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## The Construction of Candidate's Political Image on Social Media: A Thematic Analysis of Facebook Comments in the 2014 Presidential Election in Indonesia

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THE CONSTRUCTION OF CANDIDATE'S POLITICAL IMAGE ON SOCIAL  
MEDIA: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF FACEBOOK COMMENTS IN THE  
2014 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN INDONESIA

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
Communication Studies

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by  
Siti Adwyah Rachim Marpaung Malik  
March 2017

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March 2017

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the construction of the Indonesian Presidential candidates' image during the 2014 presidential election from the perspective of Facebook users. I analyzed Facebook users' comments derived from one of the candidate's Facebook pages, Prabowo Subianto, by employing a thematic analysis to examine an official posting's comments on June 19, 2014 where a group of celebrities supported Prabowo Subianto. Comments were extracted from June 20, 2014 to July 8, 2014, which was 20 days before election day. Results indicated that the construction of a candidate's image involved the relationship between the perceived attributes of the candidate and national identity; the relationship between the candidate and his supporters; the perceived personality traits of the candidate, and the ability of supporters to identify with the candidates on a personal level. Moreover, there were also inferences related to political scandals, their treatment by other politicians, spiritual values, and the future state of the country. The study also showed how users tried to make sense of their political world by simplifying the complexity of a candidate through the use of particular themes.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Statement

In the context of online political discourse, social media have the potential to facilitate a variety of forms of political activity among people. The increased utilization of social media platforms involving online social networking sites (SNS), such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, has provided ample opportunity for politicians to create a dialog with prospective constituents, propose their upcoming programs, promote their electability, and orchestrate fame for themselves for the purpose of raising greater political capital (Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison, & Lampe, 2011; Wheeler, 2013). Along with that, SNSs allow users to generate political content, participate in political discussions, converse about politics with other individuals, and acquire information about the candidates (Stieglitz, Brockmann, & Dang-Xuan, 2012; Vitak et. al., 2011).

The efficacy of SNS for political purposes, especially Facebook, was clearly seen during the 2008 U.S. presidential election. Facebook successfully facilitated Barack Obama's presidential campaign, especially in reaching local constituents who were politically unengaged (Smuts, 2010). Although some scholars have argued that Obama's win was not due to Facebook interactions, his campaign strategy, which clearly involved social media in an unprecedented way, showed that Facebook and other social media platforms can coexist with the structured traditional media to assist Democratic politics at grassroots levels

(Johnson & Perlmutter, 2010; Wen, 2014). More recently, the relevance of Facebook was evident in the 2014 presidential election in Indonesia, in which candidates incorporated Facebook to heighten public participation in the campaign process (Anggraini, Mustofa, & Sadewo, 2014). Arguably, using SNSs is particularly important during an election campaign because it enables politicians to establish a political arena that can affect the results of elections (Stieglitz, Brockmann, & Dang-Xuan, 2012).

To date, Facebook has reached more than one billion daily active users internationally and is placed as the most popular SNS in the U.S. (Facebook Newsroom, 2016; Pew Research Center, 2016). In Indonesia, Facebook is the most visited site nationally according to a Web-based marketing company, Emarketer (2016). Additionally, among countries with the most Facebook users in the 19-34 age category, Indonesia is in fourth position, just below India (Emarketer, 2016).

With such a tremendous number of users, Facebook has gained considerable attention from political scholars. Existing political communication literature has focused, for example, on the effect of Facebook on political participation and its effectiveness among college students (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Vitak et. al., 2011), the benefits of political Facebook groups (Wooley, Limperos, & Oliver, 2010), the motives of voters using Facebook groups during the 2008 presidential election (Fernandes, Giurcane, Bowers, & Neeely, 2010), or the relationship between Facebook and political cynicism during election

(Hanson, Haridakis, Wagstaff, Rekha, & Ponder, 2010). Studies on the use of Facebook during international elections include the use of Facebook among German politicians (Stieglitz, Brockmann, & Dang-Xuan, 2012), the discourse of Taiwanese political actors (Wen, 2014), the influence of Facebook during the 2014 presidential election in Indonesia (Anggraini, Mustofa, & Sadewo, 2014), the use of Facebook by the political parties in Macedonia (Emruli, Zejneli, & Agai, 2011), and the political branding of Facebook by female Romanian politicians (Savulescu & Vitelar, 2012). In addition, scholars have also studied how social media, like Facebook, affected voter perceptions of images of political candidates (Dimitrova & Bystrom, 2013).

Although previous studies have examined the role of Facebook in politics in cultural contexts outside the U.S., there is little research on the use of Facebook in Indonesian politics. The purpose of my research is to explore how Indonesians used Facebook during the 2014 presidential election to draw conclusions about the role of social media in constructing political images of the presidential candidates. This research is specifically concerned with the interpretations coming from the discourse of Facebook users. The 2014 presidential election is particularly interesting because the polarization effect between the candidates remarkably energized ordinary citizens to engage in political discussions through Facebook. There also seemed to be a growing trend, in regards to political strategies, where political actors were more focused on building strategic public images of themselves rather than emphasizing their

political parties. In fact, previous analyses of the 2009 presidential election revealed that candidates employed various strategic maneuvers involving traditional media as a way to promote their public images (Prasetyawan, 2012). Although previous studies have explained the way political actors constructed their public images, research on the capacity of citizens to make sense of these candidate images needs more attention. Studying images of presidential candidates formulated by social media users is important because it offers insights about the degree of political knowledge found in citizens and helps to better understand how they translate the current political situation in Indonesia.

Hence, I propose the following research question: How do Indonesian voters construct the images of presidential candidates on Facebook?

The present study involves a thematic analysis of users' comments on one of the presidential candidates' official Facebook page, Prabowo Subianto, over a period of 20 days prior to the presidential election. By analyzing a sample of users' comments, I seek to understand how public opinion develops around certain discourse themes that rationalize the inferences voters employed to describe images of the candidates. The analysis of users' comments distinguishes the study from other scholarly research which has focused on how Facebook generates social activism (Lim, 2013; Gazali, 2014; Molaei, 2015), the level of civility of political discussion on Facebook (Molaei, 2014), and the quality of political discussion on Facebook during the 2009 Indonesian presidential election (Molaei, 2014).

It is crucial to study Indonesia because of its unique position as the world's third largest democracy, which in turn makes it interesting as a "living laboratory" for social media studies (Gazali, 2014, p. 426). In this context, it is important to see the dynamics of online political conversations among Indonesian users, particularly since the candidates were considered populist elites, an aspect missing in previous elections. By assessing how Indonesian Facebook users interact in a political context, this study contributes to advancing the knowledge concerning Facebook's capability to facilitate political discourse in a country where "the democracy is still in its infancy, unlike the U.S" (Ananta, Arifin, & Suryadinata, 2005, p. 34).

## CHAPTER TWO

### HOW VOTERS CONSTRUCT IMAGES OF CANDIDATES

This chapter focuses on several concepts necessary for understanding how voters construct the images of political candidates as part of public opinion formation. In the following, I review the notion of public opinion, the role of candidate image in the formation of public opinion, and the role of social media in the process. This review will offer an understanding of the factors that contribute to voters' perceptions when interpreting their political world.

#### Public Opinion

Public opinion has been conceptualized differently by various social science scholars, and how it was defined depended on “how it is communicated” (Larson, 1999, p. 133). For example, public opinion can be looked at as opinion distribution, which is an outcome of poll results (Blumer, 1948), but also as an outcome of sociological process (Peters, 1995).

The construct of public opinion in the political setting has its roots in Greek culture (Peters, 1995), but in Western culture, public opinion as a concept only started to emerge in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Habermas, 1989). Since the first emergence of opinion in the political realm, intellectuals have differentiated opinion from knowledge, and considered the notion of opinion separated from the notion of truth (Peters, 1995). One of the classical philosophers, Plato, proposed

that *doxa* (or opinion) was “a popular belief,” transient and free from philosophical rigors (Peters, 1995, p. 4).

Aristotle, perceived opinion as “a part of human activity since all human action is historical, practical, and contingent” (Peters, 1995, p. 4). Aristotle further asserted that to act wisely, “humans need wisdom that comes from accumulated experience of human affairs” (Peters, 1995, p. 4). The Greek philosophers also saw opinion as the outcome of a decision process derived from “aggregate views” (Peters, 1995, p. 5). Similarly, 17<sup>th</sup> century thinkers conceptualized opinion as a source of “prejudice, probability, and authority, which makes it a contradiction to the components of *episteme* (knowledge)” (Peters, 1995, p. 4). Opinion was perceived as a decision that lacked certainty; something similar to Plato’s perspective (Peters, 1995). In respect to public affairs, opinion rested on state power or “the consent of the governed” and represented people’s support for government authority (Peters, 1995, p. 5).

It is interesting to note that the notion of “public” has contributed dramatically to transforming opinion, and, like “opinion,” “public” has been conceptualized differently since the period of the Greeks and Romans (Peters, 1995, p. 6). According to Taylor (1990), the notion of public can be referred to “what matters to the whole society, or belongs to this whole society, or pertains to the instruments, or institution or loci by which the society comes together as a body and acts” (p. 108). In other words, “public occurs in the loci of public space

and becomes a sociological aggregate” (Massam & Dickinson, 2011; Peters, 1995, p. 7).

Initially, “public” was recognized abstractly by people and it was “privately restricted by race, class, and gender” (Carey, 1995, p. 380). However, since the public spaces were filled with workers and merchants from different social classes, “public” became something that carried “specific social information involving a group of strangers who gathered in public houses and discussed political issues” (Carey, 1995, p. 380). Strangers in this context referred to those congregating in public places to debate the news. In other words, these publics were formed in an open context (Carey, 1995).

History shows that for a public to be formed, it needs an outlet where strangers can have a proper conversation and regular contact with one another, as well as issues to talk about, as circulated through newspapers and pamphlets (Carey, 1995). Mass media, therefore, allowed the construction of the conversationalist (Carey, 1995). Another aspect that is important for public formation is the existence of public places where “strangers could gather and share opinions” (Carey, 1995, p. 381). Therefore, a public is more than just a group of strangers, but rather a political power that goes “beyond the State and its representatives” (Carey, 1995, p. 382). A public, according to Papacharissi (2002), “suggests ideas of citizenship, commonality, and things not private, but accessible and observable by all” (p. 10). This conception of the public marks the

shift from considering power as the prerogative of the State to recognizing power in the public and public discourse.

Habermas (1989) argued that the public sphere was “a place for social interaction outside the private sphere (the home) and the sphere of public authority (the state/court) whereby people meet in a space that promotes sociability, equality, and communication to form public opinion” (Calhoun, 2012, p.75). It is due to the “broader political and social arena” within the public sphere that the meaning of public opinion shifted throughout different eras (Glynn, Herbst, Lindeman, O’Keefe, & Shapiro, 2016, p. 27; Habermas, 1989).

Essentially, the meaning of public opinion and how people express it are always shifting since public life itself is constantly changing (Habermas, 1989). The emergence of the public sphere was facilitated by a distinct characteristic of the 18<sup>th</sup> century European bourgeoisie society operating in the realm of London coffeehouses, Parisian salons, and German table societies (Calhoun, 2012). In these coffeehouses and salons, groups of people gathered together freely to engage in an open rational debate free from social ranks and political strata (Habermas, 1989; Huda, 2010), without regard to economic and political interests (Graham, 2015). Essentially, in the formation of public opinion, the continuous development of rational discourse was supported by the active reasoning constructed by the public (Dahlberg, 2004; Graham, 2015). Habermas (1989) also points out the main difference between the realm of coffeehouse and salon life by highlighting women’s participation in the salon’s construction, a role not

performed in coffeehouses (Calhoun, 2012). Unlike salons, coffeehouses feature a space open to any individual with enough money to purchase coffee. In salons, by contrast, the guests depended on the selection made by the salon hostesses who had “the power to allow and deny guest entry” (Calhoun, 2012, p. 75). In summary, the formation of the public opinion as we understand the concept today, was crucially dependent on the emergence of a public sphere.

Mass media played an important role in the formation of public opinion. According to Bryce (1888), “public opinion formation happens through four different organs: the press, public meetings (especially those that occur during the political campaign), elections, and citizen associations” (as cited in Strömbäck, 2013, p. 17). As suggested by Anstead and O'Loughlin (2015), in a contemporary setting, social media may be considered a new venue where opinion becomes manifest, as it enables voluntary public meetings and citizens' associations (Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2015). More recently, Foshay (2016) remarks that an important aspect of the public sphere is that it goes beyond the free flow of information collected in the public space to include active participation and the construction of social activity that involves “collective public will” (p. 233). Thus, the Internet may be considered an online forum akin to a public space for the expression of deliberative politics (Papacharissi, 2002). However, as a public sphere, the Internet may act as a political instrument able to facilitate discussion that allows exchange of ideas and positions. In other

words, virtual space “enhances discussion; a virtual sphere enhances democracy” (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 11).

### The Role of Social Media in Public Opinion Formation

The expansion of social media sites has changed both how public opinion research is carried out and how researchers access user information about their emotions, thoughts, and behavior (Murphy, Link, Childs, Tesfaye, Dean, Stern, Pasek, Cohen, Callegaro, & Hardwood, 2014). Furthermore, as mentioned by Murphy et al., (2014), the proliferation of social media platforms and the number of opinions expressed on SNSs may become an alternative set of data for scholars. In the following, I offer a brief review of recent scholarly research concerning the role of social media in public opinion studies.

Social media have become a valuable source to analyze opinion interaction and formation since they provide a tool for people to participate in the production, consumption and distribution of information (Lim, 2013; Xiong & Liu, 2014). Through social media, users are forming their opinions based on the “synthesis and contrast of viewpoints”, of their networked friends (Gionis, Terzi, & Tsaparas, 2013, p. 1). It is important to note that opinion formation derived from social media is different from that based on traditional media and is also more complex when compared to real word interaction (Xiong & Liu, 2014). This is because social media allow information diffusion to happen faster and discussion can be done anonymously (Xiong & Liu, 2014).

Given their rapid expansion, social media platforms continue to receive attention from many scholars, including those who are interested in the process of public opinion formation on Facebook and Twitter. A study by Xiong and Liu (2014), for example, was dedicated to investigating opinion formation on Twitter. Using more than one million Twitter posts, these authors assessed users' sentiments. The results showed that public opinion has the tendency to develop in an ordered state in which only a limited number of opinions (in this case, one point of view only) dominates the conversation. Furthermore, the data also demonstrated that users are more likely to express an opinion and maintain it rather than make an alteration. Interestingly, users' actions were consistent with their opinions and had the potential to influence other users.

Another scholar examined the way social media were involved in the opinion formation of Islamic movements in Egypt (El Gazzar, 2013). Using users' comments on Facebook and Twitter, the study postulated that opinions and comments from social media would reflect specific frames of expressions that can be used to predict public opinion surrounding the society. The findings suggested that the negativity expressed towards Islam in social media parallels the higher frequencies of anti-Islamists in actual events. In other words, the negative public opinions are based on the current situation. One important implication from this study is that social media can be used as a tool to judge the public since it reflects opinions of civilians rather than as a medium that caused the Arab Spring.

Research also showed that social media could be used to understand public opinion surrounding the 2010 general election in the U.K. (Anstead & O’Laughlin, 2015). Using Twitter comments, the results demonstrated that opinion formation on Twitter reflected public opinion formulated by political journalists in offline traditional media settings. Lee, Choi, Kim, and Kim (2014) conducted a similar study focusing on political discussions with specific attention given to social media and their relationship with opinion polarization. Results indicated that individuals who use Facebook and Twitter are more likely to have polarized opinions. However, it is important to note that this polarization is experienced by individuals who already hold strong opinions and have greater awareness of public affairs. One important finding from this study was that social media, in the context of public opinion, are largely dependent on the individual characteristics of users and the structure of the social media itself.

Another study demonstrated that Twitter has the potential to be a monitoring tool of public opinion for political actors during the election period (Frame & Brachotte, 2015). More specifically, Twitter allows users to capture predominant public sentiment surrounding certain issues that occurred in the online realm using a real-time monitoring system. French politicians have used public media to sense what they call “the temperature” of public opinion, which then give them insights into which relevant resources should be transferred for their constituents (Frame & Brachotte, 2015, p. 280). Ultimately, politicians are

strategically showing their constituents that they are becoming part of an on-going political discourse.

Connecting with the results above regarding opinion polarization, it is important to note that social media can potentially create what Sunstein (2001) referred to as group polarization. With this concept, “like-minded individuals with similar opinions are engaged in discussion to fortify their pre-existing views, and to move toward more extreme points of view in the general direction in which they were already tending” (Sunstein, 2001, p. 5). This condition is popularly known as the “echo-chambers” (Sunstein). Sunstein (2001) further explained that when individuals are primarily interacted with other individuals who belong to the same political party, “there is a potential for the development of different forms of extremism, and for profound mutual misunderstanding within individuals outside the group” (p. 5). The “fragmentation of public sphere or echo-chambers can be strengthened by the nature of social media that allow people to find others who have similar opinions or positions like them” (Batorski & Grzywinska, 2017, p. 4). In addition, the notion of a sharp group polarization is strongly apparent in the 2014 presidential contest between Prabowo and Jokowi, especially within each supporter who takes part in the virtual sphere of Facebook.

