



Roland Barthes' Semiotic Analysis of Prabowo - Gibran's Use of Fashion in the 2024 Presidential Election

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Abstract

Fashion as a form of political communication during the 2024 Presidential Election in Indonesia, this study aims to explore how fashion was utilized as a medium of political communication by the presidential and vice-presidential candidates Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka, with a focus on the visual representations displayed through the social media platform Instagram. In this context, fashion is not merely seen as a matter of clothing style, but as a set of signs that carry political, symbolic, and ideological meanings. This research employs a qualitative method through a literature study by analyzing various scholarly sources and visual documentation obtained from the official Instagram account @prabowo.gibran2. The theoretical framework is based on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, which outlines the process of meaning-making through three key stages: denotation (literal meaning), connotation (cultural meaning), and myth (the underlying ideological narrative within signs). The findings reveal that the fashion choices worn by Prabowo-Gibran during the campaign conveyed strong nonverbal political messages. For instance, Prabowo's signature militaristic style constructed an image of firmness and nationalism. Meanwhile, Gibran's light blue varsity jacket adorned with anime motifs highlighted youth identity and a non-conventional approach to politics. Most iconically, the frequent use of light blue shirts and casual clothing represented simplicity, a sense of closeness to the people, and youthful energy. These meanings were visually constructed and consistently repeated across various posts, forming a political myth that portrayed Prabowo-Gibran as an ideal duo combining seasoned leadership with youthful vigor.

Introduction

As social beings who live within a community, in our daily routines we are constantly engaged in communication activities. Communication is an integral foundational science that influences and enriches all aspects of human life. It not only studies how people communicate but also analyzes its impact across various disciplines. Essentially, communication facilitates the exchange of ideas between individuals and groups (West & Turner). This enables communication studies to contribute to many applied fields such as psychology, management, journalism, politics, counseling, and even fashion. Communication can be categorized into two types based on language: verbal and nonverbal communication. Verbal communication refers to direct forms of communication, whether through spoken interaction or writing. However, some people may assume that verbal communication is the only form of communication, while in fact, nonverbal communication is equally important for every individual to understand (Alaudinova, 2022). Nonverbal communication is expressed without words, but through facial

expressions, body language, eye contact, tone of voice, proximity, touch, as well as appearance and clothing.

One form of nonverbal communication is semiotics, a discipline that studies signs and symbols and their use in the communication process (Dash & Davis, 2022; Pankow, 2022). Semiotic communication is not limited to spoken or written language but also encompasses nonverbal aspects such as gestures, facial expressions, body language, and other unspoken symbols (Ibrahim et al., 2022; Agwu et al., 2024). The importance of semiotics in daily life, especially in the context of nonverbal communication, lies in its ability to allow individuals to interpret deeper meanings from what they see or feel without relying on words (Saussure, 1916). In nonverbal communication, semiotics plays a crucial role in interpreting signs and symbols. In the context of this study, clothing and accessories serve as signs in nonverbal semiotics. The way someone dresses can communicate a great deal about their identity, social status, or even mood. For instance, choosing to wear formal attire at a particular event may signify respect and seriousness, while casual clothing might signal a more relaxed and informal atmosphere.

Over time, fashion has become a form of cultural change. Generally, fashion represents jewelry, style, and clothing. Clothing ranging from shirts, pants, jackets, to uniforms acts as a symbol of identity and is inseparable from human development and cultural history (Salma, 2023; Salma & Falah, 2023). In other words, fashion can be seen as a social strategy that conveys messages and lifestyles of individuals or communities, forming part of social culture. In the era of globalization, particularly with the rise of the internet, communication has entered a transformative stage (Henner & Robinson, 2023; James et al., 2022; Fangni, 2025). Information no longer depends on time and place, as the internet enables virtual communication without spatial limits (kemendigbud.go.id). Today, fashion in any domain can be accessed virtually, with new media allowing individuals to interact without physical presence (Aririguzoh, 2022; Dhami & Mandel, 2022; Palmer, 2024).

General Elections, especially the Presidential Election, are highly competitive events held every five years in which candidates compete for public support (Valencia et al., 2023; Courchesne et al., 2022; Burtell & Woodside, 2023). To gain this support, they must employ various communication strategies, both verbal and nonverbal (Permadi, 2024). One of the most intensively used means of conveying vision, mission, and positive image is through fashion, such as campaign clothing and other body-worn attributes. Here, fashion is not merely aesthetic; it becomes a strategic nonverbal communication tool. Campaign outfits worn by supporters, for example, act as mobile media of movement that help attract wider support. The clothing style of a presidential candidate can reflect their personality, beliefs, and values. Some voters may even assess how a candidate dresses as an indication of professionalism, confidence, or alignment with their supporters. This aligns with the view that fashion serves as a communication tool to express a person's social identity, showing who they are and categorizing them within social groups (Laksmi, 2017).

