



SELEBGRAM POLITICIANS: VIRTUAL SELF AND POLITICAL SELF-REPRESENTATION IN THE INSTAGRAM ERA

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

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This study investigates how a politician constructs and presents her virtual self through social media, focusing on Ananda, the elected Deputy Mayor of Banjarmasin for the 2025–2030 term. Employing a qualitative interpretative approach and virtual ethnography, this research explores strategies of self-representation, impression management, and emotional resonance in digital political communication during the 2024 regional election campaign. The analysis is grounded in dramaturgical theory and the concept of the virtual self, while also accounting for the digital cultural context that shapes symbolic interactions between politicians and the public. The findings indicate that Ananda's self-representation on Instagram is perceived as authentic, consistent, and emotionally resonant with the digital public. The effectiveness of this strategy lies not only in an engaging and communicative online performance, but also in the alignment between her digital persona and offline presence. However, the study also affirms that political legitimacy continues to rely on structural factors such as political track record and party support. Consequently, social media is understood as a complementary arena that strengthens the affective bridge between politicians and society within the contemporary local political ecosystem.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social media is increasingly recognized as a rapid and influential means of disseminating information, leading to the gradual decline of traditional media forms such as print and broadcast media [1]. It has become a crucial tool for communication, networking, and raising public awareness. Beyond serving as a platform for self-introduction, users now act as opinion shapers and influencers in the digital realm. Individuals previously unknown can become influential figures and are perceived as celebrities by their followers [2]. In the political context, social media has significantly reshaped how politicians build their careers. It enables them to introduce themselves, conduct campaigns, and maintain direct, unmediated relationships with constituents [3]. These developments give rise to new political dynamics that demand critical examination. From the perspective of contemporary political science, this phenomenon signifies a shift in power relations and patterns of mediation between political leaders and the public.

Manuel Castells (2005), in his analysis of the network society, emphasizes that the public sphere is no longer confined to physical spaces but is increasingly shaped by interactive and decentralized communication networks [4], with social media emerging as a key arena for the production of political meaning. This perspective is echoed

by Papacharissi (2015), who introduces the concept of affective publics, digital communities formed through emotional narratives and collective expressions of affect rather than institutional structures [5]. Similarly, Enli (2015) argues that political authority in the digital era is no longer rooted in control over information flow, but in the ability to perform authenticity and engage the public emotionally [6]. Chadwick (2013) further contributes by highlighting the hybrid media system, in which the logics of old and new media converge to reshape power relations and political visibility [7].

Social media, therefore, is not merely a technological medium; it functions as a dynamic political arena where the contestation of image, legitimacy, and emotional proximity unfolds. These digital strategies must be understood as part of the repoliticization of cultural spaces, in which social capital, manifested through likes, shares, and followers, becomes a form of symbolic capital in electoral and reputational contests. This shift reflects a political dynamic that is increasingly personalized and blurs the boundaries between politicians as public figures and as individuals navigating a digitally mediated cultural landscape.

Among the various social media platforms, Instagram has become a favorite among politicians due to its capacity for visual storytelling and the cultivation of aesthetic personal proximity. This phenomenon is often referred to as *insta-branding*, a strategic effort to reinforce personal and political image through curated visual content [8]. Prominent *selebgram* (celebrity-gram) figures on the platform employ distinctive techniques to build public recognition, often presenting a self-image that is not only polished but also controversial, quirky, or eccentric to capture audience attention. The number of followers serves as a key metric of popularity, and the greater the follower count, the greater one's influence within the digital landscape [9]. In this context, Echeverría (2023) draws on the work of José van Dijck and Thomas Poell to explain the logic of social media, which operates through the interrelated principles of popularity and datafication. Popularity allows platforms to amplify the visibility of content, figures, and ideas via algorithmic ranking, while users contribute to this amplification through participatory actions such as likes and shares [10]. Meanwhile, datafication refers to the platform's capacity to convert user activities, including following, liking, commenting, and sharing, into quantifiable data that can be analyzed and leveraged for strategic purposes. In political campaigns, these data function not only as indicators of performance, but also as the basis for content personalization and micro-targeting strategies aimed at voters. As a result, interaction metrics such as likes, followers, and engagement are no longer passive indicators of audience presence, but have become crucial tools in shaping image, visibility, and the persuasive power of digital political communication.