### The Role of Facebook in Election

Though Facebook was initially intended to create and maintain interpersonal ties within its online community members (Woolley, Limperos & Oliver, 2010), the transformative use of Facebook during the 2008 presidential

election in the U.S. illustrates the growing potential of social media as an outlet of political participation for candidates and users (Vitak et. al., 2011). For the first time, Facebook partnered with a traditional media company, ABC News, to combine news feeds and online political activity (“ABC News”, 2007) into an application that enabled both the streaming of a presidential debate and user dialogue before, during, and after that debate (“ABC News”, 2007; Carlise & Patton, 2013). In other words, the application worked as an extension of the actual debate, which aired in one-hour sessions (“ABC News Joins”, 2007). The application also allowed users to follow ABC reporters who continually updated news stories and documented the situation on the ground throughout the campaign process (“ABC News Joins”, 2007). Considering such an extensive collaboration, Facebook played a prominent role in facilitating a new form of political communication during the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign (Carlise & Patton, 2013).

During political elections, social media have the capacity to affect the decision-making process of potential voters, which in turn, may benefit certain political interests (Metaxas & Mustafaraj, 2012). In practice, social media analysts have also reported that social media platforms enable the manipulation of the number of followers claimed by candidates (Metaxas & Mustafaraj, 2012). These authors, for example, noted that in the 2012 U.S. presidential election, the candidates received more than 110,000 followers in only one day, however, Peterman’s analysis (2012, as cited in Metaxas & Mustafaraj, 2012)

demonstrated that not all followers were real individuals, i.e. some were fake derived from a service of buying followers. The alteration of the number of followers is something that the general public does not usually notice.

The utilization of social media in electoral campaigns has been examined by political communication scholars in different political contexts outside the U.S. with mixed results. Despite cultural differences, Facebook has turned out to be more of a way of circumventing traditional media to disseminate political information than a platform encouraging genuine political discussion, or even a “cause” of more political engagement, such as voting or meaningful political activism in real life. Of particular interest are the studies that examine the role of Facebook interactions in altering the outcomes of elections. Gomez (2014), for example, reported that social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, mobilized a higher percentage of voters during Malaysia’s 2013 general election (GE13)—in fact, the highest political turnout in Malaysian politics to that point. When it comes to electoral results, however, social media “remains elusive” and is not the only factor influencing the results of the election (Gomez, 2014, p. 102). From the GE13 election, it was noted that social media have a capacity for “mobilizing and politicizing the citizenry” but do not significantly affect the actual results per se (Gomez, 2014, p. 101).

Kimseng (2014) analyzed the role of social media in assisting the political change in Cambodia’s 2013 election. Results demonstrated that social media helped the opposition party to obtain a better electoral gain. Moreover, Facebook

represented an effective platform for the opposition party to voice its agenda to its constituents, a phenomenon which did not exist in the preceding elections (Kimseng, 2014). Social media are progressively surpassing the traditional mass media as platforms for political discussion and are breaking the monopoly on information dissemination by traditional mass media; this is especially true in the Cambodian context. Comparably, social media also played an important role during Kenya's general election where it fostered mobilization among voters and allowed citizens to debate political issues (Bing, 2015). Additionally, people paid a great deal of attention to the presidential candidates because of their Facebook activities (Bing, 2015). One important finding in the context of Kenya's elections is that when it comes to political change, the efficacy of social media, including Facebook, is far from a certainty because active online participation does not automatically translate into politically meaningful behaviors (Bing, 2015; Ibaehrine, 2008). Instead, the key variables that impact politics, according to Lim (2012), are the "societal contexts and arrangements around the technology" (p. 638).

Scholars have also monitored the use of Facebook by political parties and leaders during the 2012 election in Georgia (Kakachia, Pataraiia, & Cecire, 2014). Results showed that Facebook was chosen as the preferred communication tool by the Georgian political parties. However, instead of using Facebook as the place to introduce political programs or policies, Facebook was mostly used to promote the personalities of the political leaders. One pivotal role of Facebook in the Georgian political context was to disseminate information in ways that

circumvented the traditional mass media typically controlled by the government. Through Facebook, political parties could reach out to the wider public and bring out news more freely than possible through traditional media. Interestingly, Georgian political parties have never utilized Facebook as a tool for “opinion polls” (Kakachia, Patariaia, & Cecire, 2014). In fact, Georgian political parties often delete negative comments or feedback, which suggests that “official” Facebook profiles are more tools for public image construction rather than genuine platforms for political discussion. Scholars also noted the role of social media in reflecting the political behavior of people during the 2012 general election in South Korea (Nam, Lee, & Park, 2014). Using a quantitative research method, these authors found that voters voluntarily disseminated information across different social media platforms, including Facebook, particularly since Facebook was considered more private than Twitter in terms of building connections. Facebook was also found to be less biased than Twitter in demonstrating the actual political landscapes during the election.

Besides distributing political information and creating a platform for users to engage among themselves and with the candidate, research is unclear whether Facebook activity actually leads to substantive political outcomes (e.g. increase in voting). Pennington, Winfrey, Warner, and Kearney (2015) studied the political engagement of Facebook users during the 2012 general election in the U.S. The results of the study showed that simply following the candidate’s Facebook page does not necessarily increase voters’ political engagement such

as voting turnout or the efficacy of the election itself. Earlier research by Kushin and Yamamoto (2010) also showed similar findings in which participants' attention to social media feeds did not correlate with political self-efficacy, although social media users did become more cognitively active in the political discourse provided by the social media at the time of the 2008 election. One explanation for the non-significant results is that many may consider political information derived from online interaction to be less credible than information from offline interaction (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). Baumgartner & Morris (2010) suggested that social media do not increase participants' political engagement with the election itself, and that the political participation of many users seems to be confined strictly to online activity.

Other studies found that the use of social media influences political participation during election. For example, Baek (2015) showed that political social media use contributes to electoral mobilization. However, the outcome depends on the quantity of political information users obtain from their circle of friends. Through their networks, users are exposed to various political messages and get persuaded at the same time, which makes users more likely to vote. Furthermore, an earlier study by Alujevic (2012) indicated that higher involvement with Facebook leads to greater political participation in offline settings. This study suggested that online campaigns should formulate effective social media strategies since social media activity might translate into political participation. Similar findings by Vitak, Zube, Smcok, Carr, Ellison, and Lampe

(2011) showed that political activity on Facebook can predict political activity in real life, possibly because the architecture of the platform naturally allows fast information movement through the feeds section, which in turn encourages users to participate.

### Candidates Images and Elections

In a famous early twentieth century work, Lippmann (1922) explained the role of the public's social construction of political issues for the functioning of democracies:

...the real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And although we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage it." The public's attempt to socially construct a simplified candidate image during elections is part of the same process. Before discussing how the process works, it is important to briefly review several definitions of political image in general. (p. 20)

One of the scholars who initiated a discussion of political image is Kenneth Boulding (Hacker, 1995). As an economist scholar, Boulding described image as general structures that individuals use to make sense of human behavior, which involve all stimuli that occur either internally or externally throughout individual lives (Hacker, 2004). Therefore, the basic element of image is not about the product of one stimulus, but is all the information owned by the

individual to judge others, and is a subjective experience (Hacker, 2004). Other scholars, Nimmo and Savage, defined political image as a complex structure that is related to political messages which influence one another (1976, as cited in Hacker, 2004). Thus, there is an element of transaction between image and political messages. Hacker (2004) further explains that, according to Nimmo and Savage, the formation of candidates' political image is not only determined by their political messages, but also affected by the current impressions voters have of candidates. There is no consensus among scholars regarding the definition of political image; however, as noted by Hacker (2004), the general essence of a candidate's image refers to "clusters of voter perceptions of candidates" (p. 4).

Politicians' images are essentially important for the success of their campaigns, and this is especially evident in the context of modern political campaigns in the U.S. (Kjeldahl, Carmichael, & Mertz, 1971; Hacker, 1995; Hacker, 2004; Balmas & Sheaffer, 2010). This may be because political actors can establish or mold their images through utilization of traditional media involving television political advertisements, newspapers, magazines, and radio (Kjeldahl, Carmichael, & Mertz, 1971). For example, in the Indonesian political context, many of the presidential candidates in the 2004 presidential election spent more time on televised advertisements to cultivate particular public images, rather than talking about their political programs (Prasetywan, 2012). As argued by scholars, a candidate's image is influenced by their campaigners' skills in using media (Nimmo & Savage, 1976). Furthermore, throughout the campaign

traits, “politicians often times employ several positive characteristics, such as traits of honesty, integrity, and experience, in order to attract more attention from the voters since those traits are positively perceived by constituents” (Kjeldahl, Carmichael, & Mertz, 1971, p. 129). As explained by Fridkin and Kenney (2011), “politicians focus on traits assessment in their campaign messages because people are comfortable in making trait evaluation; in fact, people involve in trait measurements throughout their daily activities” (p. 62). Additionally, voters are more likely to form affective impressions of candidates before they use a more complicated cognition process when evaluating images of political candidates (Hacker, 2004). These affective impressions can also be affected by people’s evaluation of candidate’s qualifications (Kiouisis, Bantimaroudis, & Ban, 1999).

In addition to the availability of information concerning candidates’ characteristics, important events or “context of the campaign” such as presidential debates, for example, can also offer an opportunity for voters to evaluate images of candidates (Mckiney & Stephenson, 2002; Warner, Carlin, Winfrey, Schnoebelen, & Trosanovski, 2011; Zakahi, 2004). A comparison study of the candidates’ image before and after debates revealed that debates affected voters’ perceptions of a candidate’s performance and qualities, such as leadership and qualifications (Winfrey, Schnoebelen, & Trosanovski, 2011). More importantly, voters’ measurements of image (measured using item scores) improved after the debate. It is important to note that the higher image scores are affected by the prior knowledge and impressions that people have of the

candidates as well as candidate performance in the debate. Poor voter knowledge of candidates does not always disadvantage the candidate's image, especially when another context, such as political debate, can confirm voters' perceptions and expectations. In short, political debate provides an opportunity for judgment of a candidate's image.

It is important to note that internal factors that come from the cognitive processes of voters also affect the way candidate image is constructed. After all, the basic theme of image is that it is concerned with subjective experience (Hacker, 2004). Earlier research by Kinder (1978), revealed that voters are more likely to construct positive sentiments of candidates who support the voter's own opinions on politics, and more likely to have negative feelings towards a candidate who is not advocating similar positions to their own. As explained by Sears (1983), "perceived similarity should increase liking" (p. 233). The level of affection towards candidates is dependent on how they are perceived by voters. Study by Sears (1983) showed an interesting finding that voters opinions do not follow a simple relationship with candidate success, implying that expecting a candidate to win the election does not necessarily mean that they have positive opinions of the candidate. Moreover, the study also showed that people have a tendency to assign more weight to the negative features of candidates and set stricter attitudes than when evaluating the positive aspects of candidates. That is, one negative aspect of a candidate has the same weight as several positive aspects. These findings illustrated that there is a cognitive consistency between

what voters believe about political information and whether their own opinions are reinforced by the candidate's positions.

As mentioned earlier, political actors use traditional media to mold their public persona (Kjeldahl, Carmichael, & Mertz, 1978) and in certain ways, media do shape citizens' overall perceptions of a candidate's image (Kiouisis, Bantimaroudis, & Ban, 1999). Using the agenda-setting theoretical framework, researchers investigated how messages from the press transfer to the public. Media portrayals of a candidate's personality traits through newspaper articles reflect what people actually think about candidates (Kiouisis, Bantimaroudis, & Ban, 1999). However, media portrayals of a candidate's personality attributes do not affect people's general perceptions of the candidates. Most importantly, the dynamic of public opinion regarding images of candidates vary incrementally throughout the campaign trails in accordance with how the candidates were described in the news (Balmas & Sheaffer, 2010). In addition, the more that people were exposed to news coverage regarding candidates' attributes, the more they used this content as a basis for their evaluations. However, this more likely affected those who highly consumed newspapers.

Another way to understand how people formulate candidates' images is through the appearance of a candidate him or herself. Many studies show that factors like physical appearance can sway people's judgment, which later could either move people towards or away from the candidate (Johns & Shephard, 2007; Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, & Hall, 2005). In other words, judgments of

a candidate's image through the assessment of their physical attributes can lead to subsequent measurement, such as voting decision. One explanation may be that "people may rely heavily on instant verdicts such as politician's physical features" when making decisions on candidates (Johns & Shephard, 2007, p. 435). Seeing a photograph of a politician, for example, was sufficient for constituents to make inferences about the candidate's characteristics, such as their level of competency, honesty, and warmth (Johns & Shephard, 2007; Todorov et al., 2005). In fact, some political actors make an effort to enhance their physical appearance by manipulating their visual images through, for example, changing their hairstyle (Mater, Spezio, Kim, Todorov, Adolphs, & Alvarez, 2010). Moreover, it is also interesting to see how people can feel a sense of threat from photographs of the candidates; those who are perceived as a threat are less likely to be perceived positively in their image and less likely to be elected (Mater, Spezio, Kim, Todorov, Adolphs, & Alvarez, 2010) An important result of this study is that this condition was more likely to occur to those who did not have prior knowledge or at least have little source for other heuristic cues (Mater et. al., 2010). As argued by scholars, most voters do not collect in-depth information related to candidates, and in fact many voting decisions are based on only a few considerations (Neuman, 1986). Furthermore, previous studies have ruled out other factors such as candidate's age, degree of attractiveness, and familiarity, as indicators mediating voters' inferences regarding candidates' competency, and their decisions in voting (Mater et., 2010).

As previously mentioned, politicians employ several positive characteristics or traits to their public persona. Indeed, scholars have asserted the implication of image personality traits to the overall persona of prominent politicians, and revealed that each candidate has different qualities to show (Funk, 1999). Former U.S. president Bill Clinton, for example, was seen as a candidate with high sense of empathy towards citizens, whereas Jimmy Carter was perceived as a leader with high sense of honesty and integrity (Funk, 1999). However, an important part in understanding the relationship between a candidate's image traits and the overall evaluation made by voters is that depending on the candidate, each trait can produce different evaluations for the candidate himself (Funk, 1999). In short, voters' evaluations are not "simply based on the candidate's competence and leadership effectiveness; instead, depending on the leader, certain traits may have a stronger influence on candidates' evaluations" (Funk, 1999, p. 714). This is also dependent on the context of the election, and thus, each election has different type of image priming for each candidate.

In the case of Indonesia, many candidates in the 2004 presidential election primed certain image traits through the use of political advertisements on television (Prasetywan, 2012). The construction of their public images often reflected what they thought about the political situation in the country, and what they are desired to achieve when they became a leader. From their political advertisements, potential voters can recognize a deep sense of nationalism and

empathy towards the poor people in the country. Indeed, the characteristic of loving the country has been a classic image employed and recycled by many leaders in Indonesia's politics (Prasetywan, 2012). In the American political context, campaigners are more likely to highlight certain issues. For example, Obama emphasized the issue of taxes (Kenski, Hardy, & Jameson, 2010). It can be suggested that in the 2009 Indonesian presidential election, the main strategy of the candidates "was forming certain personal characters" (Prasetywan, 2012, p. 311).

It appears that nontraditional media have the capacity to affect voters' perceptions of candidates. Past research by Johnson, Braima, and Sothirajah (1999), for instance, found that politicians' websites and the use of the Internet had considerable effects on the overall image of the candidate. Similarly, Dimitrova and Bystrom (2013) showed that the use of social media significantly affects voters' perceptions of the candidates' traits, especially for people who heavy social media users. Moreover, the study demonstrated that following candidates on Facebook lead to positive evaluations from voters, particularly evaluations related to the effectiveness of a candidate's leadership and intelligence, but not honesty traits. The use of Facebook or exposure to a candidate's Facebook page can produce more political participation from the voters (Vitak et. al., 2011). Prior research has documented that voters in general have their own "mental picture of specific characteristics that an ideal presidential candidate should have" (Grabe & Bucy, 2009, p. 101). One way to confirm their

expectations, is to examine campaign photographs displayed on candidate's Facebook pages (Goodnow, 2013). Additionally, viewing negative online videos distributed on websites like YouTube can result in negative evaluations of a candidate's image (Goodnow). Despite its benefits for candidates, the utilization of Facebook may produce new challenges as candidates have reduced levels of control over their online image (Bronstein, 2013; Gueorguieva, 2008).

In conclusion, many previous studies have shown the importance of image for candidate performance over the course of their campaign journey. Though a political message is an important factor, current impressions that voters have of candidates are essential to their verdicts regarding candidates' images. Furthermore, voters' construction of candidate image is greatly shaped by the traditional and nontraditional media through which candidates can present particular traits or characteristics as their public image. These different traits are treated differently by voters depending on the candidate himself. Overall, when it comes to political learning, especially in terms of a candidate's image, voters have their own perceptions of idealized character for leader. A lack of knowledge regarding a candidate's character is not always a disadvantage for the campaigners since candidates have other avenues to promote the characters that they believe are favorable for potential voters, e.g. personal appearances and political debates.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE 2014 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN INDONESIA

In this chapter, I describe more generally the process of presidential election in Indonesia to show the political nuances of Indonesian elections. I then focus on the dynamics of the 2014 Indonesian presidential race and its distinct characteristics.

Since Indonesia declared its independence from Dutch colonial rule in 1945, it has conducted 11 elections in 1955, 1971, 1977, 1982, 1987, 1992, 1997, 1999, 2004, 2009, and 2014 (“History of Elections,” 2014). Election terms have varied in this time, but are usually for five years. After declaring independence in 1945, Indonesia adopted a parliamentary democracy, and appointed its first president, Sukarno. The first general elections were held in 1955 (Ellis, 2016). At that time, the 257-seat People’s Representative Council (known as Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, DPR) were allocated regionally based on number of populations and the appointed President Sukarno to stay as president of the new Indonesian republic (Ellis). It is important to note that the 1945 Constitution did not include a specific article that mentioned presidential office term, and thus, presidents had power exceeding the DPR (Crouch, 2010).