The two main ideas discussed here nonverbal communication through semiotics and fashion are then connected with the political maneuvering of Prabowo–Gibran in the media, particularly through fashion dominated by the color blue in their cabinet. This choice of fashion conveys signs and symbols beyond mere aesthetic elements. The author intends this study to provide a literacy framework for understanding both the explicit and hidden meanings behind the semiotics of Prabowo–Gibran's blue attire in various public appearances. Here, semiotic theory becomes relevant in linking fashion with communication and political communication, offering tools to analyze media narratives by uncovering the meanings embedded in fashion symbols. As stated by American sociology professor Alex Thio, "Fashion is a great though brief enthusiasm among relatively large numbers of people for a particular innovation."

Fashion is something people *do*, not merely something they wear. Referring to Roland Barthes' Fashion System theory (1990), the way we dress functions as a sign that reflects who we are and what cultural values we embrace. Thus, clothing is no longer viewed as neutral or trivial (Hartono & Hidayatullah, 2019).

From this perspective, fashion can be understood as a powerful communication medium that conveys complex messages about identity, social status, values, and group affiliation. Through their appearance, Prabowo–Gibran communicate without words the identities they wish to project to society. Their use of blue fashion plays a significant role in shaping social interaction and transmitting layered meanings. Fashion, as part of nonverbal semiotic communication, includes artifactual expressions such as clothing, accessories, and styling. Colors, too, function as signs and symbols that vary in interpretation across social contexts. Thus, communicative styles in dress influence public perception and convey messages related to social status and class.

In this study, the focus is on how the color blue consistently worn by Prabowo–Gibran operates as a semiotic symbol. While their outfits vary across campaign events, the underlying message conveyed by this color remains deliberate and strategic. Literature on semiotics in the context of presidential elections remains limited, which motivates the author to examine how fashion, particularly dominated by blue, was used in Prabowo–Gibran's campaign to convey symbolic meaning. Here, blue does not only serve an aesthetic purpose but also carries deep connotations and symbolism within Prabowo–Gibran's political communication. By analyzing this through Roland Barthes' semiotics, the study seeks to enrich our understanding of fashion as cultural language in politics. Fashion in the political context, as observed during the 2024 presidential election and after Prabowo–Gibran's victory, becomes a fascinating academic subject. The symbolic use of blue has become prominent not only among their supporters during the campaign but also in governmental events and among ministers and presidential envoys. Using Barthes' semiotic framework, clothing can be understood at three levels: denotation (literal meaning), connotation (cultural associations), and myth (ideological narratives that naturalize meaning) (Barthes, 1990; Barthes, 2013). This framework allows us to see fashion not just as "what is worn" but as a producer of political imagery that shapes public perception. The dominance of Prabowo–Gibran's blue fashion can therefore be seen as a defining color in Indonesian politics during this election cycle. With the rise of digital media, particularly Instagram, where around 103 million users in Indonesia were active by early 2025 ($\approx 36\%$ of the population), visual narratives became central in shaping public opinion (Ratcliffe, 2024). Given the demographic dominance of young voters aged 17–40, Instagram served as the most relevant medium for projecting the political imagery of Prabowo–Gibran.

Methods

Research Approach

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach; a type of qualitative research aimed at providing a detailed and in-depth description of the phenomenon under study. Rather than testing hypotheses or producing statistical generalizations, this approach emphasizes contextual understanding and interpretation of meaning (Toding, 2024). In this case, the phenomenon explored is the symbolism of Prabowo–Gibran's fashion during the 2024 presidential campaign, as reflected in their social media presence. The descriptive qualitative design is suitable because the researcher seeks to portray naturally occurring visual representations without manipulation of variables. The ultimate outcome of this study is a qualitative interpretation of signs and meanings embedded in their campaign fashion, rather than numerical data.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is the main instrument of data collection, simultaneously functioning as the designer, observer, interpreter, and author of findings. In this study, the researcher adopts the role of an observer-participant, analyzing digital artifacts in the form of Instagram campaign posts. While the researcher does not intervene directly in the campaign process, the role requires active interpretation of visual texts, colors, and fashion symbols within the socio-political context. Reflexivity is also maintained, with the researcher acknowledging the influence of personal perspectives while striving for objectivity in interpretation.

