logic, making cross-discourse dialogue increasingly difficult. The implications for democratic discourse are significant: supporters of different candidates often inhabit entirely different informational environments, reducing the possibility for meaningful

deliberation across partisan lines. In the context of the 2024 elections, users who have been exposed to Prabowo-Gibran content will continue to receive similar content, reinforcing existing political beliefs and reducing openness to alternative viewpoints (Az-zahra et al., 2021).

An algorithmic curation creates a self-reinforcing loop where users are constantly affirmed in their choices, leading to a fragmented public sphere where different voter groups inhabit entirely different realities. Philips (2024) found a significant correlation ($r = 0.65, p < 0.01$) between the level of engagement in echo chambers and the expression of extreme political views,

which contributes to polarisation. This polarisation is not necessarily ideological but affective; users feel a stronger emotional connection to their chosen candidate and a deeper alienation from opponents, driven by the emotionally resonant content served by the algorithm. A study by the Centre for Digital Society at Universitas Gadjah Mada confirms that the TikTok's algorithms bias towards specific political candidates renders user more, vulnerable to believing misinformation (Palijama, 2024). The implication is that political support can be mobilised rapidly and on a massive, yet the space for deliberation and criticism is becoming increasingly narrow.

From Foucault's perspective (1991), this mechanism constitutes form of 'digital governmentality', a pattern of controlling and regulating populations that operates subtly through knowledge, preferences, and subjectivities shaped without explicit coercion. Digital governmentality differs from traditional disciplinary power in that it does not rely on physical confinement, but on modulation. It controls individuals in open environments by modulating their access to information and manipulating their range of choices. The algorithm disciplines the way users conceptualise politics by systematically conditioning what is deemed worthy of being consumed and

internalised as political truth. Users, in turn, participate in their own subjugation by actively engaging with and propagating the content that aligns with algorithmic logic, thereby becoming both subjects and agents of this nascent form of power.

Power relations in digital campaign network

The research findings indicate that power relations played a significant role in the success of the Prabowo–Gibran digital campaign. According to the Ipang Wahid Stratejik survey, President Joko Widodo's approval rating reached 75 per cent (Lubis and Wijayanto, 2023). The campaign team leveraged this symbolic capital by building a sense of closeness between

Prabowo–Gibran and Jokowi through harmonious and positive digital narrative. This strategic alignment was not subtle; it was systematically embedded in every piece of content, creating a visual and narrative continuity between the popular outgoing president and his would-be successors. Gibran's image as the President's son and Prabowo's as Jokowi's Defence Minister became political capital that was effectively communicated via TikTok content.

The narrative of 'continuing Jokowi's programmes' was disseminated through engaging content formats such as dancing, jingles, and memes, making it more easily accepted by voters who are Jokowi partisans. This

transfer of legitimacy was facilitated by the algorithmic tendency towards content clustering. Users who previously engaged with pro-Jokowi content were automatically served pro-Prabowo content, creating a seamless 'algorithmic bridge' between the two political brands. Data from exit polls confirms the effectiveness of this strategy: voters from the Nahdlatul Ulama base, which is not traditionally a Prabowo Stronghold, contributed 59.3 per cent of the votes (Indikator, 2024).

The mechanism through which Jokowi's political capital was transferred to the Prabowo-Gibran ticket deserves closer examination through a Foucauldian lens. In this case, the TikTok algorithm

functioned as a political technology that enabled the seamless transfer of legitimacy without requiring formal endorsement or explicit policy continuity. The algorithm's content-clustering feature meant that users who had previously engaged with pro-Jokowi content were automatically identified as potentially receptive audiences for pro-Prabowo content, creating an invisible bridge between the two political brands. This algorithmic mediation of political succession represents a novel form of power transfer that bypasses traditional democratic mechanisms. Unlike formal endorsements, which can be scrutinised and debated, algorithms operate beneath

the threshold of conscious awareness, raising fundamental questions about the nature of political agency in the algorithmic age.

Fulcrum notes that the support of former President Jokowi was a critical factor enabling this strategy to succeed. By positioning his eldest son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, as a vice-presidential candidate through a controversial Constitutional Court ruling, Jokowi expanded his political influence while simultaneously helping the ticket attract young voters (Jalli et al., 2025). This manoeuvre demonstrates how traditional political power can be amplified and laundered through digital platforms. Within Foucault's

framework, this pattern of power distribution is 'capillary', not top down, but flowing through networks, produced by content, creators, disseminated, reinterpreted by audiences, and redistributed through duet and repost features (Foucault, 1977b). Power is no longer held solely by the state or political parties but is dispersed throughout the social body, operating through millions of micro-interactions on screens. Algorithms become mediators that enable the transfer of political loyalty to occur without direct coercion, solely through digital 'situational identification' amplified by content virality. In this capillary network, every user who likes or shares a campaign video becomes

a node in the power structure, unwittingly participating in the reproduction of the dominant political discourse.

Critical insights and ethical considerations

Although algorithmic strategies have proven effective, this research also identifies a several ethical risks that necessitate consideration. Firstly, algorithms tend to reinforce existing views, potentially exacerbating political polarisation (Rahmawati, 2018). This polarisation threatens the democratic ideal of a shared public sphere where diverse opinions can be debated. Secondly, algorithms can be utilised to rapidly disseminate misinformation, damaging candidate's

reputations and influencing public opinion (Perdana, 2023). The speed at which misinformation travels on TikTok, driven by engagement metrics rather than accuracy, makes it nearly impossible to correct false narratives once they have taken root. Thirdly, a lack of algorithmic transparency results in bias within the presentation of information (Sahputra, 2023). Users are often unaware that their feed is a curated reality, leading to a false sense of informedness. Fourthly, reliance on digital technology renders campaigns vulnerable to technical issues or platform policy changes.