In 1959, due to the unstable political environment, President Sukarno enacted a decree to abolish the parliament council and formed the Provisional People’s Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat Sementara,

MPRS), which consisted of both civil and military representatives (Ismanto & Legowo, 2004). With this presidential decree, Sukarno had complete power to facilitate his autocratic political rule known as the Guided Democracy (Ismanto & Legowo, 2004; Indrayana, 2007). The decree also eventually allowed Sukarno to be elected by the majority of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), as president for life until Suharto replaced him in 1967 (Maarif, 1996). The MPR is the highest constitutional body whose main task is to approve the policy guidelines every five years (International Business Publications, 2013).

When Suharto officially took office in 1967, the authoritarian governance was still actively operating along with a proliferation of corruption, which eventually led to more political turbulence that reached its turning point in 1998 with the overthrow of Suharto's regime (Suryadinata, 2002). As an important note, Suharto's government was similar to Sukarno's administration in that there was only one candidate to contest the presidential electoral race (Crouch, 2010). Sukarno was appointed for four terms and served in office for more than two decades, while Suharto, appointed in 1967 after a military coup, remained president for six terms in a 32-year period (Crouch, 2010).

In the post-Suharto era, the convergence of civil movements brought about the Reformation, with the hope of bringing a more liberal political structure to the political process (Crouch, 2010; Ellis, 2016). One political reform occurring in this period was the reduction of the number of MPR members from 700 to 200 seats (Thalang, 2005). Another alteration was the formation of a multiparty

parliament without having majority numbers (Thalang, 2005). Consequently, presidential elections became less systematic and involved more hidden political transactions between leaders of parties with popular votes (Lamoureux, 2003; Rinakit, 2005; Thalang, 2005). Megawati Sukarnoputri, for instance, leader of the Indonesian Democratic Party Struggle (PDI-P) and the daughter of Indonesia's first president Sukarno, received the most votes in the 1999 presidential election (without majority) but Abdurrahman Wahid was the one chosen as president by the members of MPR (Mietzner, 2000; Thalang, 2005).

It was obvious during the initial stage of the Reformation era that the process of presidential election remained the same, i.e. the MPR had the authority to appoint the new president and vice president (Suryadinata, 2002). Moreover, in the case of Indonesia, indirect election seemed to be one of the threats creating an imbalance between the executive and the legislative, which resulted in a fragile position for the president. In other words, indirect election of the president by the MPR made it easier for the MPR members to remove the president from his or her position at any time (Grote & Roder, 2011). For example, in the case of President Abdurrahman Wahid, the MPR dismissed him from the presidential office in July 2001 due to the lack of political support from the political majority members (Grote & Roder, 2011), and replaced him with President Megawati Sukarnoputri (Kim, 2008). This incident illustrates how, after the downfall of Suharto, Indonesian presidents could not use their substantial

power “as freely as those experienced by the directly elected presidents” (Grote & Roder, 2011, p. 467).

In 2001, during President Megawati Sukarnoputri’s administration, the MPR amended the 1945 Constitution with the specific intention of implementing direct presidential elections (Hosen, 2007; Thalang, 2005). A year later, the fourth amendment became effective and required presidential and vice-presidential candidates to compete as a single pair (Hosen, 2007; Thalang, 2005). With the new amendment, only political parties or a party coalition that garnered at least three per cent of the seats of the DPR or five per cent of the vote in legislative elections are qualified to nominate a presidential team (Hosen, 2007; “IBP”, 2012; Thalang, 2005).

In 2004, using the new electoral laws, voters were allowed for the first time to choose the president through direct election (Ellis, 2016). The election was held with a two-round majority system, meaning that victory could only be determined by having more than 50 per cent of total votes or at least 20 per cent of the vote from each province (Lindsay, 2009; Dagg, 2007). If there were inadequate voting numbers in the first round, the second round was executed. Along with that, in 2004, the presidential term was also established to be only two consecutive five-year terms similar to the U.S. system (Dagg, 2007). The average Indonesian citizen considers the 2004 direct presidential election to be more democratic and transparent compared with the preceding elections (Suryadinata, 2005). The procedure itself, however, was still clouded by the

hidden political agendas of parties with popular votes. The PDI-P, for example, was proposing a bill that required the presidential candidate to have no criminal record as a way to block Golkar party's chairman Akbar Tanjung from the presidency (Suryadinata, 2005).

The presidential threshold in the 2009 and 2014 elections was raised to 20 per cent of seats or 25 per cent of legislative election votes (Dagg, 2007; "Rumah Pemilu", 2014). Similar to the 2004 election, many people perceived the 2009 election as "fair and free" (Ufen, 2010, p. 282). Furthermore, the 2009 election was featuring familiar political elites with three president-vice president pairs in total. The situation was slightly different in the 2014 presidential election. One distinct feature of 2014 presidential election was the process itself, which did not involve a second-round victory since there were only two president-vice president pairs of candidates competing for the presidency.

#### The Dynamic of the 2014 Indonesia Presidential Election

In the 2014 presidential election, the General Commission of Election (KPU) stated that there were 190 million Indonesian voters nationally, tripling the 2009 election (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, 2014). At that time, the ongoing process of Indonesia's young democracy had continued to flourish and had reached its turning point. One distinct feature of the 2014 presidential election was the process itself, which did not involve a second-round victory since there were only two pairs of president-vice president candidates who competed for the presidency. The nominated presidential candidates were Joko Widodo, popularly

known as Jokowi, a former mayor of Solo, and Prabowo Subianto who was the former army strategic reserve commander. Many were concerned that the 2014 direct presidential contest posed a threat to Indonesia's democracy itself since one of the candidates, former Special Forces General Prabowo Subianto, was eager to return the indirect electoral system (Mietzner, 2014). Many citizens were also worried that Prabowo would set out the old attribute of authoritarianism to Indonesia's political system (Mietzner, 2014). The 2014 presidential election was a key moment in Indonesian political history because Indonesia experienced the threat of returning to an authoritarian regime under Prabowo who was dubbed by media and political experts as the oligarchic politician (Aspinall, 2015). Despite the fact that Prabowo lost to Jokowi, the emergence of antidemocratic elites is still heavily visible (Mietzner, 2014; Fukuoka & Thalang, 2014).

Before the official campaign period started, the 2014 election featured familiar elite politicians including Prabowo Subianto, Megawati Sukarnoputri, and Aburizal Bakrie (chairman of Golkar's party). These politicians were well-known for their important roles as chairmen and chairwoman of their parties (Fukuoka & Thalang, 2014). However, due to their lack of popularity, Megawati and Bakrie lost their chances of being nominated, paving the way for Prabowo to contest the presidential election (Fukuoka & Thalang, 2014). The mood of 2014's election changed once Jokowi decided to join the presidential race (Fukuoka & Thalang, 2014). Socially, Jokowi's popularity developed from his contribution as the mayor of Solo in Central Java, and his popularity climbed significantly when he won

Jakarta's gubernatorial election in 2012 (Fukuoka & Thalang, 2014). Initially, Prabowo and Megawati endorsed Jokowi's bid for Jakarta's governorship, in the hopes of improving their popularity for the presidential election (Fukuoka & Thalang, 2014). Eventually, Jokowi's popularity became the most important factor and Megawati nominated Jokowi as the PDI-P's presidential candidate (Fukuoka & Thalang, 2014). Ironically, as the PDI-P chairwoman, Megawati broke a political agreement, acknowledged as Batu Tulis pact, that stipulated her commitment to support the nomination of Prabowo as the presidential candidate in the 2014 election prior to Jokowi's official nomination (Widhiarto, 2014). Indeed, the 2014 presidential election was a tight competition between Jokowi and Prabowo (Fukuoka & Thalang, 2014; Mietzner, 2014; Tornquist, 2014).

The emergence of the populist leader Jokowi and his opponent Prabowo should be understood within the context of former president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's activity (Mietzner, 2014; Fukuoka & Thalang, 2014). During Yudhoyono's presidency between 2004 and 2012, Indonesia's economy grew exponentially with the per capita income rising from \$1,161 to \$3,557, a process supported by the expansion of middle-class citizens (Mietzner, 2014; Tornquist, 2014). In terms of the political situation, Yudhoyono managed to settle the ongoing crises from the previous administration, such as the ongoing war in Aceh (Mietzner, 2014). Yudhoyono also made a great effort to eradicate corruption in the government as well as manifesting bureaucracy reform (Tornquist, 2014). However, in the years prior to the 2014 election, Yudhoyono's administration

started to show drawbacks involving enduring corruption cases and collusions that ironically came from his own party, the Democratic Party (PD) (Tornquist, 2014). The general public was also exposed to stories about how certain members of the parliament, specifically those who come from Yudhoyono's own party, were involved in "money politics" issues (Tornquist, 2014). Accordingly, Yudhoyono's popularity declined significantly along with the popularity of his party (Tornquist, 2014).

Strategically, both candidates Jokowi and Prabowo used the weaknesses of Yudhoyono's administration for their political advantage, although in different ways (Tornquist 2014; Mietzner, 2014). Prabowo, for example, promised to protect the nation's natural resources and used nationalist rhetoric to condemn the proliferation of corruption (Mietzner, 2014). As explained by Fukuoka and Thalang (2014), Prabowo also reinvented his political persona as a decisive leader, which was a sharp contrast to Yudhoyono's image. Jokowi, in contrast, was branding himself as an ordinary Indonesian with a nonchalant manner, which made him looked approachable and seemingly docile, unlike the typical Indonesian politician (Mietzner, 2014).

### The Role of Social Media in Election in Indonesia

After explaining the role of social media within the context of political elections in a general sense, it is important to have information about social media in the context of Indonesia. First, this section will briefly discuss the role of the Internet in Indonesia's politics followed by the role of social media in the

election process. Initially, the Internet was widely used within the university environment and later moved to the wider civil society in 1995 (Hill, 2003). In 1996, at the time of Internet use expansion, an online forum called *Apakabar* (an expression equivalent to “how are you”) emerged as an important cyberspace for Indonesian netizens to discuss political matters. The forum has been working as an outlet that allows its active users to communicate relevant actions against the regime of Suharto and thus provide a catalyst for forming and expressing public opinion (Nurhadryani, Maslow, & Yamamoto, 2009).

It is noticeable that during the Suharto’s administration, media and ordinary citizens were strictly controlled by the government and political expression was impossible. The oppressive situation was deepened by the Asian financial crisis that firstly hit Thailand in 1997 before spreading through Indonesia. The crisis caused significant disturbances to the nation in general, and to the Suharto’s administration in particular (“Asian Financial Crisis”, n.d.; Nurhadryani, Maslow, & Yamamoto, 2009). In this situation, the cyberspace that was embedded in the far-reaching political change received momentum that increased the flow of the change (Yangyue, 2011). Most importantly, the Internet progressively facilitated and enhanced the political activity of Indonesians and played an important role at the end of the Suharto “New Order” regime (Nurhadryani, Maslow, & Yamamoto, 2009). During that period, the Internet complemented traditional mass media in voicing “the corruption, collusion, and nepotism surrounding the authoritarian regime of Suharto” (Nurhadryani, Maslow,

& Yamamoto, 2009, p. 217). It can be seen from this situation that the Internet served as a tool for ordinary Indonesians to challenge the existing government (Lim, 2006).

The Internet started to show its potential in electoral campaigns during the 1997 elections, when it became clear that political parties could derive value from having an official Internet site (Hill, 2003). Several Indonesian commentators perceived the Internet as an effective campaign method, especially for parties that did not have printed media as their means of communication. Moreover, the Internet allowed parties to disseminate information without passing through the protocols issued by the Minister of Information. Although the Internet was a convenient campaign tool, the lack of infrastructure made the implementation of online campaigns difficult in the country. As a result, political parties put more effort into more established strategies involving traditional media (TV, radio, and print), rallies, and motorcade parades (Ahyani, 1999; Hill, 2003).

Since the 1997 election, the incorporation of the Internet in electoral campaigns has slowly but steadily increased (Nurhadryani, Maslow, & Yamamoto, 2009). Political actors and parties began to utilize the Internet more often in their campaigns during the 2009 elections, as illustrated by regular maintenance of a party's website, electronic communication with visitors, and the presence of personal blogs (Nurhadryani, Maslow, & Yamamoto, 2009). The Commission of Election (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, KPU) also utilized the Internet

for tabulating voting results that allowed the public to see the counting process nationally (Hill, 2003).

Unfortunately, just like traditional media, the Internet can be used to undermine a candidate's persona and affect public opinion in the offline realm (Nurhadryani, Maslow, & Yamamoto, 2009). In the 2009 presidential election, for example, a Facebook group was dedicated to rejecting Megawati's candidacy and soon interfered with her popularity in real life. Similar cases also occurred during the 2014 presidential election where candidates received aggressive smear campaign in social media. Just five weeks before the election day due, the anti-Prabowo campaign was mainly stressing his past involvement in the kidnapping of pro-democracy activists in May 1998 (Halim & Aritonang, 2014; Fukuoka & Thalang, 2014). Meanwhile, Jokowi was misleadingly accused of being non-Muslim with Chinese-descent, and he was also heavily portrayed as a political puppet of Megawati (Halim & Aritonang, 2014; Fukuoka & Thalang, 2014; Paath & Maulia, 2015).

Social media began to play a pivotal role in Indonesia's politics during the presidential election in 2014 (Azali, 2014). Although the number of Internet users only reached around 71.19 million of the 250 million Indonesian citizens, Internet penetration has continued to increase on a regular basis (Azali, 2014; "Number of RI", 2014). As mentioned earlier, in 2014 Indonesia was reported to be the country with the fourth highest number of Facebook users and also placed among the top five in terms of the highest Twitter users across the globe in 2012

(Azali, 2014; Socialbakers, 2014; SemioCast, 2012). In fact, as reported by several online media, 200 million interactions involving the process of Indonesia's presidential election were circling around Facebook between March and July 2014 (Azali, 2014; Schonhardt, 2014; "Look Back At", 2014). This online activity reached its peak closer to the election times when users posted hashtags related to the presidential candidates (e.g. #Jokowi9juli and #Pilih\_No1\_PrabowoHatta) which resulted in topics trending nationally and internationally (Azali, 2014, "Social Media During", 2014).

Both presidential candidates, Prabowo and Jokowi used social media strategies on Facebook and Twitter in their campaign (Azali, 2014; Abdillah, 2014). While Prabowo's online campaign was official and systematic, Jokowi's online campaign was administered by volunteers and without formal coordination (Azali, 2014). In practice, Prabowo heavily used Facebook, from which he gained around 7 million likes (Abdillah, 2014; Facebook, 2014). Even though there was no official interaction between Prabowo and the Facebook page visitors, the page was regularly updated to reflect the situation in the offline environment (Facebook, 2014). Jokowi had more than 2 million likes from his unofficial Facebook page (Facebook, 2014). On Twitter, Jokowi had 1.65 million followers, while Prabowo only managed to have about 900 thousand followers (O'Neil, 2014).

Most Indonesian users utilize social media to fulfill social interaction purposes (Lim, 2013). As stated by Lim (2013), politics was not the focus of

users' online activities but rather "located on the fringe of their social activities" (Lim, 2013, p. 639). However, this situation changed during the election period when political discourse became the main topic and dominated conversation in the digital landscape. To illustrate, we can use data provided by Bubu.com, a local digital agency that collaborated with Facebook in creating a tracker application to monitor Facebook user's conversation related to the 2014 presidential election (Lestari, 2014). Bubu.com reported that 70% of the conversations relevant to election occurred on Facebook, with 44.04% of the total conversations being about Prabowo, and 52.47% being related to Jokowi (Lestari).

The results of the election revealed that Jokowi won the 2014 presidential race. Many considered that his presidency would support the growing process of democracy in Indonesia (Fukuoka & Thalang, 2014). Although Jokowi holds the top position in the country, many political experts assumed that he would not be able to separate his duty and his commitment to his Chairwoman, Megawati, and therefore, Megawati would likely to influence how Jokowi established and approved policies (Fukuoka & Thalang, 2014). Furthermore, Jokowi was forced to reach out to the party of his competitor because his coalition has only 40 per cent of parliamentary seats (Fukuoka & Thalang, 2014; Chen, 2014).

In conclusion, the Internet and social media have provided an alternative place for Indonesian users to express political opinions. Initially, the Internet managed to accelerate the political change that challenged the stability of

Suharto's regime. During the earlier times of the direct election, Internet also allowed political parties and actors to test the benefits of setting up online campaigns. Although the limited infrastructure may become a constraint for online campaigning, Internet penetration has continued to grow on a regular basis with social media users' enthusiasm increasing significantly during the 2014 presidential election. One important aspect to note is that the role of social media in facilitating the election process continues even after the ballot papers have been collected (Azali, 2014, p. 1). At this stage, social media works as a tool to monitor the counting process and make sure that there was no room for manipulation (Azali, 2014). It can also be inferred that the use of social media like Facebook, for example, brings desirable outcomes in terms of a candidate's image. In fact, just by following a candidate's Facebook page, voters are more likely to give positive evaluations, i.e. ascribing positive characteristics to the candidate involving leadership and competency traits (Dimitrova & Bystrom, 2013). However, negative videos distributed through video sharing websites (i.e. Youtube) can focus negative attention on a candidate's image in general, which can later affect voters' decision-making in elections (Dimitrova & Bystrom, 2013).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study employs a thematic analysis to investigate the Facebook postings of Indonesian users before the 2014 Presidential Election in Indonesia. The following reviews the methodology of the analysis.

#### Epistemological Approach

The epistemological approach adopted in this study is interpretive (social constructivist). Within this paradigm, the researcher takes as a point of departure the assumption that reality is constructed in the interaction between humans and that the researcher's job is to understand, interpret and explain these shared interpretations of reality (Keyton, 2006). Consequently, the postings, taken together, represent a form of discourse, and the aim of the analysis is to understand the main themes around which the discourse of the users revolved when constructing images of the two candidates.