Not all individuals who successfully build influence on Instagram originate from celebrity circles or begin with pre-existing social capital. Many achieve high visibility through consistent personal storytelling and by leveraging the platform's visual and algorithmic dynamics. For instance, Young Lex cultivated an authentic bad boy persona through expressive and provocative content, successfully attracting 1.9 million followers. However, when he adopted a more normative and positive style, his follower count declined. This case illustrates that, in the digital environment, self-expression perceived as authentic is often more effective in capturing attention than content that conforms to conventional standards. In the context of digital politics, this insight becomes increasingly relevant as *selebgram* politicians adopt similar strategies to construct a relatable public image. According to Luebke and Steffan (2025), perceptions of a politician's authenticity do not stem from objective truth, but rather from how consistently, intimately, simply, and spontaneously they present themselves on social media, which the public interprets as being "true to themselves" [11].

These dynamics raise critical questions for the study of political communication. How do politicians, constrained by institutional norms and ethical expectations, navigate self-representation in digital spaces? Does their official status restrict personal expression, or does it offer opportunities to craft a more intimate and emotionally resonant public image? These questions constitute the foundation of this study, which investigates how *selebgram* politicians construct self-representation within a digital political culture that is increasingly performative and personalized.

To address this issue, the study draws on two interrelated theoretical frameworks. First, Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory provides a lens to understand how individuals, including politicians, manage the distinction between frontstage (public performance) and backstage (private expression) in the construction of social identity [12]. On social media, this boundary becomes increasingly porous as individuals integrate personal dimensions into curated political narratives. Second, the concept of the virtual self, derived from Chris Barker's (2008) work, conceptualizes online identity as a socially constructed phenomenon, formed through acts of representation, performance, and concealment. While Barker does not use the term "virtual self" explicitly, his emphasis on identity, cultural mediation, and the influence of technology offers a critical foundation for understanding digital subjectivity [13]. Within this framework, digital identity is understood as the outcome of social construction, shaped through practices of representation, narrative selection, and the ongoing negotiation of meaning on digital platforms.

Digital platforms, as explained by Bortolan (2024), serve not only as spaces for self-expression but also as narrative archives that store and retrieve users' autobiographical traces, thereby reinforcing the perceived

continuity of identity [14]. In this context, self-representation on social media enables individuals, including selebgram politicians, to selectively display experiences, emotions, and values they wish to highlight, while simultaneously reinforcing an impression of authenticity through the recorded continuity of their personal narratives. Although digital identity may differ from offline identity, it remains socially significant, as it is constructed in relation to audiences and shaped by dominant symbolic systems within the digital sphere. By integrating dramaturgical theory and the concept of the virtual self, this research explores how selebgram politicians navigate the boundary between formal political performance and personal expression on social media, and how such self-representation functions as a tool for building legitimacy and symbolic capital within a competitive digital public sphere.

This study applies these theoretical perspectives to the case of Ananda, a young political figure elected as Deputy Mayor of Banjarmasin for the 2025–2030 term. The analysis focuses on her use of Instagram during the 2024 regional election campaign, a critical period in which digital strategies played a central role in influencing public perception. With over 95.7 thousand followers on her personal account, @hj.ananda, Ananda presents herself not only as a public official but also as a socially engaged figure who cultivates emotional proximity with her audience. Building on this context, the study aims to examine how the self-representation of a selebgram politician is constructed through social media, with a particular focus on Ananda's self-presentation during the 2024 regional election campaign. In doing so, it aims to contribute to the field of digital political studies by offering conceptual insights into the evolving relationship between platform logics, symbolic performance, and public legitimacy.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative interpretative approach utilizing virtual ethnography. This methodology enables in-depth exploration of meaning-making, identity performativity, and symbolic practices within digital environments shaped by the algorithmic logic of social media platforms. As Pink et al. (2016) emphasize, digital ethnography allows researchers to understand how social meanings are constructed, negotiated, and experienced in online interactions that are inherently multimodal and affective [15]. Hine (2015) further highlights that virtual ethnography is grounded in the recognition that the internet is not a neutral or merely technical domain, but rather a cultural space that is embedded, embodied, and enacted in everyday life, where social practices emerge through complex symbolic interactions [16].