Jalli et al., (2025) highlight that Prabowo's campaign approach also contributes to the marginalisation of diverse

voices and critical perspective from the mainstream. Although counter-narrative of enclaves persist, complex questions about policy proposals or past controversies are largely absent from the dominant discourse, filtered through algorithmically curated campaign strategies on TikTok. Substantive political debate is replaced by performative gestures, reducing citizenship to spectatorship. From Foucault's perspective, this critique points to the disciplinary dimension of algorithmic power. The algorithm operates as a mechanism that systematically restricts the space for criticism and minority voices, not through

explicit bans, but through the 'selective visibility' concealed behind technical logic (Sianipar et al., 2025). By rendering critical discourses invisible or algorithmically unprofitable, the system effectively silences dissent without ever having to formally censor it. The production of political discourse has become highly centralised around agendas supported by algorithmic logic, while alternative narrative struggle to gain an equal platform.

The ethical concerns raised by algorithmic political campaigning extend beyond individual elections to the nature of political discourse itself. When political success becomes primarily dependent on algorithmic optimisation

rather than substantive policy proposal, a shift toward 'performative politics' occurs, where the appearance of leadership qualities matters more than their substance. In Foucauldian terms, this represent a transformation in the 'discursive formation' of political legitimacy, where virality and engagement replace competence and accountability as the primary markers of political worthiness (Foucault, 2013). The algorithm thus not only distributes existing political discourse but actively reshapes the very criteria by which political actors are evaluated. Moreover, as Febriana and Rahman (2024) observe in their comparative study of Southeast Asia

elections, TikTok democratises political expression by lowering barriers for participation but simultaneously magnifies post-truth dynamics and risks marginalising dissenting voices through algorithmic bias. This paradox of democratisation coupled with potential manipulation, representing a fundamental challenge for electoral integrity in the digital age.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that the TikTok algorithm is not merely a neutral technical instrument, but a productive tool of power that shapes the visibility of political discourse, constructs voter subjectivity, and

mediates the distribution of power in the 2024 general election. Prabowo–Gibran's highly adaptive political marketing strategy, which leverages the logic of the algorithm through 'gemoy' dance content, viral jingles, AI-generated cartoons, and collaborations with influencers, has successfully created a new 'regime of truth' that transforms the candidate's image and attracts massive support from young voters. By mastering 'algorithmic grammar', the campaign was able to reshape the political narrative, turn potential weakness into assets, and mobilise a generation of voters through emotional engagement rather than ideological alignment.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its demonstration of how Foucauldian concepts, such as governmentality, disciplinary power, and regimes of truth, can be productively adapted to analyse algorithmic politics. However, this adaptation also reveals certain limitations that are instructive rather than invalidating. Foucault's concept of governmentality was developed in the context of centralised physical institutions such as prisons, hospitals, and schools, which rely on direct surveillance and physical confinement. When applied to user-generated decentralised digital platforms such as TikTok, this framework requires careful

reinterpretation, as digital power operates through voluntary participation, continuous data monitoring, and algorithmic modulation rather than overt coercion. Moreover, although users are subject as potential producers of alternative discourses, albeit within the structural constraints imposed by the platform's architecture. These limitations do not diminish the usefulness of Foucauldian analysis, but rather point a necessary evolution. This study proposes that algorithms be understood as a contemporary technology of power that operationalises what Rouvroy and Berns (2013) refer to as algorithmic governmentality, namely a mode of governance that relies on automated data processing and machine

learning to predict, encourage, and modulate social behaviour without direct coercion, often operating below the threshold of conscious awareness and democratic deliberation. This represents a significant shift from Foucault's disciplinary society toward what Deleuze call a control society, where power is continuous, limitless, and embedded in the structures of everyday digital interactions. Therefore, while Foucault's framework remains fundamental for understanding the productive and discursive nature power, it must be expanded to consider the unique logic of algorithmic platforms, a task that represents a promising direction for future theoretical development.

In addition to its theoretical implications, this research has urgent practical relevance. These findings highlight the need for greater algorithmic transparency, robust critical digital literacy education, and a regulatory framework capable of mitigating the risks of filter bubbles, political polarisation, and substantial degradation of political discourse. Young voters, who are most immersed in the information sphere driven by platforms, must be equipped with analytical tools to recognise and critique how algorithmic forces shape their political preferences and perceptions. Political actors and platform companies must also be held accountable for ensuring that algorithmic campaigns do not undermine democratic integrity by

prioritising emotional engagement over factual accuracy or visibility of discursive diversity. Future research should expand this analysis through comparative studies of algorithmic campaigns in different national and cultural context, long-term investigations into the persistence of algorithmically induced political preferences, and interdisciplinary collaboration between political science, computer science, and law to develop robust methods for auditing algorithmic bias and promoting platform accountability.

Finally, the 2024 Indonesian presidential election is an important case study in the global rise of algorithmic politics. The success of the Prabowo-

Gibran campaign demonstrates how mastery of platform logic can alter public perception and election outcomes on an unprecedented scale. For academics, this case offers rich material for formulating theories about the complex interrelationship between technology, power, and democracy in the digital age. For political practitioners, it provides both a template and a warning about the techniques and consequences of algorithmic campaigning. For citizens and

voters, it highlights the urgent need to develop critical awareness of how political preferences are shaped by systems operating outside conscious awareness and control. Therefore, the key question is no longer whether algorithms will continue to shape political outcomes, which is now a reality, but whether democratic societies can develop the institutional, educational, and ethical capacity to ensure that algorithmic power serves rather than undermines the core values of democratic life.

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