#### Sample

The data collection venue was candidate Prabowo Subianto's (PS) official Facebook page. The candidate's page, which was managed by his campaign team, included photos of the candidate with his family, photos of the campaign, video clips in which celebrities endorsed the candidate, the candidate's comments about his contender, the candidate's communication with his public, as well as the candidate's response to user's comments. The study only included

comments from PS's Facebook because his page was legitimately generated by him and his public relations team and the content was structured systematically. Therefore, the public may have had a sense that their comments were recognized and acknowledged by PS. This quasi-official forum, therefore, was less likely to be "trolled" or to be "hijacked" by users with a different agenda. It would have been interesting to collect postings from the Facebook page of the second candidate, Joko Widodo (JW). Unfortunately, his Facebook page was not the official page of the candidate and was subsequently deactivated. Therefore, the decision to focus on one venue only was motivated by both data availability and the legitimacy of the collection site. Data were collected during the period of June 20, 2014 to July 8, 2014 totaling 20 days before the actual election day, on July 9 of 2014. This period was thought to be critical because during this time, the dynamics of political discussions among users were reaching their peak as the election day became closer.

To collect a sample of user comments, I selected the story with the highest number of shares, posted on June 19, 2014. This story is a video clip made by Indonesian local artists with Indonesian idol contestants endorsing the candidate (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y0LzsVJT9IE>). Between the posting date and July 8, 2014, the story received more than 30,601 shares (Facebook, 2014). A story with the most shares denotes high popularity and has a higher tendency of going viral over the cyberspace. Using a third-party computer software called "The Facebook Grabber," I collected a sample of 5,782

comments from a total of 18,950 comments on the story during the indicated time period. Out of the 5,782 comments, 11 percent of the comments derived from the opponents of Prabowo. The consideration for choosing this number was because the system of the computer software could only manage to grab some portion of the comments. Additionally, the software was designed to operate within Microsoft Windows system where it allows data extraction from any specific date of a Facebook story taken from one's Facebook page. Once specific date is specified, the software will grab the comments automatically and restored on a table provided by the software. Moreover, the software also allows to shift the collected comments on the table to Microsoft Excel, which later permits me as researcher to import the comments to another computer program like ATLAS.ti. Importantly, the software grabbed whichever comments were promoted by the Facebook algorithm. The ordering of comments on Facebook operates based on social order (the default setting), time, and reverse time (Facebook, 2017). With the social setting, comments generated from friends or friends from friends would be displayed first, whereas comments labeled as spam would not be shown on the wall. Comments ordered by time are displayed from oldest to newest with the newest comments shown at the bottom. In the reverse time order, the newest comments are shown at the top of the list (Facebook, 2017). Therefore, the sample of comments is not a probability sample. However, I have no reason to suspect that the ordering of the comments depended on the opinion expressed by users. Therefore, from the point of view

of the topic I am analyzing (how users construct a candidate's image), the sample is, in fact, a random snapshot. In general, the comments contained less than 101 words, ranging from 4-100 words.

Data were collected via convenience sampling, which is a nonprobability method. Convenience sampling is an easy way to collect data that allows researcher "to select respondents that are convenient for his or her research as participants" (Keyton, 2006, p. 126). Although, convenience sampling has a large potential for bias and respondents do not have equal chances of being selected in the study, it is considered to be effective and quickly absorbs large numbers of data (Jennings, 2010, as cited in Amaro, Henriques, & Duarte, 2016). Furthermore, convenience sampling is considered appropriate for the current study since the nature of the study is not predicting a phenomenon, but instead, it is interpretative research. Therefore, it would be less problematic as the study is not trying to make inferences from a sample to population (Keyton, 2006; Stanovich, 1986).

#### Analytical Stance: Thick Description

The aim of my analysis is to generate thick description of the phenomenon I am investigating; namely, how voters construct candidate image. Thick description is considered an important element in qualitative research texts; and it can be referred to as an in-depth interpretative process of describing a social life and it is grounded in the perspective of members who are involved in the event (emic view) (Geertz, 1973; Given, 2008). It was first introduced by

anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who adopted the concept from the metaphysical philosopher Gilbert Ryle (Given, 2008). Essentially, for Ryle, thick description entails not only an understanding of the behavior, but also involves the interpretation of the behavior that operates in certain contexts as well as “ascribing thinking and intentionality to the observed behavior” (Ponterotto, 2006, p. 539). As further explained by Denzin (2001), thick description “presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another” (p. 100). Denzin (2001) notes that thick description contains “the ability of capturing and representing the meanings of a particular action or sequence of actions has for the individuals in question” (p. 116). From these explanations, thick description is more than just a description of a factual situation or experience, but is more about an interpretative approach of description as a way to create “verisimilitude to the reader,” according to Denzin (1989) (as cited in Thompson, 2001, p. 67). Additionally, according to Thompson (2001), “although thick description comes from the field of anthropology, communication scholars argued that it is appropriate for communication research” (p. 66), because “the study of culture can also be called the study of communications, for what we are studying in the context are the ways in which experience is worked into understanding and the disseminated and celebrated” (as cited in Carey, 1989, p. 34).

As mentioned above, Geertz’s (1973) thick description comes from “Ryle’s lecture where he discussed the concept of thick description to explain one’s

behavior” (as cited in Ponterroto, 2006, p. 539), and Geertz further explained what Ryle means by the concept of “wink” and “blink.” In discussing wink and blink, Geertz highlighted that the ethnographer or observer must know and interpret the intention that drives certain behavior or actions (Thompson, 2001). To obtain a rich interpretation, “observers must have a deep understanding of the context of the situation” (Thompson, 2001, p. 66). This means that the observer must go beyond the description stage, and instead, also understand “the underlying inferences and implications” (Geertz, 1973, p. 9). Moreover, Geertz (1973) also emphasized that in the process of thick description, the essential part is that the writing was “really our own construction of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to” (p. 9). For the observers to produce credible work, the interpretation must be “richly and thickly described” (Ponterroto, 2006, p. 539).

Thick description is effective and applicable to the current study because the study’s aim is to go beyond describing the behavior and meanings that existed in the online social interaction of Facebook users. The study is intended to interpret and translate the actions and organize those actions, which are grounded on a particular context, so that we can understand the complexity of the actions.

### Thematic Analysis

To produce a thick description of the users’ discourse, I employed thematic analysis to my data. Thematic analysis is suitable for answering the

research question since it tries to interpret an aspect of the phenomenon that lies in the empirical data, and to understand the meaning of a text (Boyatzis, 1998). As further explained by Benedict (2014), thematic analysis is a method of analysis that can be used “to identify, synthesize, analyze, and offer perception into the patterns of meanings collected in the data” (p. 45). With this method, the analysis utilizes an encoding process that involves an explicit “code, which can be manifested into different forms, such as a collection of themes, indicators, and qualifications that are connected to one another” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). On a small scale, a theme can be described as “a pattern that organizes the basic units of observation, whereas on the larger scale, a theme can reveal an aspect of a phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). In the process of analysis, a theme or a coding category can refer to observable things found in the data, or something that is more implicitly hidden in the observed data (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). Essentially, the themes can be derived inductively or deductively depending upon the source of the data (Boyatzis, 1998). In this study, the themes emerged inductively, since they appeared from raw information collected from Facebook comments. The inductive thematic analysis has some similarities with the grounded theory approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, it is important to note that a researcher’s preconception, personal experience, and knowledge may affect the identification of the themes, which may not make it an entirely inductive or deductive approach (Joffe & Yardley, 2004).

Scholars have identified several steps in conducting thematic analyses. Braun and Clarke (2006), for example, organize six stages that include “being familiarized with the collected data, constructing initial codes, forming the codes, conducting code review, defining the themes and naming them, and finally, generating the report” (p. 35). Braun and Clarke further asserted that thematic analysis is a flexible and useful research tool that “potentially provide[s] a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data” (p. 5).

Another way to conduct thematic analysis can also be concluded from Boyatzis’s (1998) method who specifically identified three different steps of developing codes and themes, which are subjective to how the data is derived. For the data-driven type, Boyatzis outlined three stages that involve a step-by-step coding guide. In the initial phase, processing, a researcher should recognize important aspects in his or her data. This is followed by encoding the data before continuing to do the interpretation. Moreover, a researcher must recognize that “a good code is one that captures the qualitative richness of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 1). The first stage involves selecting the design as well as the subsamples within the data. The second stage includes code development where the researcher develops themes on each subsample. The third stage incorporates those themes found in the second stage of the coding, followed by interpreting the discovered themes, concepts or conclusions.

For my analysis, I used the following process. After collecting users’ comments using the Facebook Grabber software program mentioned above, I

continued to work on my data by transferring the data to Microsoft Excel. By looking the data on Excel, I would be able to trace the dates of the posting more easily. I restrict my data extraction by making sure that the comments were not exceeding the selected time frame, which was the July 8, 2014. Once I checked that all comments fulfilled the required selection then I translated the 5, 782 comments from the users' native language (Bahasa Indonesia) to English, verbatim. With the translated version, I imported the data to ATLAS.ti computer program in order to aid the coding process digitally. In the initial stage, I included a full sentence of each comment to identify potential codes by allowing myself freely to detect any possible conclusions that can occur from the comments. Also at this stage, I tried to be familiarized with the users' comments as much as possible. Generally, I applied the first coding cycle by employing exploratory coding methods, which is holistic coding. Holistic coding is a method which tries "to grasp basic themes of issues in the data by absorbing them as a whole (the coder as "lumper") rather than by analyzing them line by line" (Dey, 1993, p. 104). Furthermore, holistic coding is also suitable for a novice researcher who is in the earlier stages of learning how to code data, and as suggested by Saldana (2009), "the method is time-saving for those who deal with large amounts of data" (p. 166). During this cycle I carried the decoding and encoding process to capture the repetitive patterns of the users' comments. To name a few, I managed to generate 50 codes, involving nationalism, negative characteristics, foreign nations, celebrity endorsement, faith, candidate's achievement, and

exposing the effect of Prabowo. In ATLAS.ti I also wrote some analytical memos as a reference of what the codes meant.

In the next step, I grouped the codes into more meaningful categories and reduced the number of codes and categories which would produce “a more compact set of data coded” (Saldana, 2009, p. 232). For example, I recoded “exposing the effect of Prabowo” to “addressing Prabowo’s political past”. Moreover, I was also recategorizing some of the initial categories. For instance, I recategorized celebrity endorsement and group expression to collective image category. As an attempt to explore the data coded, I used a second cycle coding method, which was pattern coding. As explained by Saldana, “the pattern coding is the one that identify an emergent theme or configuration, or explanation. They pull together a lot of material from first cycle coding into more meaningful and parsimonious unit of analysis” (p. 236). At this stage, I consolidated the categories into several themes. As explained by Rallis and Rossman (2003), a category is more of a “word or phrase that represents some segment of the data that is explicit, while a theme is a phrase or sentence that describe subtler or tacit processes” (p. 282). Based on my data reading, I managed to identify several themes, such as the strategies for constructing the image of the candidate through the construction of identities involving national identity and collective identity. There were also strategies using inferences based on metaphor, inferences based on political past, inferences based on how they were treated by other people, inferences based on the future state of the country, and inferences

based on spiritual values. During the writing process, I analyzed how these themes work together to construct the image of the candidate.

For the validation process, I attempted to validate my themes by asking a graduate student with no prior knowledge of the research topic to read 500 random comments and answer several questions such as: “What discursive strategies are being used to construct the identity of the candidates?”; “How are national and collective identities being used to construct the candidates?”; and, “How is the image of a candidate being used in the comments?”

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF CANDIDATE IMAGE CONSTRUCTION

The analysis will focus on several themes that demonstrate a candidate's image and the construction of several identities to show how users create idealized images of presidential candidates. These involve construction of national identity and group identity. The analysis will also show how users construct a candidate's image through inferences based on personality traits, political scandal, elements of spiritual values, projection of the future state of the country, and inferences based on their treatment by others.

#### Candidate Image and The Construction of National Identity

Social media users related the image of their chosen candidate to the image of the ideal candidate who is capable of addressing the many issues that, in their view, confront the nation. An important dimension of candidate image construction is related to the construction of national identity and how the candidate might be able to act as a strong defender of national rights and the national image in foreign policy contexts. The renewal of national identity or nationalist feelings can occur through numerous everyday routines (such as subtle language, symbols, and objects) through which the citizenry are continually reminded of being a part of a particular nation (Billig, 1995; Baruh & Popescu, 2008; & Wade, 2011). This phenomenon is what Billig (1995) defined as "banal nationalism", which according to Baruh and Popescu (2008) captures

“the sense of ‘us versus them’ divisions ingrained in people’s habits of speech, or the never-questioned and ever-communicated beliefs about the glory of a nation’s past that reproduces national identity at the level of people’s discursive experience” (p. 84). In the context of contemporary Indonesia, various kinds of “everyday nationalism” are practiced and recycled, with a high reference to the anti-colonial struggle, the struggle with neighboring nations over territorial claims, and Indonesia’s economic position in Asia (Aspinall, 2016). An interesting example of how “banal nationalism” is incorporated into digital media is a video game known as “Nusantara Online,” which allows its players to experience a role-playing, patriotic-themed gaming session within a historical landscape of three kingdoms in Indonesia i.e., Majapahit, Pajajaran, and Sriwijaya kingdoms (Zulkarnain, 2014). More specifically, players are able to immerse in several journeys that are loosely based on the history of one of the kingdoms that they have selected. As explained by Zulkarnain (2014), “the game highlights the role of “playable” nationalism as a contemporary practice of national identity formation” (p. 46). Indeed, the ongoing practice of “banal nationalism” in Indonesia was clearly revealed in how users constructed the image of the presidential candidate Prabowo.

As a former lieutenant general, Prabowo’s military roots were always evident in how the political discourse of his campaign courted a nationalistic perspective that promoted economic power with the intention of protecting national assets from foreign intervention or interests. His idea of economic

nationalism relied on cultivating natural resources with specific attention to maximizing the agricultural sector and promoting Indonesia as an agrarian country (Aspinall, 2015). Prabowo's approach was heavily reliant on increasing local commodities so that food production can be made locally, while at the same time minimizing imported ingredients (Aspinall). Furthermore, Prabowo highlighted how the Indonesian government failed to protect agricultural treasures and the position of local farmers, and instead devised policies that increased the dependence on imported agriculture commodities ("Agricultural Issues More Important", 2014). For him, it was ironic to see how Indonesia imported so many food crops and saltwater fish despite the country's agricultural surplus.

The analysis of user comments revealed that references to national identity were very common throughout the postings of Prabowo's supporters. The online social interaction among users showed the shared negative sentiment towards foreign intervention and foreign companies—the mood of anti-colonialism—and the desire to be respected by other nations. A recurring motif was the users' strong emotional reactions to rejecting foreign intervention with specific attention given to the issue of separatism and national policy. As mentioned by one of the users, "it is a matter of urgency to break the intervention of foreign governments for the sake of our national identity and to hold our national union together preventing separation essentially...I feel so angry inside when seeing foreign countries messing with our affairs" (comment posted on

June 21, 2014) It is not surprising to see a high prevalence of statements projected at foreign governments related to separation issues, considering territorial sovereignty has always been a sensitive issue and an integral element for Indonesia. What is surprising, however, is how some users believed that the Indonesian government may easily become a target of surveillance by foreign nations. In this context, the ideal candidate would be a strong figure capable of deterring foreign intervention. For example, one user stated, “We need a strong political figure so it will deter foreign intelligence to spy on our government or even stop them finding a way of breaking us apart” (comment posted on June 22, 2014); while another user wrote, “Indonesia should have a clear intelligence agreement with foreign nations so it will protect bilateral relationships and national unity” (comment posted on June 22, 2014).

To a certain degree, this desire for a strong leader with investment in national anti-surveillance politics can be explained as a reaction to the scandalous documents released by the former NSA agent, Edward Snowden, in late 2013, which showed Australia’s intelligence eavesdropping into the communication of several Indonesian political figures, including the mobile phone of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2009 (Frost, 2016). As a political response, the Indonesian government recalled its ambassador to Australia as well as suspended military cooperation before negotiations reached an agreement in October 2014 (Frost, 2016).

Other users stated their emotional distress directed at a government which, allegedly, was not taking a more aggressive stance to oppose foreign intervention, and their desire for a strong candidate who could stand up to a foreign power. For instance, one user reported, “I just want to hit my head on the wall knowing that foreign powers were affecting the policy makers. The new government should be more cautious and clever enough to limit foreign intervention or else we will be doomed” (comment posted on June 22, 2014). It appears here that this user thought that foreign powers had considerable influence over important matters in Indonesia and that foreign powers were a national threat. Several postings concerning island claims by neighboring countries around Indonesia had the tendency of blaming previous governments for the loss of small islands, which were formerly part of Indonesia. For instance, users expressed their negative sentiments by saying, “the new president must be able to protect and maintain our national sovereignty and prevent the loss of more islands” (comment posted on June 22, 2014); “After the Sipadan and Ligitan case, the new president should pay more attention to our small islands” (comment posted on June 23, 2014).

Apparently, many users placed the blame of the loss of two islands to Malaysia squarely onto former President Megawati Sukarnoputri’s administration. In reality, the two islands had been ownerless during the dispute which meant that, technically, Indonesia had never actually “lost” the islands. Nevertheless, for many Indonesians, the outcome of the dispute was a matter of national shame

(Butcher, 2013). Moreover, Malaysia, and previously the British government, had greater claims to the islands ranging from their economic use of the islands since early 1917 when the local Malaysians collected turtle eggs, to the more recent tourism industry on those islands. In contrast, the Indonesian government and its former colonizing power, the Netherlands, failed to provide proper evidence of authority, according to the International Court of Justice (Arsana, 2013; Butcher, 2013). In this context, it can be concluded that when it comes to sovereignty, territory alone does not guarantee legitimacy; instead, legitimacy resides in the use that people make of a territory (Colson, 2003). The case illustrated two important lessons for the Indonesian government, namely, the importance of exercising national rights over the islands in a visible way, and the importance of understanding the meaning of the islands for national defense, political, and economic prosperity (Situmorang, 2012). Users' comments about the importance of a strong candidate to preserve national claim over the islands illustrate this point.