Research Site

The study is conducted in a digital fieldwork context, focusing on Instagram as the primary platform where campaign visuals are disseminated. Several accounts were identified as active in promoting Prabowo–Gibran during the 2024 election: @prabowogibran (269k followers), @prabowo.gibran (34k), @prabowo_gibran29 (41k), and the official campaign account @prabowogibran2 (496k). Among these, @prabowogibran2 was selected as the main source of data because it is the official account and has the largest following, making it the most representative channel of the campaign's intended messaging.

Sources of Data

The data sources consist of both primary and secondary materials. The primary data include visual documentation of Prabowo–Gibran's fashion posted on Instagram during the campaign period and after their electoral victory. These visuals function as key texts for semiotic analysis. The secondary data are derived from scholarly literature books, journal articles, reports, and archives relevant to semiotics, political communication, and fashion studies. Following Eriksson (2018), literature review in qualitative research serves not only as theoretical grounding but also as comparative material to contextualize findings. Thus, the combination of visual campaign texts and academic literature provides a strong foundation for interpretation.

Data Collection Techniques

The main technique used in this study is documentation analysis. This involves systematically collecting and recording visual materials that exhibit symbolic patterns, particularly the recurrent use of blue in Prabowo–Gibran's campaign fashion. Only images that clearly highlight distinctive fashion elements (color, attire style, or accessories) are included as data. In addition to visual artifacts, relevant written texts such as captions, hashtags, and contextual descriptions accompanying the Instagram posts are also considered to enrich interpretation. Secondary literature is gathered through academic databases, online archives, and published works, which serve to strengthen theoretical and comparative analysis.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis follows the principles of qualitative inquiry, beginning from data collection through to the final reporting stage. The analysis process is conducted in three main steps: Collected data are filtered to focus on key elements fashion symbols, colors, and visual cues relevant to semiotic interpretation. The reduction process involves organizing and categorizing data to identify recurring themes and patterns. The reduced data are then presented systematically to allow clearer interpretation. Data are displayed in narrative descriptions supported by nonverbal illustrations such as images, charts, or matrices. This step enables the researcher to trace symbolic consistencies across different campaign contexts. The final step involves synthesizing findings into meaningful interpretations based on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Each visual element is analyzed at three levels: denotation (literal

meaning), connotation (cultural associations), and myth (ideological narrative). Conclusions are continuously verified against the collected data and theoretical framework to ensure consistency and reliability.

Validity of Findings

Ensuring validity is crucial in qualitative research to guarantee the trustworthiness of findings. This study applies several strategies: Combining multiple data sources visual Instagram posts and secondary literature enables cross-verification of findings. The research design and preliminary interpretations are subject to review by academic peers to enhance credibility. A transparent record of data collection, coding, and interpretation processes is maintained to allow replicability. The researcher critically reflects on personal biases and acknowledges how these may shape interpretation (Creswell, 2012). validity in qualitative research can be established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. By employing triangulation, peer review, and systematic documentation, this study ensures its interpretations are both rigorous and reliable.

Results and Discussion

Research Findings

The 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election clearly demonstrated how candidates utilized digital platforms, particularly Instagram, to shape their image and engage with voters. Presidential and vice-presidential candidates Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka became a fascinating phenomenon, as Prabowo is a senior military figure who had previously contested in two presidential elections, while Gibran is a young figure and the eldest son of the incumbent president, Joko Widodo. Their partnership is intriguing not only from the perspective of political power but also from the standpoint of communication, as they combined Prabowo's political experience with Gibran's generational appeal to millennials. They were supported by a campaign team under the banner of the "Advanced Indonesia Coalition".

KIM was established as a "big tent" coalition consisting of nine political parties backing Prabowo Subianto as the presidential candidate and Gibran Rakabuming Raka as the vice-presidential candidate in the 2024 election. The coalition brought together major parties as well as those without parliamentary seats, making it a "fat" coalition with broad-based support. The list of parties supporting Prabowo-Gibran included Gerindra, Golkar, PAN, Democrat, PBB, Gelora, Garuda, PSI, and Prima, the latter of which did not qualify as an official participant in the 2024 election (Hardiantoro, 2024).

Political Communication by Prabowo – Gibran

In their campaign, KIM employed various political communication strategies. Political communication, as a field of study, examines processes such as framing, agenda-setting, the two-step flow, and propaganda. According to McNair (2021), political communication involves three main actors: citizens, the media, and political organizations. Their interactions shape public opinion and the trajectory of democracy.