The focus of this research is the observation of the official Instagram account @hj.ananda, managed by Ananda, the elected Deputy Mayor of Banjarmasin for the 2025–2030 term, during the 2024 regional election campaign. Data collection was conducted through non-interventionist participant observation of the account's full activity, including visual posts (photographs and videos), captions, and patterns of interaction within the comment sections. The researcher adopted a passive observer role, refraining from direct responses in order to maintain analytical neutrality and to avoid interfering with the ongoing dynamics of the digital environment. All observed content elements were treated as digital cultural texts, understood as symbolic expressions that reflect cultural values, identity narratives, and political strategies constructed within the online ecosystem. The analysis was conducted using a semiotic and discursive framework to interpret how political imagery is formed, disseminated, and socially negotiated through the interaction between politicians and the digital public. The semiotic framework draws on the work of Danesi (2018), who views digital media as a dynamic landscape of signs and meanings that are continuously reinterpreted within shifting social and cultural contexts [17].

To complement the observational data, this study also relies on semi-structured interviews conducted with two primary groups: (1) Ananda, as the main subject who actively manages her self-representation on social media, and (2) several active Instagram users in Banjarmasin who are categorized as digital native voters. The purpose of these interviews is to explore emotional resonance, perceived authenticity, and the symbolic appeal of female politicians' self-representation in digital space. The combination of observation and interviews facilitates the development of a holistic understanding of the production and reception processes of political self-image within the evolving landscape of social media.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

3.1. Ananda as a Selebgram Politician in the Context of Local Political Contestation

In the contemporary digital political landscape, the personalization of power has undergone a significant transformation, driven by the growing integration of social media into political practice. One manifestation of this transformation is the emergence of political figures who strategically employ the visual, narrative, and interactive

logics characteristic of social media to construct personas that resemble digital celebrities. In this study, such figures are referred to as *selebgram politicians*, are politicians who deliberately design and perform digital identities on platforms like Instagram, using communicative strategies that are not only institutional, but also emotional and relational in nature.

Martin J. Riedl et al. (2023), in their study of political influencers, argue that individuals who possess social capital and narrative capacity can consolidate political power through practices of digital celebrity, even outside formal party structures or official positions. This phenomenon, according to the authors, not only alters the forms of political communication but also relocates symbolic authority from institutions to individuals, a trend they identify as indicative of fragmentation within democratic representation [18]. Within this framework, *selebgram* politicians are understood as entities that mediate between the logic of representative politics and the algorithmic logic operated by digital platforms.

Senft (2013) previously introduced the concepts of microcelebrity and branded self as visibility strategies that rely on consistent and engaging online performance [9]. In practice, *selebgram* politicians do not merely communicate political issues or programs, but actively position themselves as emotionally resonant and communicative figures who can be felt by the public. This strategy produces a form of calculated authenticity, a constructed sense of genuineness aimed at fostering emotional proximity while simultaneously enhancing symbolic legitimacy within the digital space.

Ananda, the elected Deputy Mayor of Banjarmasin for the 2025–2030 term, serves as a representative example of this emerging tendency. Although she began her political career before developing a strong digital presence, her Instagram account @hj.ananda has shown significant growth in personal narrative and communicative reach over the past two regional election cycles (2019 and 2024). In the 2019 campaign, she competed with incumbent figures such as Ibnu Sina, who also maintained a robust digital presence. However, by 2024, Ananda emerged as a more dominant figure on social media, positioning digital strategy as a central pillar of her political campaign. In contrast to the style of conventional politicians who emphasize formal credibility and institutional authority, as described by Bungin (2018) [19], Ananda has consistently cultivated a persona that is light-hearted, communicative, and humorous. This approach aligns with the preferences of a younger digital public that is more receptive to personal and informal modes of political engagement.

