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Audience Reception of Prabowo's Representation in AI-Assisted Political Campaigns

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Abstract *- Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with one content creator who served as the head of the Prabowo-Gibran creative team and four audience members who were active social media users, comprising one Millennial lecturer and three Generation Z undergraduate communication students. The interview data were supplemented by online observation, documentation, and content analysis of 14 campaign materials coded K1-K14. Interview data were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis, and the findings were interpreted through Stuart Hall's theories of Representation and Reception (encoding-decoding). The findings show that the broader "Gemoy" digital content was perceived as visual, creative, relaxing, and entertaining, although relatively clear evidence of AI use was found only in K6. Message production remains human-directed, with Artificial Intelligence as an auxiliary tool. Audience members reported pleasuring, reflective, empathic, and questioning reception experiences and occupied dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, or oppositional positions depending on the aspect of the message being evaluated. Meaning is influenced by digital culture, social environment, track record, political memory, authenticity, and ethics. The integration of findings produces a mechanism for constructing meaning through the Algorithmic Reception model, which connects aspects of production, platform distribution, reception, meaning reconstruction, audience action, and feedback loops.*
Keywords*: Algorithmic Reception; Artificial Intelligence; Political Communication; Representation; Audience Reception*

Abstrak - Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana audiens menerima dan mengonstruksi makna atas representasi Prabowo dalam pesan kampanye politik berbantuan kecerdasan buatan selama Pemilihan Presiden Indonesia 2024. Paradigma yang digunakan adalah konstruktivis, pendekatan kualitatif, dan desain eksploratif. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan satu ketua tim kreatif yang juga berperan sebagai pembuat konten dan empat audiens, serta melalui observasi daring, dokumentasi, dan analisis terhadap 14 materi kampanye berkode K1–K14. Bukti penggunaan AI yang relatif jelas hanya ditemukan pada K6; oleh karena itu, tidak semua konten digital dapat dikategorikan sebagai konten berbantuan AI. Analisis data menggunakan analisis tematik refleksif, teori Reception dan teori Representation. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konten berbantuan AI dan konten "Gemoy" dimaknai sebagai konten visual, kreatif, santai, dan menghibur. Pengalaman resepsi audiens mencakup aspek hiburan, refleksi, empati, dan sikap kritis, yang secara dinamis menempati posisi dominan-hegemonik, negosiasi, atau oposisional, tergantung pada aspek pesannya. Pemaknaan dipengaruhi oleh budaya digital, lingkungan sosial, rekam jejak, memori politik, autentisitas, dan etika. Integrasi temuan menghasilkan mekanisme konstruksi makna melalui model Algorithmic Reception, yang menghubungkan aspek produksi, distribusi platform, resepsi, rekonstruksi makna, tindakan audiens, serta lingkar umpan balik.
Kata Kunci: Algorithmic Reception; Artificial Intelligence; Political Communication; Representation; Audience Reception

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Introduction

Advances in digital media have transformed how political actors produce, disseminate, and evaluate campaign messages. Political communication, which previously relied heavily on rallies, speeches, billboards, newspapers, radio, and television, is now carried out simultaneously across social media platforms. Social media content has significant influence on image (Arumdipta et al., 2024). In this environment, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly used to help create text and visuals, process data, and adjust communication materials. The presence of AI does not necessarily replace the role of humans or conventional forms of campaigning. The purpose of communication, the imagery, the symbols, the narrative, the editing process, and the decision to publish the message remain within the control of the human or political organisation. The use of AI in campaigns is more precisely understood as part of the production of human-directed messages supported by technology.

This research limits AI to Automated Content Generation (ACG), an algorithm-based system that can help generate text, images, videos, animations, or multimedia combinations with varying levels of human involvement (Dörr, 2016; Marconi & Siegman, 2017). These restrictions are important because digital content is not always synonymous with AI content. Animations, memes, illustrations, photo manipulations, or creative videos can be created using digital software without generative AI technology. However, a material can combine human ideas, visual materials, instructions, selection, and editing with AI output. The ambiguity of these boundaries raises methodological and ethical issues, especially when the use of AI is inferred solely from visual stylistic similarities.

The 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election provides an empirical context for examining this issue. The Prabowo Subianto-Gibran Rakabuming Raka campaign features digital communication through animations, memes, short videos, music, interactive materials, and "Gemoy" representations. In the 2019 Presidential Election, Prabowo's representation was closer to that of a firm, nationalist, disciplined leader with a military background (Satriawan & Purwaningsih, 2021). In the 2024 campaign, this image is not entirely abandoned but is combined with a lighter, friendlier, funnier, more relaxed, and approachable image for young voters. A number of studies and news reports view "Gemoy" as part of Prabowo's political rebranding (BBC, 2023; Tapsell, 2025; Temby, 2024).

"Gemoy" refers to the portrayal of Prabowo as a funny, friendly, familiar, and readily accepted figure in social media culture. This representation is constructed through dance moves, cartoon-style illustrations, facial expressions, colour choices, music, memes, popular language, and repetition across various communication channels. From Stuart Hall's perspective, representation is not a mirror that reflects reality as a whole, but rather the practice of forming meaning through language, signs, and image-building strategies (Hall, 1997). Each representation involves a selection process: certain characters are repeatedly displayed and emphasised, while other characters, experiences, or issues can become less visible. The softening of Prabowo's image is not only related to technical creativity, but also to political interests and the organisation of meaning regarding candidates.

A "Gemoy" representation can be understood as campaign creativity, entertainment, the humanisation of candidates, or a strategy to reach out to young voters. However, audiences may also judge it as imagery, a simplification of political reality, or a representation that is less aligned with the candidate's track record. The study did not establish that the "Gemoy" image was manipulated, that AI lost authenticity, or that audiences were necessarily affected. Attention is directed to the way audiences recognise technology, assess representation, and use their socio-political experiences to accept, negotiate, question, reject, or reconstruct the meaning offered.