Through their political communication, Prabowo and Gibran successfully conveyed their vision and mission, shaped public opinion, and exercised control over campaign narratives through social media, debates, advertisements, as well as public mobilization and interactivity. Prabowo employed a confrontational and aggressive style, while Gibran appeared more passive and accommodating a combination that proved effective in attracting public attention during debates. A key aspect of their strategy was the rebranding of Prabowo with a "gemoy" (cute and cuddly) image, promoted through AI-generated TikTok avatars and viral videos. This reframing effort made him more relatable to younger voters. A study by Sriwijaya University

(2024) revealed that positive sentiment among young voters toward the Prabowo-Gibran pair reached 71%, indicating the effectiveness of their digital communication.

Communication in campaigns is not merely a tool but the essence of the campaign itself. Without effective political communication strategies, messages cannot be delivered, narratives cannot be constructed, and voter support cannot be measured. The case of Prabowo–Gibran in 2024 demonstrates how image reframing (“gemoy” persona, AI avatars), contrasting debate styles, advanced digital approaches (use of influencers and sentiment analysis), and non-verbal elements such as fashion, all integrated within the framework of political communication theories like framing, agenda-setting, two-step flow, and media analysis, became crucial to their electoral success.

Instagram

Within the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election, Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka actively adopted political communication strategies, making extensive use of social media especially Instagram as one of their primary channels for connecting with the public. In politics, the use of symbols and narratives is vital to constructing a strong image and garnering support. Therefore, semiotic analysis is essential to interpret hidden messages in visual symbolism, such as clothing and personal style, which function as powerful forms of non-verbal communication (Maulana, 2024).

This study specifically focuses on Instagram as a data source because the platform is not only a medium of communication but also an arena where fashion, as a social and political symbol, is strategically employed to construct and project political identity. Campaigns on Instagram are a vital aspect of contemporary elections, especially in Indonesia, as the platform offers significant advantages in reaching voters, particularly younger demographics. The Instagram account @prabowo.gibran, as of the time this research was written, had 496,000 followers and 1,162 posts. However, this study focuses on @prabowo.gibran2 as the primary source of data for semiotic analysis of fashion. This choice is based on its relevance to political communication, particularly in the context of their campaign strategy, which heavily relied on social media to engage audiences.

Wide Reach and High Accessibility

Instagram has more than 132 million active users in Indonesia, making it one of the largest social media platforms in terms of reach. This enables the Advanced Indonesia Coalition (Koalisi Indonesia Maju, KIM), as the campaign team for Prabowo–Gibran, to disseminate information quickly and effectively without geographical limitations. The use of Instagram in the context of an election campaign maximizes the spread of information to a broad audience, particularly the younger generation, who are highly active on the platform.

Direct Interaction and Two-Way Communication

Features such as comments, direct messages, and live streaming allow the Prabowo–Gibran campaign team to directly interact with voters. This creates two-way communication that strengthens the relationship between the candidates and the electorate. The campaign team actively utilized various popular social media platforms, especially those favored by young voters (millennials and Gen Z), such as Instagram. Research indicates that Instagram served as one of their main campaign channels, functioning both as “a tool for constructing a positive image” and as a space for interaction with supporters (Sihalahi, 2024; Smith, 2019). The official Prabowo–Gibran account (@prabowo.gibran2) regularly uploaded campaign photos and videos, highlighting the candidates’ programs and messages. Examples of interactive engagement included informal Q&A sessions, replies from the official account, and interactive

content such as AI-generated photos and dance challenges. These efforts illustrate a participatory campaign model. Data analysis shows this approach successfully increased campaign visibility among young voters (Efendi, 2024), although concrete measures remain necessary to ensure that voter aspirations are genuinely accommodated.

Effective Visual Strategy

Instagram prioritizes visual content, such as images and short videos, which are highly effective in conveying Prabowo–Gibran’s political messages. Visual content is easier for voters to process and remember, and can be tailored to the preferences of younger audiences. To attract young voters, the campaign team relied on fresh and consistent visual strategies, particularly through fashion. Throughout the campaign, Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka consistently showcased distinctive styles of dress. Visuals shared via social media especially the official Instagram account @prabowo.gibran2 featured their fashion choices as an integral component of political communication.

Youth Engagement

Generation Z and millennials represent the most active Instagram users, who also tend to be more critical and engaged in political issues. Creative and authentic campaigns on Instagram can significantly increase their political participation, as seen in the 2024 election. According to the General Elections Commission (KPU), millennials (born 1981–1996) and Gen Z (born 1997–2012) formed the majority of the electorate. Data shows that millennials accounted for approximately 68.8 million voters (33.6% of the Final Voter List/DPT), while Gen Z made up around 46.8 million (22.85%). Combined, these two groups totaled ~115.6 million voters, or 56.45% of the national electorate (Laloan, 2023). These figures indicate that young voters (ages 17–30) represent roughly one-third of the electorate, while together Gen Z and millennials dominate more than half of Indonesia’s total voters.