The ideal candidate was constructed as an emotional nexus of anti-foreigner policies. Consistent with previous studies, the references to national identity can also manifest as a social defense mechanism in which feelings of shame about a nation's weakness or its perceived negative reputation in the eyes of international powers are associated with feelings of anger against foreign powers (Vogler, 2000). Here, an emotion-infused user's comments about foreign exploitation are illustrative of this point: "I hate foreign companies because they

are overly exploiting our natural resources from us” (comment posted on June 23, 2014). Other users claimed to be “extremely saddened” by the existing condition. The metaphor of a leech draining its host of blood was also used to make this point: “we may be a big nation, but our national wealth will soon be gone consumed by those heartless foreign companies like Freeport. Big leeches are very dangerous to us. I just hate them” (comment posted on June 23, 2014).

Users also showed emotion when expressing disapproval for the role of foreign aid on numerous occasions, especially those from Western countries: “It is 2014 and by now we should be able to stop relying on foreign aid because it is so degrading and does not bring significant change to us. Wake up bro! I feel so ashamed” (comment posted on June 23, 2014). Another user pointed out the negative side of foreign aid while proposing an alternative solution: “If we cultivate this high reliance on foreign aid, Indonesia will only remain as a poor country because our local government does not know what to do with the money. Instead, what we need more is foreign investment in different economic sectors” (comment posted on June 23, 2014). These instances show how the construction of national identity in relation to foreign powers is a complicated issue that involves strong emotions such as those of hate, anger, and shame (Vogler, 2000; Aspinall, 2016).

Along with emotional expressions against international interference, users also made negative statements against colonial powers. The anti-colonial sentiment occurred in comments involving references to past colonialism during

the Dutch exploitation period. Many users believed national sovereignty to be threatened because they saw Indonesia was still in the process of being colonialized. Users, for instance, expressed their burden by stating, “If you think that we are free from colonialism then you are so wrong my friend. The Dutch may no longer occupy our nation, even so, we are still bombarded by the foreign exploitation. We should do something!” (comment posted on June 23, 2014); “We may have declared our independence in 1945, but in practice we are still in control of the super power nations. Is this what we want?” (comment posted on June 23, 2014). Although the anti-Dutch language is not apparent in the postings, users mentioned the struggle of national heroes during the Dutch colonial era and what it had done to the mentality of some Indonesians: “Our founding fathers and national heroes fought for us in order to be free from the Dutch. And they fought with tears and blood, so we must protect our national identity and heighten our sense of nationalism” (comment posted on June 23, 2014); “During the Dutch occupation, many of our national heroes sacrificed themselves for the sake of national liberty. Come on people! We should be brave and free ourselves from the hands of foreigners” (comment posted on June 23, 2014); “People! We should not let colonial mindsets, like the feeling of inferiority brings us down. Keep on fighting” (comment posted on June 23, 2014), and “We must always remember what our national heroes did for us for the sovereignty of our nation” (comment posted on June 23, 2014). One possible reason that can explain why many users are still impacted by Dutch colonialism is because the Dutch

occupation lasted for more than 300 years, and this attitude eventually became a distinctive feature of Indonesian nationalism (Aspinall, 2016). Thus, the construction of Indonesia's national identity is strongly affected by history and often involves references to the years of struggle against colonial control. (Aspinall, 2016).

The desire to be respected by other nations seemed to circle around the perceived intentions of Malaysia's and Indonesia's economic status. Users reported how the current level of Indonesia's economic growth, which many believe to be lower than that of Malaysia, made them feel ashamed: "Indonesia arise, how come we are so behind Malaysia. Territorially-wise, we are larger than Malaysia and yet our GDP growth is lower than Malaysia. Come on people!" (comment posted on June 24, 2014); "It is shameful and cruel knowing that Malaysia is economically more advanced than Indonesia. We need a better leader!" (comment posted on June 24, 2014); "Arise Indonesia. We know we can be more prosperous than Malaysia!" (comment posted on June 24, 2014). For some, the tension was more directed to the problematic situation of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia, as they saw the government at fault for not providing standardized training for the migrant workers. One user stated that, "I feel so humiliated by the condition of our migrant workers. Many of them experience inhumane treatment while in Malaysia" (comment posted on June 24, 2014). Meanwhile, one user expressed stronger language by stating, "I don't want to be known as a slave country. Our migrant workers in Malaysia work as

maids and they receive no respect from their employers. We're losing our face! We are not a nation of slaves. We have dignity and what we need is to gain respect from Malaysia" (comment posted on June 24, 2014).

For some users, the most important issue of national dignity was restoring Indonesia to its previous status of "Asian Tiger," thanks to its significant economic performance in the early 1990s ("The Report: Indonesia," 2014). The considerable GDP growth that occurred from 1965 to 1995 decreased the national poverty rate which, for many experts, indicated a promising prospect to the overall economic stability in Indonesia ("The Report: Indonesia," 2014). The expression of shame and dissatisfaction can be seen as another form of economic nationalism, which occurred as a result of comparisons between Indonesia's past as the "Asian tiger economy" and its current economy, which, for some, is far removed from that status. Rather than advocating efforts to build the nation's economy, users focused instead on the urgency of reviving Indonesia's long lost economic status: "Indonesia will be a great tiger again in the future! No more shame people! (comment posted on June 25, 2014); "We need to resurrect the Asian tiger title back to our nation, I am Indonesia arise!" (comment posted on June 25, 2014). Others focused on the need to bring economic stability by reducing the number of exchange workers instead of concentrating on restoring Indonesia's "Asian Tiger" status: "It is stupid if you ask the next leader to bring back the Asian tiger status when we still have tremendous amounts of exchange workers out there" (comment posted on June

25, 2014). Aside from that, it is interesting to note that several users added how Prabowo outweighed Jokowi's capability in resurrecting the Asian tiger status because many believed that Prabowo's leadership style and political program of reducing the number of migrant workers aligned with restoring Indonesia's economic dominance.

The relationship between national and foreign interests was, in the users' view, an important point that distinguished the two candidates. Users constructed Prabowo as more capable of limiting or even eliminating foreign intervention because he was perceived to have more passion and to encourage nationalism among the public. Accordingly, users repeatedly motivated Prabowo to fight foreign control over Indonesia's national assets to achieve ultimate freedom, as well as to maintain the unity of the nation as a whole. On the contrary, users expressed doubts towards Jokowi's capability in restricting foreign interference by highlighting his perceived weakness in taking a stand against foreign intervention; an approach often regarded by users as a major disadvantage to his overall political strategy. Users went as far as to define Jokowi as a political pawn of foreign countries, one willing to put other countries' interests above the national well-being.

As noticed by scholars and experts, most Indonesian presidential candidates tend to incorporate and promote a nationalist platform in their campaign; Prabowo and Jokowi were no exception. However, Prabowo repeatedly endorsed nationalist messages, especially those against foreign

intervention and promoting national dignity (Aspinall, 2016). Thus, we see the campaign conducted by Prabowo, which portrayed him as a defender of national interests, reflected in how users constructed Prabowo himself. Often, Prabowo focused on the issue of foreign exploitation of Indonesia's natural resources and the position of Indonesian subservience and slavery to foreign powers. One way to break the cycle, according to Prabowo, was to restore Indonesian greatness by restricting foreign involvement in local economic sectors (Aspinall). Jokowi, on the other hand, encouraged nationalism without excessive measures and used more moderate language. For Jokowi, negotiation seemed to be the preferred solution in transnational disputes, especially in the ones between Indonesia and Malaysia; as a result, users saw him as the weaker of the two.

This fundamental difference between how the two candidates were perceived by users in relation to national identity is evident in how users employed metaphors to describe the two candidates. Users referred to Prabowo as the "Asian Tiger," a reference meant to indicate Prabowo's charismatic character that would benefit Indonesia in recovering the status of Asia's Tiger in regards to economic development. For instance, one user commented, "Prabowo is a charismatic leader and he deserves to be called the tiger of Asia. Jokowi is so far away from this title" (comment made on June 28, 2014). This metaphor was often repeated on billboards as the election approached, with a picture of Prabowo placed beside the Asian Tiger slogan (Aspinall, 2015). Prabowo's own oratory style and presentation embraced the slogan. For example, in a speech

that Prabowo delivered during an event for his political party known as Gerindra (Great Indonesia Movement Party), the candidate used the metaphor of the Asian Tiger to explain his political agenda and intention and to highlight how he would be able to restore Indonesia's economic status. Prabowo's speeches were typically delivered in a theatrical style combined with a military spirit and a passionate linguistic performance to show his great enthusiasm, all to "invoke the grandeur and passion of Indonesia's nationalist political tradition" (Aspinall, 2015, p. 13). Thus, the use of the Asian Tiger metaphor in users' comments was both a reflection of how the social media environment and the official campaign message aligned, and a way for Prabowo to forge an emotional connection to the audience by making national identity a central theme in his political program. Indeed, it appeared that Prabowo explicitly introduced the tiger metaphor in his Facebook page long before the official campaign period to demonstrate which kind of leadership style people in Indonesia needed to elevate the nation (Aspinall, 2015). Thus, the metaphor of the Asian Tiger played a strategic role in the construction of this candidate's image by also creating a contrast with the allegedly weaker character of his opponent.

Metaphors can serve to build an emotional response in the voters during a political speech (Kuo, 2003; Tannen, 1989). The utilization of animal metaphors in political discourses can also be found in Taiwan, where Taiwanese politicians used metaphors as a strategy to undermine opponents and as a political tool to maintain positive self-face in the public eyes of the other (Kuo, 2003). Animal

metaphors such as “little white rabbit”, “rooster”, and “fox” during a live debate can either make or break a candidate’s image (Kuo, 2003). In Prabowo’s case, the metaphor of “Asian Tiger,” played on nationalistic fears of foreign economic invasion, shaped his positive image as a strong leader.

### Candidate Image and Group Identity

So far, the analysis demonstrated how users appropriated nationalistic discourse to create an idealized image of a political candidate able to restore the economic and political independence of Indonesia and to project that image on Prabowo. The contrast between “us” versus “them” on which nationalistic discourse was articulated is also present in how users distinguished “their” candidate, Prabowo, from the opposing candidate, Jokowi. In this respect, Prabowo’s supporters used the constructed image of their candidate to create a contrast between themselves as a group and Jokowi’s supporters.

The construction of candidate image through the “us” vs. “them” contrast, between the group of supporters, rested on two important elements: the symbols mobilized to construct the group identity of the supporters, and inferences based on which public figure supported whom.

First, each group of supporters expressed collective identity by showing different behaviors or practices that served as signifiers which connected the group around a shared symbol, thus distinguishing it from the other (Soon & Kluver, 2014; Van Summeren, 2007), as evidenced in the contrast between the “one finger salute” and “two finger salute.” The formation of these symbolic hand

gestures had to do with the number displayed on the ballot paper. The “one finger salute” that Prabowo supporters often displayed during the election campaign was communicated in online settings to remind Prabowo supporters of what connected them. For example, in one posting, users stated, “One finger salute for you Prabowo” (comment posted on June 26, 2014); “Once one finger will always be one finger” (comment posted on June 26, 2014). On the other hand, Jokowi’s supporters showed their group identity with the hand gesture of a “two fingers salute.” They asserted their collective identity by uttering, “Two finger salute for Jokowi” (comment posted on June 26, 2014); “Two fingers salute until the end” (comment posted on June 26, 2014). In practice, Jokowi’s supporters, especially those celebrities who supported him, extended the two finger salute by using it as a theme for a musical concert to gain more social capital just one week before the election took place (Dewi, 2014). These salutes also appeared in various memes and in the selfies that the voting public posted on various social media platforms.

Thus, these non-verbal gestures were used to tie a candidate’s image to the collective identity of the supporters. As explained by Goffman (1973), the non-verbal symbolic gesture, which refers to “tie signs,” can be an effective tool to signify relationships or ties between people and involves “objects, acts, expression, and only excluding the literal aspects of explicit documentary statements” (p. 194). Though Goffman (1973) emphasizes the role of “tie signs” as expressions of intimacy in the realm of personal relationships, they are

relevant in politics as indicators of a symbolic relationships, very much like dress codes (O'Brien, 2006). Here, the "tie signs" were specifically used in social media postings to assess the other's in-group or out-group status.

Besides using verbal or non-verbal gestures, the acknowledgement of group identity can also be expressed through material objects, such as flags, emblems, logos, guide books for the backpacker subculture, or even national identity cards in Indonesia (Callahan & Ledgerwood, 2016; Currie, Campbell-Trant, & Seaton, 2005; O'Shaughnessy, 2009). These symbolic objects do not function merely as ornamental features, but they also allow the development of group cohesiveness, competency, realness, and more importantly, the construction of collective identity within the members of the group (Callahan & Ledgerwood, 2016).

A second strategy used to construct a candidate's image was to project the image of the public figures who endorsed the candidate onto the image of the candidate and his supporters. For example, one user stated: "As a supporter of Prabowo, I have never spread false comments about anything including Jokowi, because I believe that it is not right and will only create chaos between supporters. However, Jokowi supporters like to write negative comments about Prabowo and most are not accurate. Please go away, you are not part of this group and I will not ever associate with any of you" (comment posted on June 26, 2014).

The perception of Jokowi as a political “puppet” manipulated by the party leader Megawati, was the central signifier through which Prabowo’s supporters distinguished themselves from Jokowi’s. As Chairwomen of his party, many people perceived Megawati, the public figure endorsing Jokowi, as the source of power who was in control of Jokowi’s decisions and political moves. Megawati is the daughter of the first president of Indonesia, Sukarno, who is also one of the founding fathers of the nation. In her relatively short political career, Megawati became Indonesia’s president in 2001 by replacing the impeached President Abdurrahman Wahid (popularly known as Gus Dur). In the public’s eyes, including political observers, many recognized Megawati’s political decisions as rather slow, especially when it came to implementing important policies and when dealing with ongoing internal conflict such as in the city of Ambon, the capital city of Maluku (Azra, 2006). Although endorsed by her party to enter the presidential race, Jokowi was more popular and eventually became the official candidate. Accordingly, many analysts portrayed her as being more satisfied to manipulate politics behind the curtains (“Indonesia Presidential Front-Runner,” 2014). This perception was further consolidated as a result of a political speech in which Megawati asked Jokowi to serve his political party as the product of that party (Rachman & Otto, 2015). The opposing candidate, Prabowo, took full advantage of the comment and construed it to mean that Jokowi was Megawati’s puppet. Prabowo warned his supporters against the danger of electing a “puppet” president (“Indonesia Presidential Front-Runner,” 2014). This is yet another

example of how social media users adopted the official imagery of the political campaign in their comments.

The puppet as metaphor in political settings was widely used by the bourgeois political writers in the Renaissance era to great effect and persists to the present day (Shershow, 1995). For some, the puppet was a metaphor encouraging parody against the political suppression of the status quo, while for other writers, it was a metaphor indicative of the need for moral education. In the Indonesian political context, the image of the political puppet was used to emphasize the perceived weakness of Jokowi as a viable political candidate, someone whose political independence was in question. For instance, in a comment made on June 30, 2014, one user stated, "I choose Prabowo over Jokowi because I don't want to be ruled by a puppet president." Another commenter expressed a similar tone, "I give pity for people who support Jokowi knowing that he is a puppet of Megawati. This is a very dangerous situation" (comment posted on June, 30, 2014). Additionally, others held the belief that Jokowi had to follow Megawati's "commands" as the main political power in the party.

Prabowo's supporters embraced the "political puppet" metaphor in their online postings and used it as a sort of "call to arms" to denigrate the opponent's supporters. One user asserted that, "It is so sad to see many of Jokowi's supporters become the supporters of a puppet candidate. Open your eyes man! Well I am glad I am not part of your group." In this context, Prabowo's supporters

believed they were collectively “intelligent” to side with Prabowo. For instance, a user reported, “Smart people choose Prabowo. And this my friend clearly does not exist in Jokowi’s team and supporters. We are on the right track!” (comment posted on June 30, 2014). Of course, the intelligence that Prabowo’s supporters allegedly displayed was denied by their opponents. Several users, for example, felt that Jokowi supporters were “unintelligent” because they often criticized and belittled Prabowo, using a language perceived to be “uneducated” and offensive. This result aligns with the previous studies that demonstrate how individuals have the tendency to boost their similarities with the internalized social group (or in-group), while establishing sharp differences with the members of the out-group (David & Turner, 1999; Hoffner & Rehkoff, 2011). The above signifiers are used in a process of comparison between who the users believe they are and who the users believe they are not. In other words, there was a process of evaluation between the “self-recognition and external recognition” (Soon & Kluver, 2014, p. 507).

In contrast, Jokowi supporters were more likely to distinguish themselves from the perceived qualities of the artists who endorsed Prabowo and linking those qualities to Prabowo’s supporters. One of the users uttered, “Ahmad Dhani [the artist] is politically unknowledgeable and poorly educated. So no wonder this resonates perfectly with Prabowo’s supporters who more or less are the same” (comment posted on June 30, 2014). It is worth mentioning here that celebrity endorsement of political candidates was at its peak in 2014, during the

presidential campaign. Celebrities consisting of film stars, comedians, creative workers, soap-opera artists, and mostly high profile musicians endorsed both Jokowi and Prabowo in various ways, such as through the creation of campaign songs and encouragement videos circulated on Youtube. One notable form of celebrity endorsement on Jokowi's side was the free musical concert involving hundreds of local musicians, titled "Salam Dunia Jari Concert: Road to Victory" (The two-finger salute) and held just seven days before the election day on July 9, 2014 (Dewi, 2014). During a press conference at Jokowi's campaign media center, Abdee, one of the musicians involved, stated that the event was not solicited by Jokowi's political team and that every artist in the concert was performing pro-bono (Dewi, 2014).