Evidence of AI use in the Prabowo-Gibran campaign also needs to be treated with caution. The launch of PrabowoGibran.ai platforms and the use of AI-assisted characters in certain materials indicate that AI is present in some campaign ecosystems (Antara, 2024; Jakarta Post, 2023). However, this evidence cannot be used to conclude that the entire animation, cartoon, meme, poster, or video of "Gemoy" was generated by AI. Content was therefore classified as AI-produced, AI-assisted, AI-modified, digital non-AI, or content with unconfirmed AI status. This distinction prevents the spread of claims about the technology that are not supported by production evidence.

Message production is only one part of digital political communication. Once published, content circulates through a human network and a platform that uses a system of priorities and recommendations. Algorithms help organise visibility conditions based on the signals available on the platform, but cannot be positioned as the sole determinant of message success (Bucher, 2018; Gillespie, 2014). Audiences not only become recipients, but also view, ignore, like, comment, share, rewatch, discuss, or reproduce material. These actions can be conceptualised as signals for the platform or as evaluations of the material for the creative team of message creators. The relationship between production, distribution, reception, and audience action unfolds dynamically and non-linearly.

Reception theory provides a foundation for understanding audience agency. Meanings encoded by the message creator are not automatically accepted in the same form by the audience. The dominant-hegemonic position arises when the preferred meaning is accepted; a negotiated position is formed when acceptance is accompanied by conditions or adjustments; while the oppositional position arises when the audience understands the direction of the meaning offered, but rejects it based on another assessment framework (Hall, 1980). This position is not a person's permanent identity; the audience can accept the use of technology and enjoy the form of content, but negotiate the authenticity of the image or reject the candidate. Interest in content, acceptance of the image, assessment of candidates and programmes, and voting decisions need to be understood as distinct dimensions.

Previous studies offer important but fragmented explanations of contemporary digital political campaigns. Political marketing and candidate-branding studies explain how political actors strategically construct candidate identities and symbolic associations (Kausar & Riaz, 2022; Perannagari & Chakrabarti, 2020; Semande, 2024) but they give limited attention to how audiences negotiate or reject those constructions. Studies of algorithms and digital platforms explain visibility, recommendation, and engagement (Bucher, 2018; Gillespie, 2014), while research on AI and elections primarily emphasises deception, uncertainty, trust, and electoral ethics (Adam & Hocquard, 2023; Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020). Reception studies based on Stuart Hall demonstrate that audiences can occupy dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, or oppositional positions (Afandi & Rozi, 2024; Hall, 1980). However, these bodies of research do not adequately explain how production evidence, audience perceptions of AI, candidate representation, platform circulation, and political evaluation interact within the reception of a single campaign message.

This study addresses two specific gaps. First, previous research rarely distinguishes between technically verified AI use and content merely perceived by audiences as AI-generated because of its visual style. Second, reception positions are frequently assigned to an informant or audience group as a whole, leaving insufficient explanation of how the same individual may occupy different positions toward different aspects of the same communication. The findings demonstrate that acceptance of AI technology, interest in campaign content, acceptance of the candidate's image, evaluation of the candidate and political programmes, and voting decisions constitute analytically distinct dimensions. Thus, an audience member may accept AI as a

creative tool, negotiate the authenticity of a visual representation, and oppose the preferred meaning of the candidate's image without being theoretically inconsistent.

The contribution of the Algorithmic Reception Model lies in making these distinctions visible within a single analytical process. Stuart Hall's encoding–decoding framework remains essential for identifying the relationship between preferred meaning and dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, or oppositional readings. However, on its own, it does not specifically organise the technological status of content, the distinction between verified and perceived AI, platform-mediated circulation, reception experience, reconstruction of political meaning, audience action, and possible feedback. The Algorithmic Reception Model connects these elements while retaining Hall's reception positions as its interpretive foundation. It is therefore not proposed as a new theory or a universal causal model, but as a context-specific analytical framework that empirically elaborates Stuart Hall's approach for AI-assisted and platform-mediated political communication. Against this background, this study addresses the following research question: How do audiences receive and construct meanings of Prabowo's representation in AI-assisted political campaign messages during the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election?

Method

This research adopts a constructivist paradigm, qualitative methods, and an exploratory design. The constructivist paradigm is used because the meaning of political representation is understood not as singular or permanently attached to content, but as constructed through interactions among the message, experience, knowledge, culture, identity, and the audience's socio-political context. Qualitative methods were chosen to provide an in-depth explanation of the experience and the meaning-forming process, rather than to measure the campaign's effectiveness, test the causal relationship between content exposure and political choices, or perform statistical generalisations (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). An exploratory design provides space to develop patterns of experience, reception positions, and conceptual relationships based on empirical data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stebbins, 2001).

The study involved five informants who were purposively selected based on the relevance of their experiences and knowledge to the research focus. Informants were recruited through the researcher's personal network. Interviews were conducted face-to-face between February and May 2026, lasted 30-60 minutes, and were audio-recorded with informed consent. I1 was a content creator and head of a creative team involved in the Prabowo-Gibran campaign. I2-I5 were selected because they were eligible to vote in the 2024 Presidential Election, actively used social media, had encountered Prabowo-Gibran campaign content, recognised or could discuss the "Gemoy" representation, and were able to articulate their reception experiences. The four audience members were not intended to represent their generations statistically; instead, they constituted a bounded, information-rich exploratory sample that enabled comparison across contrasting interpretations.

Because the interviews were conducted after the election, the informants' accounts were retrospective and could incorporate subsequent political information, programme implementation, and post-election evaluations. These accounts were therefore interpreted as temporally revisable reception rather than as contemporaneous responses recorded during the campaign.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participatory online observations, documentation, and text and content analysis. Interview guidelines were adapted to each informant's position. Questions for I1 focused on the production and formation of message representations, while interviews with I2–I5 explored the experience of finding content, the meaning of the "Gemoy" character, assessments of AI use, image authenticity, reception positions, socio-political context, reconstruction of meaning, and actions taken after

receiving messages. Online observations were conducted on public activities and content on TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and X related to the official campaign for the 2024 Presidential Election, from 28 November 2023 to 10 February 2024. Research data used for the analysis are stored in Mendeley Data, doi: 10.17632/8c9mdzr4cf.2.