Cost and Resource Efficiency

Compared to traditional campaign methods, campaigning through Instagram is significantly more cost-efficient. The Prabowo–Gibran campaign team was able to produce and distribute content at relatively low cost, making it an efficient option particularly for candidates with limited budgets. Instagram offers a more affordable avenue for political campaigning than conventional media such as television or print advertising. The platform enables Prabowo–Gibran to create and share content with minimal expense, making it a practical choice (Rohma, 2024).

Influence on Candidate Image

The effective use of Instagram can shape the public image of Prabowo–Gibran, either positively or negatively. Consistent and relevant content strengthens political identity and increases electability. Enli & Skogerbø (2017) emphasizes that social media, particularly Instagram, plays a crucial role in shaping candidate image through photos and videos that convey political messages. Consistent visual content including symbolic messaging and visual narratives has a more immediate and memorable impact on voters compared to text alone. Similarly, Lilleker & Negrine (2015) highlight that effective social media campaigns, with carefully designed visuals, help candidates strengthen their image and build emotional connections with younger voters, who are the most active users of social media.

Taken together, these six factors demonstrate that Instagram is an indispensable tool in contemporary election campaign strategies. The platform allows candidates to reach wider audiences, interact directly with voters, and deliver political messages effectively and efficiently. Among these factors, the most emphasized in this study is the visual element,

particularly the fashion choices of Prabowo–Gibran, which serve as powerful semiotic tools in political communication.

Communication is the foundation of every political campaign, including that of Prabowo–Gibran. Without effective communication, their messages could not reach, be understood by, or influence voters. This study is grounded in political communication, focusing on how the Prabowo–Gibran campaign structured, disseminated, and received political messages through mass media, debates, and particularly social media. In this case, the Prabowo–Gibran campaign on Instagram fulfills all the classic elements of communication, as outlined below:

Communicator (Sender)

Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka act as the communicators in their Instagram campaign. While campaign teams manage the accounts, all uploaded content reflects the candidates' identity, vision, and personal style. Official accounts such as @prabowo, @gibran_rakabuming, and @prabowo.gibran2 serve as their digital representation, delivering both explicit and symbolic political messages (e.g., through fashion choices, expressions, or activities).

Message

The messages conveyed on Instagram consist of both verbal and non-verbal elements. Verbal messages are presented through captions, slogans, video narratives, and infographics featuring visions, missions, campaign promises, or speech excerpts. Non-verbal messages are reflected through fashion (e.g., blue attire symbolizing stability and nationalism), gestures, and informal interactions with citizens. These messages are structured and symbolic, aligning with semiotic approaches in political communication.

Media (Channel)

Instagram, as a visual and interactive digital platform, functions as the primary medium. It offers several advantages: rapid and wide distribution of messages, especially among young audiences; multiple features (Reels, Stories, Feed, and Live) that support visual and narrative campaigns; and a space for personal branding and two-way communication with followers.

Audience (Receiver)

The audience consists of the Indonesian public, particularly young voters (Gen Z and millennials), who are among Instagram's most active users. Content is designed to be relatable to youth lifestyles. Importantly, the audience is not passive; they actively respond through likes, comments, direct messages, and reposts.

Effect (Feedback)

The effects of the campaign can be seen in increased electability and digital presence for Prabowo–Gibran during the campaign period. High engagement in comments and shares signaled strong interaction. A fresh, positive image was shaped especially through fashion choices and narratives of simplicity and solidarity. Additionally, organic hashtags and support from netizens emerged as visible outcomes. The Prabowo–Gibran Instagram campaign thus meets all the elements of communication comprehensively, while enhancing them with a strong visual dimension. By integrating semiotics (fashion and color symbolism), political narratives, and interactive two-way communication, Instagram became their central platform for digital political strategy. The use of Instagram as the primary data source in this research focusing on fashion and semiotics is therefore highly relevant. As a visual-first platform, Instagram enables an in-depth analysis of how fashion elements such as Prabowo–Gibran's consistent use of blue

attire, stylistic choices, and clothing combinations operate as political and cultural symbols in their campaign, particularly as shared through the @prabowo.gibran2 account.