As shown in the existing literature, celebrity endorsement is prevalent in Western democracies, particularly in American politics (Jackson & Darrow, 2005; Wheeler, 2013). The involvement of celebrities in Indonesia was apparent in 2014. Indonesian celebrities have become openly outspoken and proud about their political standpoint, especially in supporting their chosen candidate in the 2014 presidential election. Throughout the official campaign period, local musicians and film stars were involved in political advertisements, musical concerts, and social media as a way to catapult their candidate's electability before the election day. The rise of celebrity political endorsement has never been as prominent as in the 2014 presidential election; Indonesia only adopted direct election in 2004 (Fukuoka & Thalang, 2014).

To a certain extent, celebrity endorsements towards political candidates are triggered because of the already solidified figure of the candidate himself or herself. In Bill Clinton's case, for instance, celebrities were attracted to him because he was perceived to have strong charisma, intellectuality, and a strong vision about the environment, multiculturalism, and gay rights (Wheeler, 2013). Most significantly, Clinton courted the involvement of Hollywood superstars which, in turn, made them feel special (Wheeler, 2013). Therefore, it can be concluded that the linkage between celebrities and politicians is "a two-way street" (Wheeler, 2013, p. 42). Similarly, in Prabowo's case, many of celebrities who endorsed him did so because of his already established charisma as a political candidate and image as a strong, decisive leader. In contrast, other celebrities were attracted to Jokowi because of his perceived image as an approachable, down to earth, and humble person.

However, it is worth remembering that celebrities use their social capital to attract followers for a candidate, thus modifying the candidate's image. For example, in Obama's case, the use of celebrities in his campaign was not only a means to improve his public persona as a presidential candidate, but also as a strategy to mobilize African-American voters (Wheeler, 2013). Obama used endorsement—for instance, the endorsement of high-profile celebrities like Oprah Winfrey—to gather a wider range of constituents. As reported by Garthwaite and Moore (2008), "Winfrey's endorsement of Obama was estimated to bring in 1,015,559 votes" (as cited in Wheeler, 2013, p. 80). Interestingly, the

association between Hollywood and Obama did not always work harmoniously, as illustrated in his 2012 presidential campaign when the legendary actor and director Clint Eastwood symbolically addressed Obama by speaking to an empty chair at the Republican National Convention (Abdullah, 2012; Wheeler, 2013). Thus, the relationship with celebrities can often be negative and used as a form of political attack (Wheeler, 2013).

In the case under analysis, the perceived failures of the media celebrities who endorsed Prabowo were seen to reflect on Prabowo himself. Several Jokowi supporters made remarks about the artists' outfits which seemed to remind them of some of the Nazi uniforms. One user stated, "I am totally against the human rights violence committed by the Nazis. That being said, I am against Ahmad Dhani and the person he supports" (comment posted on June 23, 2014). The Nazi-like elements in Dhani's costume received a lot of attention from voters. As mentioned by one of the users, "I can't believe Ahmad Dhani wears a Nazi officer uniform? And use it during the time when he is endorsing a presidential candidate. I think he is losing his mind" (comment posted on June 23, 2014). Another user agreed with this comment by saying, "I think Ahmad Dhani is crazy and on top of that he is stupid. He should have known better the historical meaning behind the uniform" (comment posted on June 23, 2014).

The issue of Ahmad Dhani's Nazi-style uniform did attract international and domestic critical attention. *Time* (2014) for instance, reported negatively on Dhani's costume), which many believe explains the negative outcome of

Prabowo's campaign (Kwok, 2014). Others assumed that Ahmad Dhani did not politically comprehend the historical background surrounding the Nazi Party, and only used Nazi elements as an artistic statement ("Sejarawan Kritisi Kostum," 2014). Regardless of the intent behind the artist's outfit, Jokowi's supporters cashed in on the similarity to a Nazi uniform to emphasize how Prabowo and his supporters endorsed violence: "We support a peaceful campaign and leave alone the violent behavior. We are not those people who support Prabowo who are often involved in anarchy efforts" (comment posted on June 23, 2014). Ahmad Dhani himself claimed that his musical expressions were misunderstood; however, fellow musicians like Anggun and Glen Fredly disagreed and tweeted that such manners were ignorant. They also commented that Indonesia must not fall into the hands of fascists ("Ahmad Dhani's Nazi", 2014), which further cemented the link between the perceived image of an endorsing celebrity and the image of the candidate himself; as evidenced in the following: "I think it is careless for Ahmad Dhani to use the fascist-style costume because it may bring negative perceptions to Prabowo's overall image as a potential leader" (comment posted on June 25, 2014).

Jokowi's supporters also expressed criticism towards the artistic qualities of the song itself. For example, one user stated, "I don't like the song, and as a suggestion, it would have been better if those singers did not copy Queen's song, We Will Rock You. It doesn't sound original" (comment posted on June 22, 2014). Another user said, "How come those celebrities plagiarized someone's

else song without asking permission first?” (comment posted on June 22, 2014). It appeared that many of the users agreed on the issue of alleged plagiarism of those celebrities, especially targeted towards Ahmad Dhani since he was the initiator of the campaign song. As expressed by the users, “Yeah Ahmad Dhani terribly plagiarized Queen’s song and I thought he was a gifted musician?” (comment posted on June 22, 2014); “How come a musician as cool as Ahmad Dhani created a campaign song from an existing song and I can feel a degree of plagiarism in this song. In fact, it is a high one” (comment posted on June 22, 2014).

Jokowi’s supporters, naturally, acknowledged the artistic quality of the celebrities who supported Jokowi. For example, “Honestly, I think celebrities who support Jokowi have better taste in music and clearly are more creative than Ahmad Dhani and friends” (comment posted on June 22, 2014). In a similar vein, another user wrote, “Yeah Jokowi’s celebrities are far more creative and they sound very organic unlike Ahmad Dhani who plagiarized Queen’s song” (comment posted on June 23, 2014).

In summary, the construction of the political images of the two candidates was directly connected to how the candidate’s relationship with important public figures was perceived by the public. The relationship between Prabowo and the endorsing media artist Ahmad Dhani, on one hand, and the relationship between Jokowi and his endorsing media artists, as well as the endorsing political leader Megawati, were strategies that voters employed to build the image of their

candidate and his opponent; as well as the image of the two groups of supporters. Other public figures who endorsed the two candidates were also used to distinguish between the positive and negative qualities of the candidates and their supporters.

#### The Construction of Candidate Image Based on Personal Traits

One substantial aspect that can explain why people like one candidate and dislike another is the extent to which they can identify personally with them (Brooks, Manza, & Bolzendahl, 2003; Levine, 2005). This statement is not only true for politics. In the sports world, sport fans are more likely to identify and connect with athletes who seem to share similarity of character, lifestyle, and political opinions with the fans. For instance, old school athletes have a better connection with audiences who are oriented towards old school ideology than with younger fans (below the age of 30) who are accustomed to a materialist set of values (Sukhdial, Aiken, & Kahle, 2002).

Similarly, in the case under analysis, voters connected to the candidates on a personal basis using perceived character traits that, in their opinion, made them similar to the candidates. Users believed Prabowo had the quality of a sincere person, or to be exact, as a non-hypocritical individual. One post stated, for example, "I like Prabowo because he is not a hypocrite when dealing with his contender and I myself am personally similar to this" (comment posted on June 28, 2014). Another post stated, "The thing that moves me is the fact that Prabowo always says his true feelings and never sugar-coated his opinions, and

I am like that as a person” (comment posted on June 28, 2014). It is likely that this inference about Prabowo’s character had to do with how aligned people perceived Prabowo’s relationship with journalists, to be with his own. Thus, Prabowo never tried to satisfy the media or court them for the sake of his public image, which was perceived by some to be in line with his character. For example, at a news conference at the Freedom Institute in Jakarta, Prabowo refused to answer a *Jakarta Post*’s reporter and criticized the media for giving him disproportionately negative treatment (“Ini Alasan Prabowo”, 2014), an attitude perceived to be in line with his uncompromising character.

Other positive personal traits that users remarked on were Prabowo’s qualities as an animal enthusiast and how that connected to the passion of his voters. For example, several users mentioned how they were very fond of Prabowo’s animal-lover side, such as his care for his horses and the goats he bred. A user stated “I love animals and so does Prabowo. This is great and I think a leader who loves animals would be a responsible one” (comment posted on June 27, 2014). Prabowo’s passion towards his horse and his horseback riding skills were introduced to the public eyes during a campaign event that further cemented the military image of Prabowo (Aritonang, 2014). Various online media outlets who interviewed Prabowo also commented on Prabowo’s animal-friendly home, often described as an environment filled with dozens of horses, and used a photograph of Prabowo with his exotic pet eagle (“Prabowo: What

Guarantees”, 2013). Prabowo’s interaction with animals was also a background image in a widely shared video interview on YouTube.

Jokowi, too, was praised for his efforts in handling animal abuse in Jakarta. As an example, a resident of Jakarta mentioned online:

As a mother of two I do not want my child to see chained macaques being exploited badly as a form of entertainment. I put high value on animals and thank God Jokowi also has the same attitude by eradicating the monkey business (comment posted on June 28, 2014).

Another comment made by a student was:

As a veterinarian student and someone who is opposed to animal exploitation, improper monkey shows should be banned because it is inhumane and their health is at high risk. I believe animal’s health is essential. And I give credit to Jokowi for stopping the business and being aware of the macaque’s health” (comment posted on June 28, 2014).

The issue of monkey performances without proper treatment from the handlers has been a serious situation at the heart of Jakarta for many years. However, Jokowi was the first bureaucrat who openly criticized the abusive monkey shows and took a real initiative to stop the action (Kapoor & Fabi, 2013). Furthermore, political analysts noted how these efforts, while on a relatively small scale, often brought unexpected political benefits because they were perceived by voters as an improvement compared to the neglect of other government officials (Kapoor & Fabi, 2013).

Another inference that enabled voters to connect to the candidate had to do with religion. For Prabowo, users felt that he was a good Islamic leader who would protect Islam in Indonesia. As one user expressed it, “I see Prabowo as a person with a sincere heart and that he would be committed to Islam. I see this in me as a young Muslim” (comment posted on June 30, 2014). Another user remarked on how Prabowo would defend Islamic and Muslim communities in Indonesia. Conversely, with Jokowi, some users were not sure about his religion and what being a Muslim meant to him, even though Jokowi described himself to the media as a devout Muslim. With a doubting tone, a user commented, “It is hard for me to connect with Jokowi because though he is a Muslim, some of his actions do not show enough that he is a devout one” (comment posted on June 30, 2014). This comment may have been due to the political rumors spread on social media about Jokowi’s wife only using the hijab as an accessory, to appeal to potential voters during the campaign. As shown from previous studies, there is a correlation between voters’ religion and presidential candidate preference (Bradberry, 2016). Religious service attendance by presidential candidates during primaries is a significant predictor of voter choice. Although the present analysis does not focus on the relationship between religion and voter choice in Indonesia, it is worth mentioning that the devoutness to religion for the voters was an important thread throughout many user postings.

However, more interesting than the perceived character traits that users employed to form a personal connection to the candidate were these traits that

voters perceived as being part of a candidate's personality. The analysis of postings revealed that users constructed the image of the candidate by invoking the candidate's alleged character in the context of the candidate's political past, the treatment at the hands of other people, and the quality of the candidate's spiritual life. These linkages were used to make predictions about the state of the country under a candidate and thus to distinguish among the two candidates.

### Political Scandal and The Candidate's Character

References to political scandals were important strategies for constructing the candidates' image. The occurrence of political rumors referencing political scandals was significant in the 2014 presidential election, especially in the online sphere. Through the extensive use of social media, rumors are both a way for information to flow to the public and a strategic form of political attack (Weeks & Garrett, 2014). Flourishing rumors that consisted of either positive or negative statements are often related to a candidate's credibility, party, personal life, and the people who are involved in the candidate's success team. In the dynamic of online discussions, voters are more attracted to negative rumors that apply to the candidates.

Online users used political scandal as a way of making inferences about the character of the candidates. Jokowi's supporters referred to Prabowo's alleged human rights scandal as the reason why they would not choose him. Thus, Prabowo was seen as the main figure behind the May 1998 riot. Jokowi's supporters expressed curiosity and even outrage at the fact that Prabowo was

still supported, given his alleged human rights violations. For example, one user stated: “How come Prabowo gets so much support when we know he is abusing Indonesian human rights” (comment posted on June 25, 2014). In a similar vein, another user commented: “I wonder what makes people vote for Prabowo when I know for sure that the May riot was under his command” (comment posted on June 26, 2014). “Prabowo will not become our president because I believe many people would not approve it since he is blacklisted by the United States government for his human rights abuse scandal” (comment posted on June 26, 2014).

Prabowo was indeed denied entrance to the United States in 2000 due to accusations of his involvement in the kidnapping case involving activists who were against Suharto’s regime in 1998 (Hiebert, Osius, & Polling, 2013). Nonetheless, experts explained that the U.S. government may grant a visa for Prabowo since the allegation could not be entirely proven until clear and sufficient evidence existed as a result of a proper court trial (Hiebert, Osius, & Polling, 2013). These negative comments regarding Prabowo’s past political scandals confirms research that shows how voters respond more to allegations of political scandal, especially those related to corruption and power abuse (Basinger, 2013).

Prabowo has denied his involvement in the May 1998 riot and added that the horror was a political plot targeted to attack his position as a commander (Camilleri & Schottman, 2013). On the other hand, he has a different attitude

when dealing with the kidnapping incident, asserting that he was only following orders from the leader above him who had more power to govern, and therefore, by default, he was not entirely responsible for the impact (Camilleri & Schottman, 2013). However, a more recent information from the military inquiry indicated that Prabowo failed to translate the meanings behind the order, and thus, made him responsible for the kidnapping case (Bachelard, 2014). Interestingly, one user defended Prabowo's position by stating, "As a person who abides by the law, I think it is so unfair if we judge Prabowo without having definite evidence for his role in the kidnaping and torture the young activist back in the 1998 riot" (comment posted on June 25, 2014). In addition, one user seemed to agree with the fact that Prabowo was simply following a command from the top leaders with more authority and power, which indicated that he was not the sole perpetrator of the May riot. This can be seen from the statement, "Prabowo was only a pawn, there were leaders who instructed him to kidnap activists who were anti-Suharto. And those leaders must also take responsibility for the horrific events they caused these innocent people" (comment posted on the June 28, 2014).

Another interesting finding was how some users expressed their assumptions that the large support of Prabowo was due to the political party factor. For example, "I think people who support Prabowo, regardless of his political past behavior or allegations, do so because of his political party" (comment posted on June 25, 2014). Similarly, other users stated that citizens who became Prabowo's supporters were those who came from the same party

as him. This is shown from comments like, “I bet people who are the members of the Gerindra party are those who support Prabowo and shut their eyes regarding the kidnapping accusation” (comment posted on June 23, 2014). “Yeah those who also belong to Gerindra must ignore the fact that Prabowo was once involved in the human rights abuse scandal” (comment posted on June 23, 2014). These results supported past research related to the Clinton-Lewinsky political scandal in 1998, showing that voters held the same position by endorsing the party of Clinton (or the status quo), regardless of the sexual scandal behind him (Jacobson, 1999). One aspect that explains this result was that Clinton’s administration made a good contribution to the economy, which improved public welfare and decreased level of crime (Jacobson). Although Prabowo’s case was not related to a sexual issue, many individuals may have believed that his plan regarding economic development could improve the overall economic situation in Indonesia. As mentioned by Jacobson, among the indicators that American citizens used to evaluate the president’s performance, the economy’s performance is highly regarded and should be implemented properly by the president (Jacobson). This can be shown by several statements like, “I know that Prabowo is not perfect considering his allegation of human rights abuse, but his economic agenda which focuses on improving the agricultural sector impressed me” (comment posted on June 22, 2014). “Prabowo may have a skeleton in his closet, but hey who does not right? What is more

important is we need his vision for reducing poverty” (comment posted on June 23, 2014).

On Jokowi’s side, users were more likely to point out his outward appearance as a mere tool in shaping a strategic public image, which many considered was misleading and full of hidden messages. For example, a user stated, “Jokowi may look ordinary and he does not indulge in expensive materials, but I don’t think it is a legit move. I bet he only uses it to gain public approval, especially from the grassroots” (comments posted on June 22, 2014). In a similar vein, another user stated, “with using simple attire, Jokowi may look approachable and nonchalant. However, these are only used to manipulate his public image since he needed to get public approval” (comment posted on June 25, 2014). Furthermore, users also recognized Jokowi’s facial features as a thing that explained his character. This can be seen from a statement like, “with his baby-faced looks, Jokowi appears weak and vulnerable. I think this is what makes him so submissive to Megawati” (comment posted on June 22, 2014). Though, in real life, Jokowi does not entirely match baby-faced features, such as big eyes and a small chin. However, past research revealed that adults with baby-faced attributes are perceived to look more submissive and physically less strong than other adults (Berry & McArthur, 1985; Rosenberg, Khan, & Tran, 1991). Moreover, there were also many users who made negative comments involving Jokowi’s physical features, particularly his slim posture. As an example, “How come you believe Jokowi? He is so skinny and malnourished looking. This

is not the kind of president that I want to have” (comment made on June 22, 2014). “Why is Jokowi so skinny? He looks unhealthy with that kind of weight. I believe he has a problem with his body in general” (comment made on June 24, 2014). This situation indicated that the physical characteristics of a leader or potential leader does matter to individuals. As seen in past research, there was a connection between a leader’s physical stature and preference for leaders (Murray, 2014). More specifically, people were more likely to choose a leader with greater weight and body mass index (BMI), especially in situations where threats were present (Murray, 2014), i.e., leaders who are physically more powerful, regardless of their degrees of attractiveness.