Documentation includes illustrations, animations, videos, posters, memes, music, slogans, captions, hashtags, screenshots, campaign team publications, and relevant news stories. Campaign materials are inventoried using codes K1–K14 with detailed records of source, platform, relationship to the campaign, status of AI use, and its relationship to the informant's information. Content status is categorised as AI-produced, AI-assisted, AI-modified, digital non-AI, and AI status unconfirmed content. This classification was based on producer disclosures, official sources, process documentation, metadata, or other credible evidence. Visual stylistic similarities are not used as the sole evidence that a piece of content is AI-generated. Text analysis was then performed on visual and verbal elements, such as colour, expression, illustration style, language, humour, music, slogans, and popular cultural symbols, to identify the representation of the candidate offered.

Interview data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis, in which themes were generated through the researcher's interpretive engagement with the data rather than treated as categories that automatically emerged from the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). The study does not claim a mechanical point of universal data saturation; such a claim assumes that meaning are simply discovered rather than interpretively generate (Braun & Clarke, 2021b). Data adequacy was instead assessed through relevance, depth, information power and the capacity to compare production, content, and audience meanings (Malterud et al., 2016). After the themes were developed from the data, Stuart Hall's theory of representation and encoding-decoding reception theory were applied. Research validity refers to trustworthiness, which includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Denzin et al., 2024).

Credibility is maintained through triangulation of interviews, observations, documentation, and content analysis as well as data verification with informants. Transferability is supported by a detailed description of the context, informant characteristics, object, and research procedure. Dependability is maintained through systematic documentation and an audit trail of the research process. Confirmability is maintained by attributing interpretations to citations, codes, themes, analysis notes, and traceable data sources. The research claims are limited to the I1–I5 experience and K1–K14 content and are therefore not intended to represent all Generation Z and Millennials or to prove the internal mechanisms of the platform's algorithm.

Text analysis is used to examine campaign content, while Reflexive Thematic Analysis is used to analyze interview data. The findings were subsequently interpreted using Stuart Hall's theories of representation and encoding-decoding and integrated to inform the development of the Algorithmic Reception Model. The analysis is carried out in stages to ensure a traceable relationship between empirical data, codes, themes, interpretations, and conceptual models. The process is carried out through the following stages.

The first stage involves preparing and organizing all research data. Interview data were transcribed, re-examined, and assigned informant codes I1–I5. I1 is a content creator, I2 is a Millennial audience, and I3, I4, and I5 are Generation Z audiences. I1 data are used to describe the process of producing or encoding messages. I2–I5 data are used to describe the audience's experience and their meaning or decoding of the message. Documentation data, such as images, animations, videos, posters, memes, text, and other forms of campaign content, are coded K1, K2, K3, and so on. These codes aim to facilitate the search for the source, content form, the status of AI use, and its relationship to the informant's statement.

Interview data were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. This approach aligns with the constructivism paradigm because themes are understood as the result of the researcher's interpretive engagement with the data, rather than as categories that are automatically found in the transcript (Braun & Clarke, 2021a).

The analysis was conducted in six stages: (1) familiarization by re-reading transcripts I1–I5 to understand the content, context, and patterns of meaning; (2) encoding relevant segments of data according to the meaning of the informant's statements; (3) grouping related codes to develop the initial theme; (4) reviewing the theme by comparing it with citations, overall transcripts, and variations across informants; (5) defining and naming themes based on core concepts that unify patterns of meaning; and (6) preparing analytical descriptions supported by informant citations and linked to the research questions.

Once the theme is developed from the data, Reception theory serves as an interpretive framework. The audience's reception is classified as dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, or oppositional. These positions are not determined by generational categories or political choices. The position of reception is established by how the informant receives, negotiates, or rejects the meaning offered in the message. An informant can show different positions when interpreting different elements of the content. The analysis also attends to the context that shapes meaning, such as digital culture, political experience, family environment, friendships, social media use, and knowledge about the candidate. These factors are used only when they appear and are supported by interview data.

The final stage integrates results from message production analysis, content analysis, reception experience, reception position, reconstruction of political meaning, and audience action. This integration informed the development of the Model. The model was constructed by distinguishing components derived from interview data I1–I5; K1-K14 content analysis; Reception theory; the literature on AI and algorithms; and the conceptual synthesis of researchers. The model also notes that the reception process did not occur in a linear manner. Audience actions, such as watching, liking, commenting, sharing, ignoring, or creating derivative content, may conceptually function as platform signals and contribute to subsequent content circulation. However, this relationship was not technically observed in the present study. To maintain the traceability of the analysis, the researcher documented the relationships among citations, codes, themes, interpretations, and model components. The documentation serves as an audit trail, allowing findings and models to be tested against empirical data.

Results and Discussion

Message Production, "Gemoy" Representation, and AI Proof Limits

Analysis of K1-K14 content shows that the Prabowo-Gibran campaign uses a range of visual and audiovisual communication, including illustrations, cartoons, animations, posters, short videos, music, slogans, memes, and interactive materials. These elements create a lighter communication style and align with the media habits of young audiences. Compared with conventional content that relies on original photos or recordings of candidates, formal language, direct program delivery, and relatively fixed forms of material, "Gemoy" digital content is perceived as more visual, creative, relaxing, popular, and entertaining. The difference does not primarily lie in the purpose of communication, as both forms of campaigns can be used equally to convey a message and build an image, but rather in the form of representation, the degree of visual modification, the style of delivery, and its suitability for social media culture.

Nonetheless, the inventory results show that the term "AI content" cannot be applied to the entire digital material "Gemoy". Evidence of AI use varies in certainty. Across K1–K14, AI use is most evident in K6 or Fotober2.AI, while some other materials are ordinary digital content or have not yet been confirmed through the technical process of their creation. Cartoons,

animations, memes, posters, and creative videos don't automatically become AI products just because they have a synthetic look or have been modified. These findings are important because some informants use the term "AI content" to refer to almost any form of cartoon, animation, or digital visuals. This usage reflects the audience's perception of AI features, not the technical evidence of production.