Fashion Communication as a Sign

The official Instagram account of the Prabowo–Gibran pair, @prabowo.gibran2, serves as a visual archive documenting their campaign journey. Through uploaded photos and videos, the public can see the consistency and the intended messages reflected in their choice of sky-blue outfits. In the 2024 Presidential Election campaign, Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka utilized visual communication through fashion to deliver powerful political messages and to construct an image of leadership that is inclusive yet rooted in Indonesian culture. The uniqueness of their fashion, whether in campaign events or during the inauguration, carried profound symbolic meanings (Mranani, 2024).

Didit Hediprasetyo's Role in Campaign Fashion Design

Didit Hediprasetyo, son of Prabowo Subianto, played a significant role in designing the fashion concept for the Prabowo–Gibran campaign team. Didit was actively involved in various campaign events throughout the 2024 election not only as a companion but also as the designer behind the campaign's signature outfits. Every fashion element, from color to design, was carefully crafted to create a consistent and easily recognizable visual identity. As an internationally recognized designer and the son of the president-elect, his involvement added extra value to Prabowo–Gibran's campaign image.

The campaign emphasized sky-blue and white outfits as symbols of their movement. Both the candidates and their campaign team frequently appeared in sky-blue shirts or checkered jackets. Didit himself designed the sky-blue jackets worn by Prabowo and Gibran during the final presidential debate. Moreover, the youth campaign team (TKN Pemilihan Muda) launched campaign merchandise (such as T-shirts and sweaters) designed in part by Didit, showing that fashion was not merely about appearance but also a powerful political communication strategy.

Didit's credentials as a Paris Fashion Week and haute couture designer reinforced the sense that the campaign was not only political but also professional, modern, and sophisticated. His expertise elevated the campaign fashion into a branding tool that was consistent, global in outlook, and stylish.

Examples of his contributions include: Campaign Uniforms: The campaign team often wore sky-blue vests or jackets designed by Didit, consistently showcased during rallies, debates, and press conferences. Candidate Outfits: Prabowo and Gibran frequently appeared in iconic sky-blue checkered outfits, including jackets specially designed by Didit for the final presidential debate. Campaign Merchandise: Didit contributed to the design of campaign merchandise, some of which was made available for public download and reproduction as creative products supporting the campaign. The color choice of sky-blue was explained by Didit's collaborators as symbolizing peace and serenity, akin to the calmness of a clear sky. The checkered motif combined with red-and-white arrows pointed to the right was interpreted as a symbol of progress and national pride.

Use of Blue as a Symbol of Identity

Blue became the signature color of the Prabowo–Gibran campaign. The choice went beyond visual identity and carried strong symbolic meaning. Blue is often associated with stability, trust, and peace values that the pair aimed to project as part of their vision for a better and more harmonious Indonesia (Mranani, 2024).

Betawi Traditional Attire (Ujung Serong) at the Inauguration

At the 2024–2029 Presidential Inauguration, Prabowo and Gibran wore Betawi traditional attire, specifically Ujung Serong. This was the first time such attire was worn at a state inauguration, symbolizing respect for local culture and the diversity of Indonesia. The inclusion of blue shades in these outfits further enriched the symbolic meaning, representing continuity, change, and inclusivity in leadership (Mranani, 2024). Public discussions highlighted two shades of blue: Sky Blue (#87CEEB), called “Oligarchy Blue,” and Dark Blue (#000072), called “Resistance Blue.” Analysts noted how these two blues symbolized different narratives one tied to power, the other to resilience and resistance.

Fashion as a Tool of Political Communication

Fashion functioned as a deliberate tool of political communication for Prabowo and Gibran. The uniformity of blue outfits among campaign teams suggested unity and discipline, while traditional attire at the inauguration emphasized respect for heritage and national identity (Purnama, 2024). For instance, during the campaign, the candidates and their supporters frequently wore sky-blue attire designed by Didit, which created a sense of freshness and modern professionalism compared to other candidates. Fashion, therefore, reinforced the collective identity of the campaign. The “Gemoy dance” performances, where Prabowo and Gibran danced playfully with supporters in matching blue outfits, projected a humanized and approachable image, appealing directly to young voters (Pratama, 2025). Fashion here was more than aesthetics it was a symbolic language. According to George Herbert Mead’s symbolic interactionism theory, appearances generate symbols interpreted by the public. Sky-blue symbolized unity and professionalism, traditional Betawi attire expressed cultural respect, and casual, playful moments like the “Gemoy dance” conveyed accessibility and warmth (Pratama, 2025).