3.2 Analysis of Ananda's Virtual Self-Representation and Its Social Implications

In an effort to understand how a politician's virtual self is represented and received by the public, this analysis employs a virtual ethnographic approach as formulated by Hine (2015), who conceptualizes digital media as a cultural space characterized by symbolic practices, narratives, and affective dimensions [16]. Based on the analytical structure presented in Table 1, the researcher examines Ananda's digital experience by analyzing multiple levels of representation, ranging from media space to experiential stories.

Table 1. Virtual Ethnographic Data Analysis

Level of Analysis	Object of Analysis
Media Space	The researcher examined the features and affordances provided by the Instagram platform.
Media Archive	The researcher analyzed the content as text and meaning within a digital media context.
Media Object	The researcher observed user activity and interactions, both between the user and others.
Experiential stories	The researcher connected online realities to offline experiences through in-depth interviews with the celebrity politician and netizens who served as supporting informants.

The findings of this study indicate that the virtual self constructed by Ananda on social media reflects a form of authenticity that is genuine and uncontrived, as she emphasized during the interview:

"Ulun di Instagram ya riil ulun, kesukaan terhadap K-pop bukan karena ingin menarik perhatian Gen-Z, karena pecinta K-pop itu tidak mungkin di buat-buat." (Interview with Ananda, 2025)

Translate: "What I show on Instagram is the real me. My interest in K-pop is not intended to attract Gen-Z attention, because a love for K-pop is something that cannot be faked."



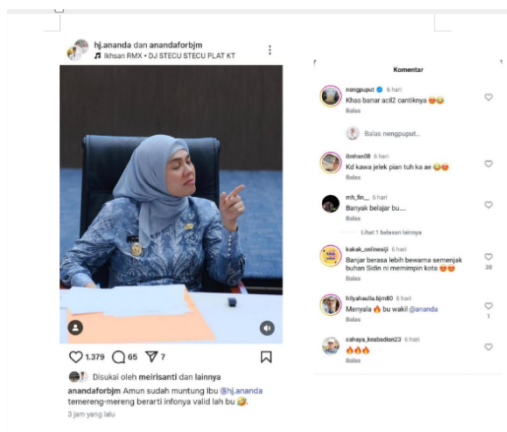
(Source: Ananda's Instagram, 2024)

Ananda's acknowledgment of her authentic personality is reflected in her light and spontaneous communication style, as well as in her consistent use of the Banjar language as a cultural marker that reinforces her identity's proximity to the local audience. Through this expression, Ananda explicitly states that the identity she presents on social media is not a construct designed solely for electoral purposes, but rather a reflection of her subjectivity and daily lived experience, which she consciously articulates within digital space. In other words, the virtual self she constructs is not merely a campaign strategy, but a form of personal actualization that introduces a new political dimension, namely an authentic presence within an algorithmically mediated public communication sphere.

Within Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory (1959), Ananda's self-representation may be categorized as a frontstage performance that maintains strong continuity with her backstage identity. The persona she presents to the public is not disconnected from her private character, and in fact reveals personal elements that are typically concealed by conventional politicians. For example, her incorporation of local language and her openness about her interest in pop culture (such as a fondness for K-pop) function as inclusive and emotional identity narratives that strengthen her connection with younger constituents. This openness not only reflects a progressive communication style, but may also be interpreted as a form of symbolic resistance against overly formal, elitist, and hierarchical models of political representation.

The resonance of Ananda's digital image in the eyes of the public does not cease at the electoral campaign stage, but instead continues to evolve into a sustained and relational form of engagement. Her consistency in sharing lighthearted and humorous content, along with her use of familiar local language, has cultivated a symbolic closeness that strengthens affective public attachment. This phenomenon reflects a shift in the meaning of political participation in the digital age, as described by Theocharis et al. (2023), who argue that the use of social media opens space for new forms of political action that are not fully captured by conventional categories of participation, such as liking, following, sharing, or commenting on political posts [20]. Although these actions may not directly result in policy change or the selection of public officials, they represent meaningful expressions of political identity and affiliation.