Besides commenting on Jokowi’s physical attributes, users also discussed how Jokowi was supported by the “invisible conglomerate” who operates similar to the mafia. Users assumed that Jokowi’s campaign was financially supported with illegal money coming from these hidden conglomerates in exchange for something valuable. One user mentioned, “Open your eyes, don’t you know that Jokowi is supported by the “bad conglomerates”? Their invisible hands penetrate through Jokowi’s campaign. And I am sure they want something in return” (comment posted on June 26, 2014). Various users approved this comment and added statements like, “I agree with this comment. And what is more I think is that those ‘bad conglomerates’ would greatly monopolize important economic factors” (comment posted on June 26, 2014). Furthermore, many users also mentioned how they learned about this sensitive issue from Twitter. For example,

“Don’t you hear that people on Twitter are stating that Jokowi is backed up by the mafia?” He is so bad and definitely not the kind of leader that I want” (comment posted on June 26, 2014).

One possible reason for this allegation can be traced from the occurrence of tabloid newspapers, namely *Obor Rakyat* (The People’s Torch). At a glance, readers may get an impression that the main theme of the tabloid contains various negative issues and distrust over Jokowi’s campaign, which many people consider aggressive and fueled with hate. In one of the articles, writers of the *Obor Rakyat* reported that Jokowi’s campaign was supported by the big Chinese conglomerate, which is popularly referred to as “cukong.” This may have happened because many of Jokowi’s supporters in Solo reported that the influential Chinese-Indonesians entrepreneurs were financially supporting his campaign in Solo, with a degree of reciprocation in return (Tyson & Purnomo, 2014). Moreover, if we traced back these connections, Megawati also has a good relationship with notable Chinese-Indonesian conglomerates such as Lim Sioe Liong. It is important to note that in the context of the political realm in Indonesia, there has always been a degree of relationship between Indonesian politicians and the cukongs, suggesting that the relationship is one of the driving forces behind a campaign (Tyson & Purnomo, 2014). In addition, some users who discussed this allegation further added how Jokowi is allegedly supporting Christianization, proposing that he is a “bad Muslim.” For example, “Haven’t you heard that one of the main supporters of Jokowi’s campaign is the big business

man with Christianity background?” (comment posted on June 28, 2014).

Moreover, another user commented, “It is not strange how Jokowi supports proliferation of Christianity in Solo, because he is close to many rich Chinese-Indonesian businessman” (comment posted on June 29, 2014). Jokowi is indeed close to many successful Chinese-Indonesians and it is publicly known that these figures contributed significantly to supporting Jokowi’s campaign. This situation was later manipulated by *Obor Rakyat* by spreading a rumor that Jokowi’s father, who is known as Widjijatno Notomihardjo, “is actually a Chinese-Indonesian businessman with the name “Oey Hong Liong”, but changed his Chinese name for political reasons” (Tyson & Purnomo, 2014, p. 133).

Moving on to the next allegation, users also talked about Jokowi’s sexual scandal, which many users claimed occurred when he was in China. For example, one user commented that Jokowi had a sex tape with a Chinese woman during a trip to China. Various users stigmatized Jokowi as a nasty old man: “Jokowi is a dirty old man, apparently” (comment posted on June 26, 2014). “Don’t you know that he has a sex tape with a Chinese woman. This is so disgusting. How come at the time of the election we heard about this immoral story?” (comment posted on June 27, 2014). Similar to the previous allegation, users obtained the sex scandal issue from a topic posted on Twitter and they inferred this in their comments. Though the number of reports are relatively small, the fact that users discussed the allegation showed that moral code is important for some people, especially during election time. Interestingly, some

users who discussed this matter speculated on the outcome if the allegation was indeed true even though they knew the possibility was relatively small since there was no actual sex tape circulated on the Internet or elsewhere. In essence, a sex scandal can be a parameter used by society in determining sexual moralities for the purpose of distinguishing between what is sexually acceptable and not (Gamson, 2001). In doing so, society may employ public humiliation as a form of punishment, which may result in a loss of status for the carrier of the scandal. Nevertheless, sociologically, a sexual scandal can be considered a phenomenon that is dependent on the time period where the sex scandal itself occurs (Gamson). Therefore, what is perceived by people as immoral behavior or something that should be kept private in one period of time, may not be the same later or even earlier in public (Gamson, 2001, p. 190).

#### At the Hands of Other People

Another important strategy for the construction of a candidate's image was not what the candidate did himself, but what other people did to the candidate. As mentioned above, Prabowo was perceived as someone significantly involved in the May 1998 riots. Nevertheless, there is a controversy whether Prabowo's involvement happened because Prabowo wanted it or because his senior generals ordered him to, which would have made Prabowo not entirely accountable for the riots. This political speculation was used to highlight Prabowo's good character. For instance, "It is proven that Prabowo's senior generals sacrificed Prabowo to hold the responsibility of shooting and killing in

the May 1998 riots. Those generals manipulated the case as if Prabowo was the person to blame. Prabowo was heavily afflicted by those generals during the political turmoil period” (comment posted on June 28, 2014). In a similar vein, a user explained:

Why do we have to bring something that already occurred in the past. We cannot change the time. Move on guys! And most importantly, Prabowo’s superiors are the ones who needs to bear the responsibility for the May riots not Prabowo (comment posted on June 28, 2014).

Another user stated:

If you want to know who is responsible for the riots in Jakarta then you should ask Prabowo’s seniors during that time. Also, try to ask yourself if you were in Prabowo’s position at that time, what would you do to handle the situation. We were in total chaos at that time (comment posted on June 28, 2014).

On the other hand, there were some users who were dissatisfied with this position because they perceived the horror of May 1998 was under Prabowo’s command. For example:

I am sorry but I cannot accept when Prabowo stated that his superior should be blamed for the violence in the Jakarta riots. This is because he was the one in Jakarta at that time and he should have been able to stop the violence and prevent it from spreading (comment posted on the June 28, 2014).

Others evaluated that Prabowo's action was politically motivated as a way to promote his position and replace his senior Wiranto who, at that time, was the commander of the armed forces. Users stated, "I think this is not a matter of how his superior treated him, but this is about how Prabowo was trying to elevate his position by not stopping the violence" (comment posted on June 28, 2014).

Another user agreed with this statement by further explaining that Prabowo was being political to create the impression of Wiranto's inability at repressing the riots: "The violence in the Jakarta riots was clearly a personal agenda of Prabowo to bring Wiranto down because Wiranto was not in Jakarta during the critical time" (comment posted on June 29, 2014). Wiranto was indeed outside Jakarta during the shootings of some students at the Trisakti University which ignited more violence around the city of Jakarta and resulted in 1200 victims in the two days of rioting: May 13 and 14. (Lee, 2015). One of the speculations circling around the riots is that Prabowo was trying to undermine Wiranto's position by downplaying the violence to show Wiranto at fault (Lee, 2015). It is publicly known that Prabowo and Wiranto have never had good chemistry when it comes to their working relationship in the armed forces, and this was stated by Prabowo himself (Lee, 2015). Some users also noted this circumstance by saying, "You know why this is happening? It is clearly because of the rivalry between Prabowo and Wiranto. This is even still apparent until today" (comment posted on June 29, 2014). Later in the post, some users specified how Wiranto declined many of Prabowo's propositions in the army. For example, "You guys

know the fact that Wiranto often times turned down Prabowo's request; right? Like rejecting Prabowo's proposal for buying new military hardware. This can be a reason why Prabowo dislikes Wiranto" (comment posted on June 30, 2014).

With these comments, we can see that when it comes to constructing a presidential candidate's image, past relationships help voters make inferences about the candidate's character and his or her moral values. Past impressions indicated that Prabowo was involved in the May riots; however, many people in the current period thought that it was Prabowo's senior officer who was responsible for the violence. Therefore, Prabowo is an innocent man to a certain degree in the chaotic incident of the May riots. As explained by Savage (1995), one's perception of presidential candidate's image is influenced by the interaction between the impression they had in the past and the current ones, making both important in the image formation process.

When it comes to Jokowi, we would see a totally different image construction. For Jokowi, users thought that people, specifically Megawati and other insiders involved in Jokowi's party (The PDI-P), treated him as if they are the driving force that helped pave the way for his presidential candidate position. As an example, one user said, "I hate to say this but I guess Megawati and other influential PDI-P act as if Jokowi would not be here if they were not behind him" (comment posted on June 29, 2014). This statement was agreed to by many users stating that "Yes what's up with Megawati? She treated Jokowi like he is a person with lack of power and she thinks that she is the source of Jokowi's

success” (comment posted on June 29, 2014); “Yeah I know that right, Megawati would always feel Jokowi is nothing without her support and we can see this in the media” (comment posted on June 29, 2014). Many users also speculated that if Jokowi was elected as the president, Megawati would control Jokowi, resulting in political interference. For example, “We can see it now that Megawati acts as if Jokowi was a helpless bureaucrat, but wait until he becomes a president then she would not let him go away without her decision in many aspects” (comment posted on June 29, 2014). This opinion can be traced back by looking at one of the online articles from *Time* magazine hinting that Jokowi was not in full control of his candidacy since he did not have the freedom to choose his vice president candidate (Kwok, 2014). Instead, his chairwoman Megawati selected his partner. However, many also responded that this impression was created and reinforced by the media, especially the online news. For example, one user mentioned “I get why people think that Megawati treats Jokowi like he needs of guidance and instructions. But I think this is mainly because the media keep portraying him as if he is helpless without Megawati” (comment posted on June 30, 2014). These postings about Jokowi denoted that there is an interaction between what ordinary people think about Jokowi and what the media perceived him to be. As we can see, the general public recognized how Megawati and people inside the party treated Jokowi differently. Nevertheless, other audiences thought that this condition is not entirely true since it comes from the media. These findings were in line with a previous study by Trent, Short-Thompson, Mongeau, Nusz, and

Trent (2001), which showed that there seemed to be a dynamic when it comes to a presidential candidate's image between the general public and the media. More specifically, both may agree and disagree on certain characteristics that are important for a candidate, such as the candidate's honesty or gender. In this current study, treatment of others seemed to be an important factor involved in a presidential candidate's image.

### Spiritual Values

Images that contained spiritual values of the candidates were apparent in the users' comments, particularly comments that stated the role of God in the success of the candidates. Many of the users believed that God has an important role in determining the presidential race and how God would give a sense of protection for each candidate. The sense of love to God coming from the candidates was also important for users. As an example for Prabowo, one user commented, "I believe that God would give you protection Mr. Prabowo, because I can see that you are a faithful Muslim sir and you love God dearly" (comment posted on June 25, 2014). Furthermore, many users believed that Prabowo would be protected by God concerning his attitude when dealing with his competitor. More specifically, users perceived that Prabowo treated his haters and competitors in a good manner. This is demonstrated through a comment like, "I know for sure that God would give his blessing and assurance for keeping you under his guidance because you never say one bad word directed to Jokowi or people who dislike your point of view" (comment posted on June 26, 2014);

“Since Prabowo never gives negative reaction to those who corner him or people who spread false allegation about him, I am sure that God will always stand by his side and protect him whenever he goes” (comment posted on June 26, 2014). There was also a user who commented, “Sir I believe that God will grant you the win because you are a faithful person and God can see this in you” (comment posted on June 25, 2014). Moreover, other commenters added their comments by giving religious advice to Prabowo; for example, “I know that you are a faithful leader, but please sir don’t forget to recite Quran because reciting Quran will help you to feel more peaceful and calm” (comment posted on June 25, 2014); “I can see that you are a loyal Muslim, but one suggestion sir, please give more money to the poor because spiritually it would help you to grant your wish and smooth the path of the election process” (comment posted on June 25, 2014). Aside from referencing the embrace of God, these results suggested that there was a great sense of advice giving coming from Prabowo supporters and the sympathizers. More comments that denoted advice giving such as, “With the help from God sir, I believe you can pass this trial. Please stay alert and don’t forget the five-times prayers sir!” (comment posted on June 27, 2014); “Never give up sir because God does not sleep and I am sure you have his blessing” (comment posted on June 27, 2014).

Interestingly, various users in the postings also expressed how they remember Prabowo in their prayers. For example, “You are a good Muslim sir and I can see this radiates within you. You are always in my prayers sir and I

hope that Allah would grant my wishes, which is to have you as my president. Amin!” (comment posted on June 26, 2014). Another interesting comment was how some users thought that prayers from prominent religious figures would help Prabowo in achieving victory and deter negative energies. For instance, “Don’t worry sir, I believe those prayers coming from religious figures would boost your chance of winning, and most importantly, help to eliminate negative energies surrounding you during the campaign” (comment posted on June 26, 2014); “Spiritual support from religious figures would definitely help you to win the race sir, and neutralize negative energies from your haters” (comment posted on June 26, 2014).

As for Jokowi, users showed positive comments of how God contributes to his pathway for winning the presidential election while removing obstacles from those who do not believe in the Jokowi movement throughout the election period. For instance, “Jokowi is a good Muslim and I am totally sure that God would always be behind him and bless him to win the election” (comment posted on June 30, 2014). While others stated, “Jokowi is not only a good person, but he is also a true believer. And I heard from an insider that he has never missed doing the five times prayer. With this characteristic, I believe God will protect him from the harm coming from his haters” (comment posted on June 30, 2014). In a similar tone, another user also mentioned, “Jokowi is a sincere person and God loves sincere individuals. Sir, God would prevent any harm to you because you are destined to be our president” (comment posted on June 29, 2014).

Interestingly, some users thought that Jokowi deserves to win because God would not approve of Prabowo since many of the users believed that Prabowo was involved in the kidnapping case during the Jakarta riots. There was a degree of comparison using Prabowo's allegation story as the reason. For example, "Jokowi will clearly win the election, because God does not sleep. He knows what Prabowo did in the past and how he kidnapped those innocent activists who fought against Suharto" (comment posted on June 28, 2014). Moreover, users expressed, "Yeah I think Prabowo's case of abusing human rights would hinder him from winning the election. Because in my opinion heaven knows that he is the key behind the disappearance of the innocent activists. God does not sleep. With this situation, Jokowi will get the victory since he has a clean background and never violates human rights" (comment posted on June 28, 2014). Similarly, another commenter emphasized how God would punish Prabowo for his sins in the past related to the kidnapping issue by stating:

God would punish Prabowo for causing the disappearance of many activists. God would not forget what he did to them. Jokowi has never been involved in violent acts and I am sure God would approve his effort by making him our new president (comment posted on June 29, 2014).

It can be concluded from these comments that there was a relationship between a candidate's behavior and what the general public think about what they do, and connect it to what God in this case would do to the candidate. The results also suggested that there is a relationship between religious attitudes of

the general public and their perceived image of the candidate. Though this research does not measure the religious attitudes of Facebook users, past research in the context of American culture revealed that religious attitudes is a part of one's socialization, which continually grows from early life (Sheets, Domke, & Greendwald, 2011). This may explain why users embraced God and included God when evaluating a candidate's image. Additionally, results also demonstrated that the element of God and the notion of God's influence was overtly apparent in Indonesia's political context.

#### Future State of the Country

As expected, many users talked about what the country would be like under the candidate's administration, denoting the future of the country. It is not surprising to see that there was a sharp difference in terms of statements that users employed for both candidates. For Prabowo, users believed that Prabowo would be able to eradicate corruption and those involved in exploiting national resources. There was a sense of positivity and trust coming from the users about Prabowo's ability to handle these problems. Users also thought that these issues were critical and that there was a sense of urgency for the next president. In one of the postings, one user stated:

The heavyweight corrupters and the mafia who are stealing the nation's wealth should be afraid of Prabowo. They are worried about Prabowo winning the election and becoming the next president, so they are trying to

put Prabowo down. This attitude is similar to a foreign intelligence who is afraid of Prabowo's power (comment posted on June 30, 2014).

Another user mentioned similar perceptions, "Yes I do think that the big players who have been corrupting many important assets are extremely afraid of Prabowo and do not want him to be our future leader" (comment posted on June 30, 2014). Furthermore, users believed that Prabowo would be able to reduce crime rates and make Indonesia a safer country in general. Comments such as "If Prabowo becomes our new president, criminals would not have the nerve to harm people and we would feel safe anywhere to go. However, today's criminals are stronger than the police. Therefore, we need a leader who is strong like him" (comment posted on June 30, 2014); "If we choose Prabowo, national security would be improved and it would lower number of criminals. I believe this because Prabowo entails a characteristic of a strong leader" (comment posted on June 30, 2014) are common in postings.

On the other hand, there are also a group of users who believed that the future of Indonesia would be in a critical period if Prabowo won the election. These users feel that Prabowo's image as someone who is involved in the Jakarta riots may bring negativity to Indonesia's image in international eyes. It can be seen from users' comments like, "I think there would be a chaos if Prabowo wins the presidential race because his involvement in the Jakarta riots can interfere Indonesia's politics, and this also affects Indonesia's image internationally" (comment posted on June 30, 2014). Moreover, users also

thought that if Prabowo wins the election, it would affect the diplomatic relationship between Indonesia and the United States since Prabowo did not obtain a visa permit to enter the United States. For example, “I am worried that it would affect the international relations between Indonesia and the U.S. because I think people in the White House dislike Prabowo’s style and his past” (comment made on June 30, 2014). Moreover, Prabowo who was allegedly involved in a significant human abuse case left a strong impression that he would conduct the administration with an authoritarian style, putting fear into some users. For instance, “I think we would be a fearful nation if Prabowo becomes our president because he may enforce us to follow his demands, and if not he is the type of person who can enforce violence to serve his interest” (comment posted on July 1, 2014). These results demonstrated that people are actively assessing people’s characteristics, including when evaluating a candidate’s image, in political settings. As suggested by earlier literature, in essence people actively engage in assessing other individuals; traits throughout their daily activity (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011).