I1 data shows that message production is a collective effort that remains human-directed. Candidates provide general direction, while the creative team develops visual details, slogans, narratives, and material forms. I1 explains, "Directions are only given in general. The creative details are entirely worked out by the team." The team did not completely remove Prabowo's image as a stern figure; instead, they emphasized a side considered more witty, relaxed, and closer to the community. According to I1, "Because the firm image is already strong, we don't need to increase the portion anymore. What we are doing is showing another side that has been rarely known to the public." Thus, the process is more appropriately called human-directed, AI-assisted political message production. AI can help with certain parts of the production process, but humans still determine the idea, purpose, preferred meaning, sign selection, editing, and the final message.

The “Gemoy” representation portrays Prabowo as a figure who remains firm while appearing friendlier, more relaxed, humorous, humanised, technologically aware, and closer to younger audiences. These findings align with Stuart Hall's view that representation is not a copy of reality, but rather the practice of forming meaning through the selection and organisation of language, signs, and imagery. In this context, image softening is not merely an aesthetic change. Representations magnify certain aspects of the candidate, while others may become less visible. However, research did not establish early on that the process was manipulative. Creativity, authenticity, imagery, and the conformity of representation with reality are issues that the audience interprets.

Audience Reception Experience of Campaign Content

The analysis identifies four reception experiences: pleasuring, reflective, empathic, and questioning reception. These categories draw on previous research (Li et al., 2023) but in this study, are applied to AI-assisted political messages. These experiences do not form stages that must negate one another. An informant can enjoy the content, reflect on the political substance, recognise emotional closeness, and, at the same time, question the authenticity of the representation.

Reception experience (Table 1) analysis was conducted by tracing the relationship between informant citations, initial codes, categories, and themes of the experience. In the first stage, quotations I2–I5 are coded based on the meaning contained in the informant's statement. Codes with similar meanings are then grouped into categories. Furthermore, the category is interpreted through four types of reception experiences: pleasuring, reflective, empathic, and questioning. These four terms are not new terms produced by this research. However, they come from the findings of research conducted by Li, Adnan, and Gong (Li et al., 2023).

In this study, the four categories serve as analytical concepts for interpreting the I2–I5 experience in the context of AI-assisted political messages. The analysis doesn't stop at matching the data with previous categories. The research explores these forms of experience in the context of political representation, the authenticity of candidate imagery, the use of AI, programs, track records, political choices, and audience actions.

Table 1. Establishment of the Reception Experience

Informant quotes	Initial code	Category	Experience theme
"The content of 'Gemoy' gives a pleasant impression." (I2)	Enjoyment of content display	Enjoy content	Pleasuring reception
"In my opinion, the gemoy content is more of a joke or entertainment." (I3)	Content as entertainment	Enjoy the humour of the campaign	Pleasuring reception
"I think such content is funny and doesn't matter." (I4)	Rate content funny memes	Enjoying political humour	Pleasuring reception
"What I see is that the concept of 'gemoy' is funny. It was precisely because of its cute and different appearance that I became interested." (I5)	Fascination due to visual cuteness	Fun and attraction	Pleasuring reception
"He was pleasant, but that didn't mean I immediately accepted all of his political messages." (I2)	Separating entertainment and political acceptance	Evaluation of messages	Reflective reception
"I still see the way it is delivered during political debates." (I3)	Compare content to performance during a debate	Political considerations outside of content	Reflective reception
"If the campaign contains a debate of ideas, it is certainly very good because the public can assess the capacity of candidates more objectively." (I4)	Prioritizing ideas and capacity	Substantive evaluation of candidates	Reflective reception
"I also like the program. So it's not just because of the gemoy." (I5)	Consider content and programmes	Evaluation based on several factors	Reflective reception
"Prabowo is portrayed as a 'father' figure who understands young people and understands the people." (I2)	Recognizing the father figure	Introduction to emotional closeness	Empathic reception
"I understand that this strategy is carried out to change the image of Prabowo, who was previously known to be strong, to be more humane and close to the community." (I4)	Recognizing the candidate's humanization	Understand efforts to build closeness	Empathic reception
"Now he is smiling more often, more relaxed, and closer to the community." (I5)	Feeling a change in the candidate's closeness	Emotional connection with the candidate	Empathic reception
"The AI in the campaign is not very dominant, in my opinion. What is more noticeable are the visual and animation aspects." (I2)	Questioning the dominance of AI	Evaluation of technology claims	Questioning reception
"If it is a program, maybe after looking at it again, the MBG program turns out to take a lot of money. So maybe it can still be evaluated again." (I3)	Questioning the cost of the programme	Evaluation of political substance	Questioning reception

Informant quotes	Initial code	Category	Experience theme
“During the campaign, the image that emerged was a figure who understood young people and was close to the community. But after being elected, I feel that I have not seen it in real terms.” (I4)	Image and reality gap	Questioning the authenticity of representations	Questioning reception
“Maybe it would be better if the candidate's original photo was used more to make it natural.” (I5)	Want more natural visuals	Questioning visual authenticity	Questioning reception

Source: Authors, 2026

Based on Table 1 above, the audience reception experience was established through a traceable analytical process connecting informant quotations, initial codes, categories, and experiential themes. The table demonstrates that these experiences are not mutually exclusive or sequential. An audience member may enjoy the creativity and humour of the campaign content while simultaneously evaluating its political substance, recognising the emotional image offered by the campaign, and questioning its authenticity, ethical implications, or consistency with the candidate’s track record.

Pleasuring reception occurs when the audience enjoys the visuals, humour, music, animation, movement, or creativity of the content. All informants reported pleasant experiences, though the consequences differed. I2 views "Gemoy" as a form of visual entertainment, but insists, "It's fun, but it doesn't mean I get all of its political messages right away." I3 rated cartoons, "Okay Gas" songs, and campaign packaging as creative jokes, but didn't make them the primary basis for candidate assessment. I4 enjoys memes and animations without changing their political choices. For I5, the most powerful experience is fun, as stated: "From what I can see, the concept of 'Gemoy' is funny. It was precisely because of his funny and different appearance that I became interested and finally chose Prabowo." Nonetheless, I5’s choice is also influenced by the programme, the candidate's character, previous support, and family environment. Therefore, pleasure can be an entry point to attention, but it does not automatically result in image acceptance or a decision.