In this context, user engagement with Ananda's digital persona, whether through likes, positive comments, or participation in online discussions, can be understood as a form of micro-political engagement that reconfigures the boundary between political and social spheres. These digital interactions not only reflect appreciation for a politician's communication style, but also serve as symbolic articulations of public preference and trust toward a political figure perceived as authentic, communicative, and representative. Therefore, Ananda's success in maintaining digital engagement after the election not only signifies the sustainability of the political image she has cultivated, but also marks an effective adaptation to the emerging dynamics of political participation shaped by the affordances of social media.



(Source: Ananda's Instagram, 2024)

This is evident from the continued positive responses in the comment section of Ananda's Instagram account @hj.ananda, which persisted even after the campaign phase had ended. One user, for example, commented on an expressively styled post by Ananda:

"Cantik, Bu. Kehadiran Ibu memberikan warna untuk kota ini." (Instagram comment, 2024).

Translate: "Beautiful, Ma'am. Your presence brings color to this city."

Such expressions of appreciation indicate that content portraying a "silly" or informal side does not necessarily diminish political credibility. On the contrary, it strengthens the perception of authenticity and broadens the politician's reach to wider voter segments, particularly among younger generations and active social media users. Furthermore, findings from in-depth interviews conducted with several informants who were active voters in the 2024 Banjarmasin regional election suggest that Ananda's digital persona does not significantly diverge from their impressions formed through face-to-face interactions. Azizah, a local selebgram, stated:

"Sudah pernah ketemu, gambarnya sama aja pintar ngomong dan ceria. Tidak ada bedanya sih." (Interview with Azizah, 2024)

Translate: "I've met her in person, and she's just as she appears online—articulate and cheerful. There's no difference."

The consistency between Ananda's online image and offline experience was also affirmed by Lani, a radio broadcaster in Banjarmasin, who commented on Ananda's rhetorical skill and public performance:

"Punya kemampuan public speaking yang bagus, sama yang dilihat langsung dengan di media sosial dan televisi." (Interview with Lani, 2024)

Translate: "She has strong public speaking skills, just as you see on social media and television."

Such acknowledgments indicate Ananda's success in maintaining the integrity of her digital image, not merely as a campaign tool but as an extension of personal qualities experienced directly by the public. This is particularly significant in the context of contemporary digital political culture, where the credibility of a public figure no longer relies solely on institutional mediation, but increasingly depends on the ability to construct a consistent and responsive personal narrative.

Ananda's content is also effective because of its ability to package serious issues in an entertaining and accessible format. Rizki, another interviewed selebgram, remarked:

"Suka dengan konten-kontennya (Ananda) lucu, menghibur. Biarpun sebenarnya serius yang dibicarakan tapi kita nontonnya sampe selesai." (Interview with Rizki, 2024)

Translate: "I really enjoy her content. It's funny and entertaining. Even though the issues she discusses are actually serious, we still watch until the end."

This statement highlights the imperative for selebgram politicians to maintain a strategic level of engagement so that their content attracts attention and generates interaction in the form of likes, comments, and shares. In this way, politicians remain in the public eye not only through social media activity but also through real-world social presence and interaction.

However, one notable finding emerged from an interview with Dinda, a university student, who observed a dissonance between Ananda's digital persona and her experience of meeting her in person:

"Saya pernah bertemu dengan beliau, tetapi citra dan karakternya di media sosial terasa sangat berbeda dengan pengalaman saya bertemu secara langsung. Di media sosial beliau terlihat ramah, hangat dan dekat dengan masyarakat." (Interview with Dinda, 2024)

Translate: "I once met her in person, but her image and character on social media felt very different from my real-life experience. On social media, she appears warm, approachable, and close to the community."

Nonetheless, Dinda acknowledged that the circumstances at the time may not have allowed for meaningful communication:

“Menjadi sosok yang dikenal luas membawa tanggung jawab untuk tetap profesional, saya juga memahami mungkin kesan berbeda itu muncul karena saya baru pertama kali bertemu pada kondisi tertentu tetapi tetap saja ada perbedaan yang cukup mencolok.” (Interview with Dinda, 2024)

Translate: “Being a widely recognized public figure comes with the responsibility to remain professional. I also understand that the different impression may have arisen because it was my first time meeting her under specific circumstances, but still, the difference was quite noticeable.”