For Jokowi, users felt that the country would be in great danger because they worry Jokowi would follow in similar footsteps to Megawati, which is selling national assets to foreign countries, and being slow when making important decisions. For example, one user stated “I am worried that Jokowi would have similar style like his chairwoman, Megawati, who sold our national satellite to Singapore. As a result, we are under surveillance from the neighboring countries.

Don't you forget about this matter" (comment posted on June 27, 2014). Various users gave similar responses by saying "Yeah I have a strong feeling that Jokowi would probably sell our national assets and this will create instability to our nation. Do you want this to happen people?" (comment posted on June 27, 2014); "First he will sell our important resources and then slowly our national stability would go downward. This is so scary!" (comment posted on June 27, 2014). In addition, many users think that Jokowi would adopt similar policies made by Megawati, and this situation is considered negative. For instance, a user stated, "If Jokowi wins the race then I will suspect that more islands will disintegrate from our territory, and more people would suffer from poverty since outsourcing remains in the employment agreement. I don't want my future to be like this people!" (comment posted on June 28, 2014). It appeared that many users objected to Megawati's employment construction pathway that allows outsourcing. One reason is because they feel that outsourcing would limit their ability to secure jobs since the relationship is temporary, meaning that workers could end up unemployed at any time. During Megawati's administration, she allowed the proliferation of contract workers and outsourcing as a way to tackle the unemployment issue (Booth, 2016). However, in practice, many considered this act to bring disadvantages, especially for employees.

On the other hand, various users seemed to believe that Jokowi would bring a better future for Indonesia, especially to Indonesia's economy. This is mainly due to Jokowi's previous success as a Mayor of Solo. For example, "I

think we would have a better economy situation because Jokowi has successfully improved Solo and this is a good indication for a larger context” (comment posted on June 30, 2014). Another user gave a positive response by commenting, “Jokowi is not only a good mayor but he also a good manager to his furniture company. I think this is what we need to improve our future economy” (comment posted on June 30, 2014). Jokowi’s credibility as a good mayor was internationally recognized and he received the title as one of the best mayors worldwide (Ardytia & Rulistia, 2013). In addition, he was the second runner-up for the best world Mayor prize in 2012; a contest conducted by a non-profit foundation namely The Philanthropic City Mayors Foundation (Ardytia & Rulistia, 2013). It appeared that Jokowi’s achievement as mayor of Solo left a positive impression on many users, which denoted a better future for Indonesia.

## CHAPTER SIX

### DISCUSSION

The current study aimed to explore how Indonesian voters used Facebook during the 2014 presidential election to draw conclusions about how voters constructed the image of political candidates. Because of the strong polarization generated by the rather different political agendas and political backgrounds of the candidates, the general public was intensely involved in the campaign and interacted in online discussions on Facebook and other social media. The debates raged around various political topics related to elections, including debates related to the ideal candidate and how the two candidates were perceived. The study of how these perceptions were constructed is important as a contribution to a larger study of public opinion formation in Indonesia.

The study used one of the presidential candidates' Facebook page, Prabowo's Facebook page, as the data collection venue, with special focus on the reactions to an official story posted on June 19, 2014, in which media celebrities endorsed Prabowo in a song. That song proved polarizing and attracted both negative and positive comments about the candidate. Thus, the reactions to this story offered excellent insights into the tensions involved in the construction of a candidate's image.

Using a thematic analysis, the study identified several themes that show how voters constructed candidate images. In particular, the study concluded that voters focused on three areas: the relationship between the perceived attributes

of the candidate and national identity; the relationship between the candidate and his supporters as a distinct social group; the perceived personality traits of the candidate and the ability of supporters to identify with him on a personal level. In that regard, the analysis focusses on the references related to political scandal, treatment of other people, spiritual values, and the future state of the country.

The findings show how voters connected an idealized image of the “right” candidate to the construction of national identity in a discourse with nationalist overtones. Voters measured candidates’ abilities in defending national rights and national image when dealing with foreign policies. As shown in the data, the references to national identity were very strong in the comments of Prabowo supporters through which they shared similar negative sentiments directed at foreign intervention, anti-colonialism, and the desire to be respected by other nations. It appeared that there was a sense of urgency to stop the cycle of interventions coming from foreign governments so that the nation would be able to preserve its national cohesiveness and prevent separatism. This included blocking surveillance from neighboring countries. Users were demanding a leader capable of deterring foreign intervention maneuvers. Most importantly, according to users, the construction of the idealized candidate was someone with a strong anti-foreigner attitude, especially when interacting with international policies. One reason for this attitude is the way users remembered the historical past of Indonesia which is very closely related to the colonial power of the Dutch government. Users believed that Prabowo carried the image of a leader who

strongly promoted nationalism to limit foreign intervention and to elevate the nation's dignity. Conversely, users thought that Jokowi was less able to promote a sense of national identity. Moreover, users also employed a metaphor to not only describe the image of candidates by highlighting the "Asia's Tiger" status, but also to compare which candidate has a stronger character to revive the Indonesian economy and bring it back to its former glory. Users stated that Prabowo often articulated the "Asia's Tiger" slogan in his public persona, particularly during his internal campaign within his party, and this shaped his public image as a strong leader for the country. This result confirmed that important events can provide important context which allows voters to evaluate a candidate's image (Zakahi, 2004; Warner, Carlin, Winfrey, Schnoebelen, & Trosanovski, 2011; Mckiney & Stephenson, 2002). In the case of Prabowo, the internal campaign was the context that enhanced his public image in the eyes of constituents.

In the next theme, users constructed candidate image through "us vs them" among the group of supporters meaning that users employed a constructed image of their candidate to create a contrast between themselves as a group and others. This was done through the use of non-verbal symbols to tie a candidate's image to the collective identity of his supporters. The non-verbal gestures of the hand sign not only signified the candidate's image, but also served as a tool for in-group cohesiveness and as a strategy for defining the group identity of the social supporters in a way that distinguished it from the out-

group. Moreover, users also projected images of public figures who supported the candidate onto the image of the candidate and his supporters. In fact, users looked at the celebrities who endorsed a candidate as an element that characterized the candidate's image. Interestingly, the perceived failure of the celebrities who supported a candidate was seen as a reflection of the candidate's own failure. These results confirmed previous research by Wheeler (2013), which denoted that celebrities' endorsements may not always produce desirable results for the candidates. Furthermore, we can see how voters formed a political image that involved not only one specific stimulus, but instead was a collection of information owned by the voters to judge candidates. As stated by Boulding (1973), image is about all the stimuli that occur internally or externally over the course of peoples' lives.

For the personal traits of candidates, users discussed how certain qualities of the candidates matched their own personality traits or qualities, such as a degree of sincerity, a sense of caring towards animals, and religious attitudes. To a certain degree we can assume that these qualities are essential for presidential candidates. Interestingly, users noted small contributions made by the candidate when solving problems relevant to sensitive issue, such as handling animal exploitation cases. It appeared that the media, especially the online media, highlighted this animal abuse issue. One possible reason why this became an agenda for the media is because animal abuse is one of the issues that are critical for fauna wellbeing in Indonesia. Though the dynamic of public

opinion regarding candidate images fluctuated throughout the campaign trail, the media can provide an opportunity for voters to actually think about and evaluate candidates' images (Balmas & Sheaffer, 2010; Kiouisis, Bantimaroudis, & Ban, 1999). Moreover, the fact that users highlighted religious attitudes shows that religion is overtly essential for the political setting in Indonesia and became a factor connecting the constituents and candidates. What we can take from these results is that voters are more likely to construct positive traits for candidates when they hold similar views and positions to their own. Previous research has demonstrated that voters tend to build positive sentiments of candidates when voters perceive they are similar in some way such as opinions or political positions (Kinder, 1978; Sears, 1983).

Users constructed candidate images by making references to a candidate's historical past, especially political scandals that shadowed a candidate's reputation. The Prabowo political scandal stemming from the May 1998 riot played a large role in shaping his negative image as an authoritarian leader. Many users believed that Prabowo's involvement in the riot would result in a negative image for the nation. On the other hand, many users also defended Prabowo saying that he was only following the commands of his senior officer-- something Prabowo himself has declared to the public regarding his involvement. What we can see is that image is not a one-way street dependent on the candidate's actions, but is also affected by the political messages surrounding the candidate; i.e., the image can change over time. As Prabowo spread new

messages stating that he was not the actor behind the May 1998 riot, the public started to perceive him in a different light. Although this research does not measure the progression of Prabowo's image throughout the elections, his defense by the public shows that new messages have the ability to change public's perception of a candidate's image. As explained by Hacker (2004), there is a degree of relationship between a candidate's image and political messages surrounding the campaigners. Moreover, we should also note that current impressions that voters have of candidates are an important indication of whether the candidate has a positive or negative image in the eyes of voters. It is clear from the data that many users still believe that Prabowo was involved in the May riot, and therefore, voters viewed him in a negative light. In other words, users seemed unable to forget what happened in the past.

Surprisingly, for Jokowi, many users talked about his physical features and tied those attributes to his image as a candidate. Users believed that his slim posture denoted weakness and incompetency as leader, and therefore, they did not see him as an ideal image for their presidential candidate. These findings supported previous studies showing how physical appearance can influence judgments of voters (Mater, Spezio, Kim, Todorov, Adolphs, & Alvarez, 2010). However, it should also be noted that physical features vary and their potential to affect voters' perception of a candidate's image depends on the availability of other heuristic cues (Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, & Hall, 2005). Although the current research does not specifically assess this notion, it is important to

mention since users inferred physical appearance to the candidate image. Users also discussed how Jokowi was perceived as a bad Muslim and how he has good relations with the bad conglomerates. The smear campaigns were in full-swing during the election, to the point where people were saying things that were outrageous and impossible, and this negative campaigning was very visible in the online world during the 2014 presidential election. Previous studies have shown that distribution of negative political messages on social media shaped negative evaluations of the candidate's image (Grabe & Bucy, 2009). This is because it is very difficult to control a candidate's image in the social media world (Gueorguieva, 2008; Bronstein, 2013).

Another important strategy for the construction of a candidate's image was through what other people did to the candidate. In this context, the past once again helps voters construct a candidate's character and morality. Past impressions that indicated a bleak political past or terror were filtered by the current period impressions, signaling a change in voter's thoughts. One's perception of presidential candidate image can be influenced by the interaction between past thoughts and current period thoughts (Savage, 1995). Users also perceived a close tie between the political party and its leader to be disproportional which created an impression of weakness for the candidate. One important aspect of this theme is that it appeared to be easier for users to pay attention to the negative qualities of the candidate than their positive features. As described by Shear (1983), voters have stricter attitudes when evaluating the

positive features of voters, therefore, creating more space for negative evaluations.

Voters also employed another strategy of image construction by relating candidate's behavior to what God would do to them. Users applied both positive and negative evaluation to the candidates. Interestingly, in this theme, it appeared that users made another reference about a candidate's political past. However, in this context, users connect the political past factor to what God would do to the candidates in relation to the election results. Users strongly weighted the past behavior of candidates and made positive or negative evaluations depending on what they perceived to be the candidate's behavior. It appears, in a larger context, that past behavior and reputation play a significant role in the way users construct political image, and also showed that voters use a complicated process when assessing a candidate's image, i.e. it is not only based on affective or perception of competency alone. Instead, users try to include past behavior and spiritual entity as a part of the image construction process. Indeed, as described by Boulding (1973), individuals employed all kinds of stimuli when judging a candidate's image.

Lastly, users tried to construct a candidate image by making projections of what the country would be like under the candidate's administration. In this context, users believed that a candidate's political past, characteristics, reputation, and treatment from others can contribute to the overall performance of the candidate in developing the country. Prabowo's strong leadership was

perceived by many users as beneficial not only to his public image, but also to the image of the nation in general. With Jokowi, the absence of a negative political past resulted in positive evaluations from voters. Users also thought that he was a better leader due to his success as a Mayor of Solo. Since the beginning of the campaign, many media outlets reported that Jokowi is a hardworking leader, suggesting important qualities for the nation. This situation may have influenced why voters thought Jokowi was a better leader than Prabowo. However, this may not be the only reason. There is a chance that Jokowi had already projected certain images from the beginning of the campaign. Past research has demonstrated that political actors often display positive traits to attract potential voters and obtain positive public images (Hacker, 2004). Therefore, the dual-interaction between Jokowi himself and what the media believe about him influenced the overall image of Jokowi. In the case of Prabowo, users perceived him as another authoritarian figure who would spread fear throughout the country. Once again, there was a reference to political scandal, which users perceived negatively for candidate image and the image of Indonesia internationally.

The study also demonstrates how Facebook can be an alternative form of public sphere where everyone is able to perform what Habermas (1989) suggested, that is, to engage in a rational discourse, away from the trappings of social ranking (or, in this case, the ideological bubbles) that would otherwise prevent individuals from talking to one another. As we can see from the analysis,

opponents of Prabowo are allowed to post their comments on Prabowo's Facebook page freely and to propose different terms for the debate or criticism about presidential candidates. The analysis shows how Indonesian Facebook users found in social media a forum for exchanging ideas not only with people who shared similar beliefs, but also with individuals who espoused different views. This situation conforms to Habermas's (1989) notion of public sphere which facilitates different kinds of discussions. Even so, if we image the public sphere to be akin to Habermas's image of the coffeehouse (1989), a place where everybody can enter, as long as they are able to pay, then social media is similar, in that not everyone has equal opportunity to "enter" and engage in the discussion. Though Facebook is highly popular in Indonesia, the lack of infrastructure in the remote villages in Indonesia can prevent some individuals to voice their opinions. Therefore, in practice, not all Indonesians have the equal chance to involve themselves in this virtual public sphere provided by Facebook. Aside from that, the current research shows how Facebook in the context of Indonesian political realm can be a virtual public space where it enhances political expressions and the growing process of democracy. This is because various people from different backgrounds can bypass the restriction that they may encounter in the offline world when expressing opinions.

Overall, this current study reveals that users constructed various strategies when evaluating a candidate's image. As suggested by Lippmann (1922) people are not able to deal with too many elements in their social world,

and thus, they need to create a simplified framework. This applies to the current study, in how voters tried to simplify the complexity of a candidate to particular themes that were then used to provide a basis for inferences about what the candidate stood for. The themes and the inferences they afforded were used in combination to make sense of the political world. Moreover, when it comes to constructing image, it seemed that users put heavier weight on certain information as their basis for judgment. It is argued by scholars that voters in general are not highly motivated to collect in-depth information about candidates, and in fact many voting decisions are actually made from few considerations (Neuman, 1986). This argument suggested that voters may only focus on a particular strategy to mold their perceptions regarding political image.

In summary, by highlighting the main themes that polarized public discourse and how these themes were used by voters to make inferences about the ability of the candidates to lead Indonesia, this study contributes to the analysis of public opinion formation.

The study has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the study contributes to understanding how voters dynamically construct perceptions about political candidates. More specifically, the study demonstrated how the image of a political candidate is a complex construction that draws on a variety of signifiers, both political and entertainment-related, and connects to voters in multiple ways and across multiple contexts, social, cultural, and personal. In the special case of Indonesia, the study highlighted the importance

of national identity in the process of public opinion formation. In respect to the candidate, the inferences based on spiritual values, political behavior, and treatment of others showed that there are external factors that help voters when shaping candidate's image, and, to an extent, the elements that polarize the public the most could be unpredictable. Nevertheless, the analysis also showed the great importance of political scandal in the Indonesian context. It appeared that in the case of Indonesia, scandalous incidents involving human rights abuse could produce a deep negative image that can strongly attach to voters. At a practical level, the study shows potential presidential candidates what strategies can most efficiently grab potential voters, but also what citizens need to understand from their leaders.

The study has some important limitations. First, the analyzed sample is a sample of convenience, rather than a random sample, and the comments were not collected from both candidates' Facebook pages. The computer program used to collect the data does not allow a chronological order in the extraction of the comments. It would be better for future research to include better computer software or techniques able to collect the data in a chronological order, so that we would have a better sense of how the dynamics of the discussion change over time and observe turns in the conversation. Moreover, because the study only collected data from Prabowo's page, the study may have missed certain themes proposed by supporters of Jokowi. However, the study does not make the claim that the analysis captures all themes at work in the discourse of the

supporters of both candidates. Rather, the study only seeks to offer a “thick description” of some of the themes that helped voters construct the image of the two candidates.

A second limitation of the study has to do with its validity. As in all interpretive research, researchers use their own subjective perception to interpret the material. In this case, I have attempted to mitigate validity issues by ensuring that a peer, working independently, reached the same conclusions I did when observing a sub-sample of my material. However, a different (and probably better) way of mitigating issues of validity would be to employ triangulation—namely, to collect different material about how supporters establish candidate perceptions (e.g. material from a different social media site) and show how an analysis of that material corroborates my conclusions in this case. Here, I attempted to corroborate some of my conclusions by reference to mainstream media coverage. A better way would be to simply contact some of the users who left comments on Prabowo’s page and verify with them my understanding of the nature of their perceptions.

Finally, the study was collecting comments from a language other than English, and this may open the possibility of error in the language translation. Future research may also include another form of social media involving photos of candidates since this study showed that the physical appearance of candidates can grab the attention of voters.

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