Reflective reception occurs when the audience compares content with other sources of information. I2 linked Prabowo's image change to his political position, from opposition to joining the government. I3 compared the character of "Gemoy" with debates, programmes, news, social media, and family explanations. I4 used debates, candidate capacity, track record, and post-election political developments as evaluation materials. I5 accepted the change in the image, but still evaluated the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal programme (MBG). These findings suggest that visual messages are not processed in a vacuum. The audience connects them to other information and experiences before forming a political judgement.

Empathic reception involves recognising or experiencing emotional closeness through smiling expressions, relaxed movements, humour, paternal figures, and other humanistic images. I2 and I4 recognise that the message seeks to present Prabowo as a "father" figure who understands young people and is close to society, but the introduction does not always translate into emotional attachment. In I5, the empathic experience is stronger because Prabowo's change in style is understood as a lesson from the defeat in the previous election. These findings show the difference between recognising proximity strategies and actually feeling close to candidates.

Questioning reception arises when the audience questions technology, visual authenticity, ethics, programmes, track record, or the fit of imagery with reality. I2 questions

the dominance of AI in campaigns and sets a limit that technology must not contain lies or harm others. I3 embraces creative content but questions the programme's budget needs. I5 accepts AI but wants more use of original photos to make the representation look natural. The most powerful questioning experience was found in I4, which compared the humanist image with the military background, past issues, debate appearances, and the reality after a candidate took office. Thus, questioning reception does not necessarily mean rejecting technology or candidates; audiences can receive some messages while questioning others.

The four reception experiences identified in this analysis: pleasuring, reflective, empathic, and questioning reception, were not developed as new categories by this study. They were adopted from Li, Adnan, and Gong (2023), who used them to examine cultural meaning construction on social media. Similar to their findings, the present study shows that audiences actively combine enjoyment, reflection, emotional engagement, and critical questioning when interpreting media content. However, the present study differs by applying these categories to AI-assisted political communication and connecting them with candidate authenticity, political programmes, track records, voting decisions, and Stuart Hall's reception positions. This difference can be explained by the electoral context: unlike cultural content, political campaign messages invite audiences not only to enjoy and interpret representation but also to evaluate political credibility and make consequential electoral judgements. The four experiences may therefore coexist rather than form mutually exclusive or sequential stages.

Reception Position and Five Dimensions of Reception

The intended meaning of the message creator does not fully reach the audience. In Stuart Hall's framework, the dominant-hegemonic position is formed when the audience's meaning largely aligns with the preferred meaning; the negotiated position arises when acceptance is accompanied by conditions or adjustments; the oppositional position arises when the audience understands the message's direction but rejects it by using other interpretive frameworks. The data show that these three positions are more appropriately applied to certain aspects of the message than to an informant as a permanent label.

The position is not determined solely by political choices or the informant's direct statements about his position. Determination proceeds through several stages. First, the research identifies the meaning conveyed by the content. Second, the study examines how informants understand that meaning. Third, informants' acceptance is compared with considerations of technology, authenticity, programmes, debates, track records, and political reality. Fourth, the relationship between acceptance, adjustment, and rejection is interpreted as a reception position.

The reception position (Table 2) is not permanently tied to an informant. An informant may be dominant in using technology yet still negotiate the candidate's image. Informants can also accept creative content while rejecting the candidate's representation. Therefore, the reception position is determined by the message aspect, not by attaching a label to the informant's self.

Table 2. Establishment of the Reception Position

Informant quotes	Aspects interpreted	Informant considerations	Establishment Position Process	Reception position
I2: "Whether it was made with AI or not, as long as people still know that the symbol refers to Prabowo and	Visual modificatio n and use of AI	Modifications are accepted as long as the symbol remains	Accept the use of technology, but provide	Negotiated

Informant quotes	Aspects interpreted	Informant considerations	Establishment Position Process	Reception position
Gibran, I don't think it matters."		recognizable and does not violate ethics	ethical conditions	
I2: "He was pleasant, but that didn't mean I immediately accepted all of his political messages."	Entertainment and political messages	Enjoy the content, but don't receive the candidate's overall message	Accepting forms of content, but limiting political acceptance	Negotiated
I3: "I personally don't feel deceived or manipulated by that AI content. Because in my opinion it's a campaign strategy and creativity."	The use of AI and creativity	AI is understood as creativity and a natural strategy	Accepting the meaning of technological updates that content offers	Dominant-hegemonic
I3: "I still see the way it is delivered during political debates."	Content relationship and candidate assessment	Content is accepted, but the candidate's assessment is also based on debates and programmes	Embrace content creativity with political considerations	Negotiated
I4: "If you use AI to create animations and campaign content, I don't think it's a problem."	Use of technology	AI is seen as the utilization of technological developments	Embracing the meaning of the technological advances that the campaign offers	Dominant-hegemonic
I4: "If the campaign contains a debate of ideas, it is certainly very good because the public can assess the capacity of candidates more objectively."	Entertainment and political substance	Entertainment is acceptable, but ideas and capacities are considered more important	Accept the form of content on the condition that there is political substance	Negotiated
I4: "During the campaign, the image that emerges is a figure who understands young people and is close to the community. But after being elected, I feel that I have not seen it in real terms."	Humanist image and sense of closeness	Representation compared to track record, debate, and reality after election	Understand the image offered, but reject its suitability with political judgment	Oppositional
I5: "What I see is that the concept of 'gemoy' is funny. Precisely because of his cute and different appearance, I became interested and finally chose Prabowo."	Content appeal and candidate image	Cuteness shapes attraction and strengthens choices	Embracing the sense of friendliness, relaxation, and closeness that content offers	Dominant-hegemonic

Informant quotes	Aspects interpreted	Informant considerations	Establishment Position Process	Reception position
I5: “Maybe it would be better if the candidate's original photo was used more to make it look more natural.”	Visual authenticity	Accepts AI, but wants balance with the original photo	Accept technology with customization at the modification level	Negotiated
I5: “I like the program. So it's not just because of the gemoy dance.”	The relationship between content and political choices	Content is influential, but political programs and experiences are also considered	Embracing the candidate's image, but not making content a single factor	Negotiated

Source: Authors, 2026

Based on Table 2 above, the audience’s reception position varies according to the specific aspect of the message being interpreted. Dominant-hegemonic positions mainly appeared in the acceptance of technology, campaign creativity, and the representation of a more relaxed candidate. Negotiated positions were found when informants accepted certain aspects of the content while imposing conditions related to ethics, authenticity, political programmes, debates, or candidate capacity. An oppositional position was most clearly identified when I4 understood the intended humanistic image but rejected its consistency with the candidate’s track record and post-election political reality.