Dinda’s encounter with Ananda reveals a moment of dissonance between the curated frontstage persona presented on social media and the offline interaction experienced in person. On Instagram, Ananda projects a warm, humorous, and approachable image, shaped by the affordances of digital media such as visual aesthetics, captions, and strategic interactivity. However, the offline setting, shaped by situational constraints like time, formality, or context, may have required Ananda to adopt a more reserved demeanor. This discrepancy aligns with Goffman’s dramaturgical theory, which emphasizes that maintaining frontstage consistency demands contextual adaptability. Dinda’s reflection that the encounter was brief and circumstantial suggests that the perceived incongruity may not signal inauthenticity, but rather highlights the dynamic negotiation between digital performance and embodied presence.

Testimonies from netizens and field informants reinforce Echeverría’s (2023) findings that success in digital political spaces is no longer determined solely by the strength of normative political messaging, but rather by the capacity to build sustained performance-based engagement. In the logic of contemporary social media, as outlined by Echeverría, popularity and datafication are not merely technical instruments, but also constitute a structure of opportunity for symbolic and affective legitimacy in the eyes of the public [10]. In this context, digital engagement becomes an indicator of political performance that reflects a public figure’s success in aligning their online image with the emotional and cultural expectations of voters, particularly among the digital generation.

Field findings indicate that *selebgram* politicians such as Ananda face more complex demands than conventional politicians. They are required not only to maintain a formal image as public officials, but also to ensure continuity between their online persona and real-world social interactions. Once the digital image has shaped public expectations, consistency between frontstage and backstage becomes imperative in their political communication practices. This underscores that being a *selebgram* politician involves the constant negotiation of a dual identity, balancing the performative expectations of netizens with the institutional responsibilities of public office.

In the context of Goffman’s dramaturgical theory (1959), this study shows that the frontstage is not necessarily a sanitized arena of image construction devoid of personal complexity. In Ananda’s case, the frontstage provided by social media functions as a space for expressing a more holistic identity, even including elements that would conventionally be considered part of the backstage [12]. This reflects a shifting boundary between formal and informal representations in digital political communication. Ananda does not merely highlight her positive or professional attributes as an official, but also reveals humorous, local, and expressive personal traits that are positively received by the online public.

Conceptually, these findings also invite a reinterpretation of the virtual self as developed by Chris Barker. While Barker (2008) posits that virtual identity is a construct that is displayed, shaped, or sometimes concealed as part of representational strategy [13], in the case of *selebgram* politicians, this process is not always fully artificial. Ananda, for instance, does not construct a digital persona distinct from her actual self, but instead extends and affirms a pre-existing personal identity. Nevertheless, there are moments when Ananda fails to align her virtual self with offline expectations due to the demands of professional conduct. Thus, the virtual self in this context is more accurately understood as a reinforcement of an existing identity in the digital realm, rather than a fabrication of a new one.

These findings also support the theory of digital culture articulated by Samovar and Porter (2009), which holds that digital media possess the potential to reshape societal values, beliefs, and attitudes toward social representation, including political representation [21]. In this regard, political figures who present themselves as humorous or even silly are no longer seen as undermining their authority, but rather as fostering authentic connection with the public. This is evident in the positive responses of digital audiences to Ananda’s light-hearted and communicative content. What was once considered a deviation from political norms is now increasingly interpreted as a medium for strengthening the symbolic relationship between leaders and their publics.



*(Ananda's Appearance During the Campaign
Source: Ananda's Instagram, 2024)*

In practice, political actors are no longer assessed solely based on the messages they project online, but also by the extent to which their digital performance reflects their character and credibility in real-life contexts. The information consumed by the public through social media plays a significant role in shaping initial perceptions of political figures. However, classical factors in voting behavior, such as political track records, personal credibility, and affiliation with political parties or social networks, continue to serve as primary determinants in voters' political decision-making processes. This is reinforced by field findings, which indicate that the success of a *selebgram* in becoming an elected representative, for example, is not determined by the number of followers, but rather by their actual potential to build public trust and demonstrate political capability.