Visual Documentation as a Symbol of Choice

The Instagram account @prabowo.gibran2 acted as a visual archive of their campaign journey, consistently highlighting the “Prabowo–Gibran Blue.” This fashion choice became a non-verbal communication strategy, signaling political identity and fostering collective belonging. Influencers and celebrities also reinforced this identity by wearing campaign-themed blue outfits, aligning themselves with the “02 supporter community.” when public figures wear the same political fashion as grassroots supporters, it strengthens perceptions of shared identity and solidarity. Thus, campaign clothing became both a personal identity expression (“I support them”) and a collective identity marker (“We are part of this movement”). Sneakers and Local Brand Fashion as Political Signs The use of sneakers instead of formal shoes reinforced Gibran’s image as relaxed, energetic, and approachable. Furthermore, his choice of local brands for shirts and footwear communicated support for domestic MSME (micro, small, and medium enterprises) products while projecting a modest lifestyle. As reported in the media, Gibran wore a locally made M7B blue shirt and Aerostreet sneakers priced under Rp 150,000 during a campaign in Bali. The connotation here is that Gibran presented himself as a young figure who is down-to-earth and anti-elitist, unashamed to wear inexpensive, locally produced goods. Overall, Gibran’s fashion conveyed the image of a “millennial politician”: modern, creative, humorous (he even laughed at himself by wearing a “Samsul” meme jacket), yet still rooted in local culture and attentive to ordinary people.

The Myth of Gibran’s Youth Style

At the mythical level, Gibran’s fashion constructed an ideological narrative of political renewal and generational leadership. The myth built is that politics can be conducted in a fresher, more inclusive, and contemporary manner without losing its essence. By wearing anime-inspired symbols and casual clothing, Gibran mythologized himself as a figure of the “golden

generation leader” borrowing the term from his frequent campaign theme of Indonesia Emas. He positioned himself as the mythic “creative youth agent of change.”

His fashion projected the ideology that future leadership must be attuned to young people, technology, and pop culture, ensuring that policies align with the spirit of the times. Another implied myth was authenticity and anti-formality as positive values. Through his attire, Gibran naturalized the idea that a good leader need not always wear formal suits; a leader could don an anime jacket and still be serious in addressing national issues.

This aligns with the global phenomenon of young leaders blending in with the public (for instance, wearing hoodies or rolled-up shirts) popularizing the myth that “being informal is being authentic.” For audiences, Gibran thus became a symbol of political hope for a more egalitarian and relatable leadership close to the everyday life of young citizens. This myth complemented Prabowo’s myth, so that together the Prabowo–Gibran pair represented an alliance of Tradition and Modernity on the political stage.

Light Blue as a Political Code

Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming consistently wore light blue shirts during the 2024 presidential debates. The choice of light blue became a key visual element of their campaign, projecting calmness and friendliness to the public (Toding, 2024). (Source: IG @prabowo.gibran2)

Denotation of Light Blue as a Political Code

One of the most consistent and striking fashion elements of the Prabowo–Gibran pair was their use of light blue (baby blue) clothing during the campaign. Throughout the 2024 presidential election period, they frequently appeared in coordinated light blue shirts. For example, in every official debate, Prabowo and Gibran made sky-blue shirts their signature look. Prabowo often paired his with a dark suit for a formal touch, while Gibran usually rolled up his sleeves for a more casual impression. In the final debate, both appeared in light blue varsity jackets, further solidifying the color as their campaign’s visual code. Beyond the debate stage, light blue was also visible across campaign photoshoots, volunteer bomber jackets, event backdrops, and merchandise such as Gibran’s popular “Samsul Jacket” in sky blue. At the denotative level, light blue had become the visual identity of candidate pair No. 02.

Connotation of Light Blue as a Political Code

Light blue carried a series of connotations that aligned with the campaign strategy of Prabowo–Gibran. In color psychology and political culture, blue is commonly associated with calmness, stability, and trust. Light blue in particular conveys a lighter, cooler, and more peaceful atmosphere (Toding, 2024) compared to dark blue or “hot” colors like red. For Prabowo, long perceived as stern and combative, wearing light blue shirts softened his image. Research on the 2024 debate noted that the choice of light blue gave Prabowo a more relaxed and warm aura, signaling an attempt to appear approachable (Toding, 2024). Paired with dark trousers and black shoes, Prabowo maintained seriousness while projecting greater accessibility. For Gibran, light blue symbolized youthful calmness and optimism less intimidating than darker shades, yet still professional. Politically, the choice also suggested coalition symbolism: blue is the color of the Democratic Party and PAN (Prabowo’s allies), but baby blue leaned toward neutrality and modernity, reflecting a fresh collaborative spirit. Additionally, light blue connoted technology and the future (clear skies, the blue tones of digital platforms), aligning with the campaign’s Indonesia Emas vision of a forward-looking nation. In short, light blue communicated the message: “We are ready to lead calmly and bring new hope” a connotative image carefully cultivated for the pair.