The dominant position centres mainly on acceptance of technology and creative content. I3 stated: "I personally don't feel deceived or manipulated by AI content. Because I think it's a campaign strategy and a form of creativity." I4 also accepts AI as a technological tool, although it does not fully embrace the candidate's image. In I5, the dominant position is stronger in accepting Prabowo's image change toward being more relaxed and closer to the public. These variations show that a dominant position on one aspect does not mean unconditional acceptance of the whole message.

The negotiated position is the most common pattern. I2 accepts visual modifications as long as the candidate's identity is recognised and the content does not contain lies, harassment, violations of the law, or harm to others. I3 accepted creativity and voted for Prabowo, but still used debates, programmes, news, and family as a basis for consideration. I4 enjoys cartoons, songs, and memes as long as they are within reasonable limits, but prioritises the candidate's ideas and capacity as a top consideration. I5 accepts the representation of "Gemoy" but negotiates the programme’s visual authenticity and execution. Negotiation shows that audiences don't simply choose between acceptance and rejection, but instead set ethical boundaries, authenticity requirements, and substantive considerations.

The oppositional's position is most clearly evident in I4’s assessment of the suitability of humanist images in relation to political reality. I4 understands Prabowo's humanisation goals, but stated, "During the campaign, the image that emerges is a figure who understands young people and is close to society. But after taking office, I feel like I haven't seen it in real time." The rejection is not due to a failure to understand the message, but rather to a comparison of the preferred meaning with the track record, the debate, the programme, and experience after the election. At the same time, I4 embraces technology and enjoy entertainment. A single informant may therefore occupy a dominant-hegemonic position toward technology, a

negotiated position toward entertainment-oriented content, and an oppositional position toward the candidate's representation.

The findings yielded a five-dimensional differentiation of acceptance: acceptance of AI technology, interest in content, acceptance of the candidate's image, assessment of candidates and programmes, and voting decisions. The five dimensions can be related, but do not form a causal chain. Audiences can accept technology but reject imagery; like the content but choose other candidates; accept the image but still criticise the programme; or select candidates based on considerations that are not limited to the content of "Gemoy". This distinction prevents the simplification that content appeal equals political endorsement. The findings also expand Hall's application by showing that differences in meaning occur not only between informants, but also within an informant when assessing different aspects of the message.

These findings add an aspect-specific explanation to the application of Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding framework. AI-assisted political communication also introduces an additional epistemic layer into the decoding process. The study farther shows that decoding is multidimensional and temporally revisable. The contribution of this study is therefore not to modify audience decoding positions or to propose a new Reception theory, but to provide an empirical elaboration of how those positions operate across multiple message aspects, technological perceptions, and temporal contexts in AI-assisted political communication.

The findings are consistent with previous reception studies in demonstrating that audiences do not passively reproduce encoded meanings (Afandi & Rozi, 2024; Hall, 1980). Nevertheless, they differ from studies that classify an informant predominantly within one overall reception position. In this study, reception positions vary according to the object being evaluated. For example, I4 occupies a dominant-hegemonic position toward AI as a technological tool, a negotiated position toward humorous campaign content, and an oppositional position toward the humanised representation of the candidate. I5 predominantly accepts the candidate's friendlier image but negotiates visual authenticity and programme implementation. These variations arise because an AI-assisted political message is a multidimensional object containing technological, aesthetic, representational, programmatic, and electoral aspects.

This aspect-specific variation clarifies the application of Stuart Hall's theory. Dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional readings should not be treated as permanent labels attached to an individual. Instead, each position describes the relationship between the preferred meaning and the audience's interpretation of a particular message aspect. The unit of analysis is therefore not simply "the informant's position," but the relationship between an informant, a preferred meaning, and the aspect being evaluated. This formulation explains how enjoyment of campaign content can coexist with criticism of candidate authenticity, and why acceptance of AI does not necessarily produce acceptance of the candidate or a voting decision.

Audience Context and Reconstruction of Political Meaning

Reception is shaped by digital culture and socio-political experience. TikTok and Instagram are most clearly seen as sources of political exposure or information. I3 explained that Generation Z tends to seek information on TikTok or Instagram because it is considered faster. Proximity to short videos, music, memes, cartoons, and humour helps content gain attention, but it doesn't define political positions. Digital culture provides an initial form of experience, while subsequent meanings are formed through family, friends, candidate debates, news, programme, track record, election experience, and political developments after the candidate is elected.

Family can reinforce support tendencies, but it doesn't always determine decisions. Friendship brings together informants whose views support or reject the candidate. Debates and

news provide a benchmark for campaign imagery, while programmes are used to assess political substance. Political memory also produces different meanings. In I3, Prabowo's past issues are known primarily through family stories and the media, as the 2024 Presidential Election is his first voting experience. I4 pays more attention to the military's background, the 1998 issue, and the candidate's track record. In I5, the support trend that formed before 2024 strengthens acceptance of the change in image.

Authenticity does not have a uniform meaning. For some informants, authenticity is tied to the naturalness of the photo; for others, it concerns maintaining the candidate's identity, the transparency of the use of technology, the suitability of the image to the track record, or the suitability of the representation to reality after the election. The use of AI is not automatically considered unethical. Its acceptance depends on boundaries around lies, manipulation, loss, transparency, and the potential for misleading. Authenticity also has a temporal dimension, because the image received during the campaign can be assessed after the audience has observed the policies and programme implementation.