(Source: Ananda's Instagram, 2024)

One important point that must be emphasized from these findings is that the seemingly spontaneous and unfiltered performance presented by Ananda on social media is not entirely devoid of strategic management. On the contrary, the authenticity she consistently constructs may be interpreted as part of a deliberate image management strategy. This is directly affirmed by Ananda in an in-depth interview:

"Uluu handak dikenal sebagai politisi yang touchable." (Interview with Ananda, 2024)

Translate: "I want to be known as a touchable politician."

Politically contextualized, this statement illustrates that the self-representation as a touchable politician—emotionally, socially, and symbolically close to the public—is a consciously constructed identity designed to engage a constituency that desires leadership which is non-elitist, approachable, and responsive to local needs. By presenting herself as genuine on social media, Ananda is not only expressing her personal identity, but also cultivating a form of symbolic capital that serves as an affective bridge between herself and her digital constituents. A summary of the virtual ethnographic analysis related to the construction of Ananda's virtual self on social media is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Summary of Virtual Ethnographic Findings: Representation of Ananda's Virtual Self on Social Media

Level of Analysis	Ethnographic Findings	Analytical Interpretation
Media Space	The appearance of the Instagram account @hj.ananda is visually structured and informative, with the use of campaign-specific color schemes.	Represents a digitally constructed public arena designed to convey the image of a communicative political figure.
Media Archive	A consistent pattern of personal posts over time, including interaction history and nostalgic photos from her youth.	Social media functions as a narrative archive that reinforces the continuity of digital identity.
Media Object	Humorous videos in the Banjar local dialect and posts inspired by K-pop aesthetics.	Each media object serves as a symbolic tool used to construct a persona that is emotionally resonant and relatable.
Experiential Stories	Positive comments from netizens and direct interview testimonies, such as " <i>rill uluu</i> " (the real me) and "touchable".	Self-representation is not only constructed but also publicly affirmed as authentic and emotionally close, although one individual noted a disparity with offline impressions.

Although Ananda's digital representation demonstrates a high degree of connectivity with the public, as illustrated through the media space, media archive, media object, and experiential stories outlined in Table 2, she herself acknowledges that a strong social media image is not the sole determinant of electoral success. In her critical reflection, Ananda emphasized that her victory in the regional election also depended on structural strengths that had been cultivated over time, including her prior political track record, the effective operation of a solid party apparatus, and adequate logistical support. Therefore, the digital communication strategy she developed, grounded in the concepts of the virtual self and calculated authenticity, must be situated as one component within a broader political configuration.

Social media, while serving as a strategic space for building visibility and expanding support, must still be positioned within a larger political ecology. In other words, digital self-representation should be understood as one instrument among many within an integrated political communication framework, rather than as the sole source of political legitimacy. As noted by Bungin (2018), image construction in contemporary political communication still requires the support of institutional structures, ideological narratives, and comprehensive electoral strategies [19].

Taking these dynamics into account, the findings of this study affirm that *selebgram* politicians like Ananda represent a new model of contemporary political actors, those who are capable of bridging two arenas of representation: formal representation within the institutional political system and symbolic representation within the digital cultural sphere. Ananda's success in establishing her identity as a touchable politician reflects how political actors today must not only master policy narratives, but also develop personal narratives that are emotional, relational, and consistent across various channels of political communication.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusions of this study are as follows:

1. This research demonstrates that the self-representation of *selebgram* politicians, such as Ananda, constitutes a form of power personalization in the digital era that integrates political communication strategies with practices of online celebrity. The initial objective stated in the Introduction, to understand how political image is digitally constructed, has been validated by the finding that Ananda's virtual identity is both authentic and consistent with her offline persona. However, there are moments in offline contexts when the demands of professionalism create a dissonance between her virtual self and her real-life presence.
2. The findings affirm that social media functions not only as a space for political promotion but also as a site for the construction of symbolic legitimacy grounded in emotional interaction and performativity. The virtual self that is constructed is not merely a strategic fabrication, but also a manifestation of social connectedness that fosters micro-level political participation and emotional proximity between politicians and the public.
3. These results open new avenues for the development of digital politics research, particularly in understanding the dynamics of self-representation among local politicians beyond formal institutional frameworks. For future studies, this research could be extended to other regional contexts or examined through comparative lenses such as gender and social class, in order to map patterns of differentiation within platform-based digital politics.

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