Myth of Light Blue as a Political Code

At the mythical level, Prabowo–Gibran’s consistent use of light blue reinforced an ideological narrative of harmony and renewal in politics. The color helped construct the myth that candidate pair No. 02 represented peace and a fresh stability after years of political polarization. Light blue naturalized the idea that their leadership embodied calmness (like a clear sky) while symbolizing modern progress. Another myth embedded was cross-generational and cross-group unity: unlike party-specific colors (e.g., PDIP’s red), baby blue was broadly acceptable, creating the perception that their coalition was inclusive and embracing.

The color also evoked the sky and the flag, contributing to a myth of national togetherness under one sky. From a Barthesian perspective, their consistent appearance in light blue transformed the color into a recognizable sign, which over time was mythologized as a symbol of serene change. The public became habituated to associating light blue with Prabowo–Gibran, effectively branding the color as shorthand for their leadership identity. The myth of “light blue = Prabowo–Gibran” was thus established, mobilizing emotional resonance whether calming swing voters or appealing to young voters who favor soft, aesthetic tones. Ultimately, this case illustrates how even the simplest fashion element color choice can evolve into a powerful political signifier, encoding visions and values into the campaign’s visual identity. (Source: IG @prabowo.gibran2)

Fashion in Shaping the Political Image and Communication of Prabowo–Gibran

From the discussion above, it is clear that fashion played a central role in shaping the political image and communication strategy of the Prabowo–Gibran ticket in the 2024 presidential election. Using Roland Barthes’ semiotic framework, we can see how each fashion element from clothing styles and accessories to color choices was deliberately constructed to produce denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings that advanced their campaign. At the denotative level, Prabowo and Gibran projected contrasting yet complementary looks: Prabowo with his formal–military style signifying authority and experience, and Gibran with his casual millennial style signaling dynamism and youth. These visual contrasts allowed them to appeal to different voter segments while presenting a cohesive candidate package.

At the connotative level, fashion conveyed subtler campaign messages. Prabowo’s simple military-inspired attire evoked the image of a strong yet humble leader recalling past authoritative figures but rebranded as more approachable (Toding, 2024). Gibran’s casual, pop-culture-infused outfits connoted innovation, youth appeal, and grassroots solidarity. Their shared use of light blue further reinforced connotations of calmness, trustworthiness, and optimism. At the mythical level, fashion solidified the overarching narrative of their campaign: the union of experience and renewal. Prabowo’s attire evoked myths of the “guardian general” or “national warrior,” while Gibran’s evoked myths of the “youthful reformer” or “future leader.” Together, they mythologized the idea that strength and innovation must unite across generations for the nation’s progress. As Barthes explains in *Mythologies*, signs can be elevated into myths to naturalize ideology. In this case, Prabowo–Gibran’s fashion normalized the idea that a former general and a youthful populist could stand together as the ideal leadership formula: continuity of strength blended with generational change for the good of the nation.

Conclusion

The findings of this study affirm that fashion is a powerful form of nonverbal political communication. Every element of the clothing worn by Prabowo–Gibran functions as visual rhetoric, conveying subtle messages to different groups of voters. Through Barthes’ semiotic analysis, it becomes clear how the literal meaning of clothing develops into specific connotations, eventually crystallizing into political myths that reinforce the candidates’ image.

In the 2024 Presidential Election, Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming utilized fashion as a strategic tool of communication: their modest military style and light blue “millennial” jackets were not merely aesthetic choices but deliberate efforts to shape perception. As a result, fashion helped communicate their vision, mission, and desired persona without excessive words projecting impressions of being firm yet approachable, youthful yet capable, and strong yet refreshing leaders. This aligns with the view that politicians’ clothing can be interpreted as symbolic within the semiotic framework, serving as a medium to communicate political messages and leadership identity. Fashion communication in the Prabowo–Gibran campaign was not simply about appearance but an effective strategy for delivering political messages and constructing leadership image. With Didit Hediprasetyo’s involvement in fashion design and the use of blue as their symbolic color, they successfully built a strong visual narrative that resonated with society. Thus, it can be concluded that fashion significantly shaped the political image of Prabowo–Gibran, serving as an implicit medium of communication that bridged the candidates with the hearts and minds of voters in the 2024 Presidential Election.

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