The encounter between text and context yields a reconstruction of meaning: "Gemoy" as entertainment, campaign creativity, candidate humanisation, image-building strategies, less authentic representations, and alternative representations of political track record or reality. These six meanings were not mutually exclusive. An informant may interpret the content as both entertainment and an image-building strategy, or acknowledge its creativity while questioning its authenticity. The reconstruction of meaning is therefore distinct from the position of reception. Position indicates the audience's relationship to the preferred meaning, whereas reconstruction shows the new form of meaning generated when the message is connected to the audience's experience and context.

The findings also both support and qualify previous studies on synthetic political communication. Consistent with Vaccari and Chadwick, audiences raised concerns about deception, authenticity, and the reliability of political representations (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020). However, the informants in this study did not automatically interpret AI use as deceptive. They generally accepted AI as a campaign tool when the candidate remained recognisable and the content did not contain lies, harmful manipulation, or ethical violations. This difference may be related to the playful and visibly stylised character of the "Gemoy" materials, as well as the fact that AI use was technically confirmed only for K6, while several other materials were merely perceived as AI-related. The findings therefore introduce an epistemic distinction between the actual production status of content and the production process imagined by audiences. Audiences decode not only the political meaning of a message, but also whether and how they believe the message was technologically produced.

Accordingly, the contribution of this article operates at three levels. First, it applies the four reception-experience categories developed by Li et al. (2023) to the context of AI-assisted political communication. Second, it provides an empirical elaboration of Hall's encoding–decoding framework by demonstrating that reception positions are aspect-specific, multidimensional, and temporally revisable. Third, it develops a contextual analytical framework by connecting human-directed AI-assisted production, platform-mediated distribution, reception experiences, reception positions, audience contexts, political meaning reconstruction, audience actions, and possible feedback. The principal contribution is therefore empirical elaboration and contextual analytical-framework development, rather than the creation of new reception categories or a replacement for Stuart Hall's theory.

Algorithmic Reception Model

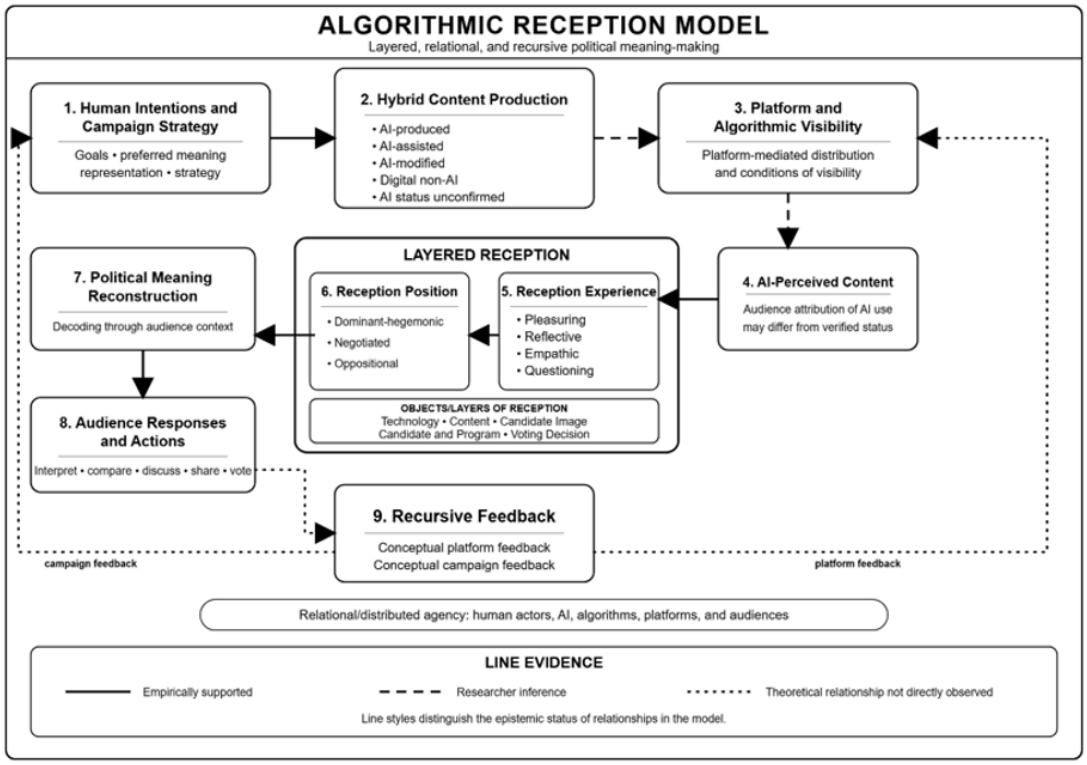


Figure 1. Algorithmic Reception Model
(Source: Authors, 2026)

Based on Figure 1, the Algorithmic Reception Model explains political meaning-making as a layered, relational, and recursive process. The process begins with human intentions and campaign strategy, through which the campaign team determines its communication objectives, candidate representation, preferred meaning, and distribution strategy. These intentions are translated into hybrid content production involving different combinations of human and technological participation. The model therefore distinguishes among AI-produced, AI-assisted, AI-modified, digital non-AI, and AI-status-unconfirmed content. This distinction is analytically important because digital appearance alone cannot confirm the use of AI.

The produced content subsequently circulates under conditions of platform and algorithmic visibility. Platforms may organise the visibility, recommendation, and circulation of content, but the model does not assume that algorithms determine the meaning audiences ultimately construct. Furthermore, the verified technological status of content may differ from its perceived status. Audiences may interpret digital illustrations, animations, or edited images as AI-generated even when production evidence is unavailable. The concept of AI-perceived content therefore identifies an additional epistemic layer in which audiences interpret not only the political message but also how they believe the message was produced.

At the level of layered reception, the model distinguishes between reception experiences and reception positions. The categories of pleasuring, reflective, empathic, and questioning reception are adapted from Li, Adnan, and Gong (2023), whereas the dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional positions derive from Stuart Hall's encoding–decoding framework. The contribution of this study does not lie in creating these categories, but in integrating them and demonstrating that reception positions are specific to the aspect being evaluated. The same audience member may occupy a dominant-hegemonic position toward AI technology, a negotiated position toward the campaign content, and an oppositional position

toward the candidate's representation. Accordingly, the model differentiates five objects or layers of reception: technology, content, candidate image, candidate and programme evaluation, and voting decision.

Reception positions do not constitute the final point of meaning-making. Audiences connect the encoded message with their digital culture, family environment, social relationships, political knowledge, candidate debates, programmes, track records, political memory, and post-election experience. This interaction produces a reconstruction of political meaning. Prabowo's "Gemoy" representation may consequently be reconstructed as entertainment, campaign creativity, candidate humanisation, an image-building strategy, a less authentic representation, or a representation that differs from the candidate's track record and political reality.

Meaning reconstruction may subsequently lead to audience responses and actions, including interpreting, comparing information, discussing political issues, sharing content, expressing support, evaluating programmes, or making a voting decision. Some actions can recirculate political messages and may conceptually become feedback for platform distribution or campaign evaluation. However, the study does not claim to have verified the internal operation of platform algorithms or a direct causal relationship between audience actions and campaign strategy. In Figure 1, solid lines represent empirically supported relationships, dashed lines indicate researcher inference, and dotted lines represent theoretical relationships that were not directly observed. These distinctions clarify the evidential status of each relationship and prevent the model from making claims beyond the available data.

Figure 1 also conceptualises political communication as a relational configuration of agency and mediation involving campaign actors, AI tools, platforms and algorithms, and audiences. This formulation does not imply that human and technological actors possess equivalent intentionality. Campaign actors exercise strategic agency by determining communication objectives, candidate representations, preferred meanings, and publication decisions, while audiences exercise interpretive agency through decoding, evaluation, discussion, and content recirculation. AI tools, platforms, and algorithms are treated as mediating elements that condition content production, visibility, and circulation. Because the internal operations of platform algorithms were not directly observed, their role in the model remains theoretical rather than empirically verified.

The analytical novelty of the Algorithmic Reception Model lies not merely in combining existing concepts, but in specifying how they operate within a layered, relational, and recursive process. The model distinguishes actual content-production status from audiences' perceptions of AI use, connects reception experiences with aspect-specific reception positions, treats political meaning reconstruction as a distinct analytical outcome, and differentiates among empirical, inferential, and theoretical relationships. Stuart Hall's encoding–decoding framework remains the theoretical foundation for explaining the relationship between preferred meaning and audience readings, while the present model situates this relationship within hybrid content production, platform-conditioned visibility, audience actions, and possible feedback. Its contribution is therefore an empirical elaboration of audience reception and the development of a context-specific analytical framework, rather than a new reception theory or a universal explanation of algorithmic political communication.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the audience's reception of the "Gemoy" representation of Prabowo in AI-assisted political messages is active, multidimensional, dynamic, and non-linear. AI-assisted and "Gemoy" digital content are perceived as more visual, creative, relaxing, popular, and entertaining than conventional content. However, not all of these digital materials

can be called AI products, as evidence of AI use is most obvious only in K6 or Fotober2.AI content. Message production is human-directed, with AI functioning as an aid in certain parts, so the process is referred to as human-directed, AI-assisted political message production. Reception can be pleasuring, reflective, empathic, and questioning, and can occupy dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, or oppositional reception positions, depending on the aspect of the message being assessed.

Acceptance of AI technology, interest in content, acceptance of candidate imagery, assessment of candidates and programmes, and voting decisions are distinct processes. Meaning is shaped by digital culture, family, friendships, debates, news, programmes, track record, election experience, political memory, authenticity, ethics, and reality after a candidate is elected. The encounter between the message and the context results in the reconstruction of "Gemoy" as entertainment, campaign creativity, candidate humanisation, image-building strategies, less authentic representations, or alternative representations of political track records and realities.

The integration of the findings produced an Algorithmic Reception Model comprising nine interconnected components: Human Intentions and Campaign Strategy; Hybrid Content Production; Platform and Algorithmic Visibility; AI-Perceived Content; Reception Experience; Reception Position; Political Meaning Reconstruction; Audience Responses and Actions; and Recursive Feedback. The model is positioned as a context-specific conceptual proposition grounded in data from I1–I5 and K1–K14, rather than as a universal theory or evidence that AI and algorithms determine electoral outcomes.

Based on these findings, further research is recommended to include more diverse and balanced informants, particularly in studies comparing Generation Z and Millennials, and to include informants from the production side, such as strategists, designers, AI operators, social media managers, and data analysts. The use of the same stimulus, production process documentation, metadata, content version archives, and digital forensic analysis is required to strengthen validation and to distinguish perception from technical evidence of AI use. Algorithmic Reception Models also need to be tested across different candidates, campaigns, platforms, audience groups, and cultural contexts using longitudinal design or mixed methods.

For candidates and campaign teams, the use of AI needs to be documented, human-supervised, updated when material changes occur, and balanced with programme information and content-correction mechanisms. The KPU, Bawaslu, the government, and regulators need to develop operational definitions, transparency provisions, reporting mechanisms, and risk-based supervision of synthetic political content. Digital platforms need to clarify tagging, political ad libraries, recommendation control options, and access to aggregate data for independent research, while protecting user privacy. Audiences also need to improve AI literacy by checking the source, context, creator, and authenticity of political messages.

Author Contributions Statement

All authors have made significant contributions to this research, and all relevant contributors have been included as authors.

List of Contributions

RLP: Corresponding Author. Role: Conceptualisation, Writing-Original Draft, Investigation, Data Collection, Analysis, Writing-Review & Editing.
MR: Co-Author. Conceptualisation, Supervision, Validation.
FN: Co-Author. Conceptualisation, Supervision, Validation.

Data Availability

Data analysed in this study are publicly available on Mendeley Data, doi: 10.17632/8c9mdzr4cf.2

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Declaration

During manuscript preparation, the authors used Grammarly and ChatGPT (OpenAI) to improve English and ensure grammatical accuracy. After using these tools, the authors thoroughly reviewed and edited the text and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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