



Mbak Ita Political Communication Strategy in Building Personal Branding for Semarang Mayoral Election 2024

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Abstract. The research aims to describe Mbak Ita's political communication strategy for building personal branding for the 2024 Semarang mayoral election. Her political communication strategy is interesting to analyse, as she has succeeded in building personal branding as a leader who has successfully brought Semarang City several awards since being appointed as mayor. As is known, Mbak Ita was elected vice mayor as a result of the 2020 regional election, along with Hendrar Prihadi. This research method combines a qualitative approach with a phenomenological approach. The research results show that the political communication strategy used was able to improve Mbak Ita's personal branding as a regional leader. The political communication strategy was built through digital social media developed by the Semarang City Government, such as the Sapa Mbak Ita Application, Instagram, and Twitter. The coverage of all activities that were blown up through social media was very effective regarding branding, popularity, and electability to advance in the 2024 Pilkada. In conclusion, there are three political communication strategies that are built, namely strategies to strengthen networks with political parties, massive branding of programmes in the media, and personal branding on digital social media.

Keywords: Political Communication Strategy, Personal Branding, Mayor Election 2024

1 Introduction

This study aims to describe the political communication strategy of Hevearita Gunaryanti Rahayu, who is known as Mbak Ita, in building personal branding for the 2024 mayoral election. The 2020 Semarang City Mayoral Election was won by the couple Hendi Hendrar Prihadi and Hevearita Gunaryanti Rahayu (Mbak Ita) for the 2021-2026 term. Since Hendi Hendrar Prihadi was appointed Head of the Public Procurement Policy Agency (LKPP) in October 2022, on 30 January 2023 Mbak Ita officially served as mayor and became the first woman to hold the position of Mayor of Semarang (Semarang City Government, 2023) [1].

Mbak Ita's popular greeting in the community has actually become a brand as a promotional material for the community as its target audience [2][3][4]. This is in line with Montoya's opinion, which states that personal branding is a personal identity that has

the ability to instil the values and qualities carried by the owner of the name in the minds of consumers [5].

The term Mbak Ita is a smart idea for positioning, especially since there has never been a female deputy mayor or mayor in Semarang City. The term "Mbak" as a female designation in Javanese and seems familiar without showing social class distinctions or egalitarian in nature becomes an unpaid promotion. Therefore, it is not excessive, if this greeting is able to be a tool to manage your brand that is managed through "word of mouth", Rangkuti explained that in such a position, personal branding is ideally able to provide trust in the minds of every consumer in this case the constituent. The more consumers who believe, the faster the power of "word of mouth" [6].

The success of brand building is inseparable from the political communication strategy that is implemented and adjusted to the conditions of the community. Semarang City is one of the important cities, not only because of its position as the capital of Central Java, but by Bappenas has been prepared as a metropolitan city. Semarang City's 2045 long-term development vision is to become a livable, developed, and sustainable metropolitan city [7]. As any other metropolitan city, after experiencing stages of rapid population growth due to urbanisation, industry, trade influence, financial centre, government centre, and national and international economic growth centre, Semarang developed into a metropolitan city [8].

As a consequence, the people of Semarang City have diverse and complex characteristics, which requires an appropriate political communication strategy in forming public perceptions, strengthening legitimacy, and ensuring policy direction in accordance with the needs and expectations of the community. Regarding the formation of personal branding, this research refers to the personal branding pyramid in which there are four strategies: determine who you are, determine what you do, position yourself, and manage your brand [9].

The four branding strategies described above need to be analysed to explain Mbak Ita's political communication strategy in building personal branding for the 2024 Semarang mayoral election. Since becoming mayor, several awards have been successfully achieved. What is interesting is that the innovations created are not far from domestic or women's issues, which makes Mbak Ita distinctive. Among other things, the main category award for the title of Child Friendly City, success in reducing stunting rates through several innovative programmes such as Rumah Pelita (Cross-Sector Stunting Handling House for Under-fives), the Millennial Gotong Royong Overcoming Stunting (Melon Musk) programme, to urban farming which is part of the education curriculum in schools, starting from PAUD, kindergarten, elementary to junior high school as Mbak Ita's flagship innovation [10].

2 Research Methods

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach. In this qualitative research process, a number of important actions are performed [11]. These include asking questions and following procedures, collecting specific data from informants, analysing data inductively to identify common themes, and interpreting their meaning [11]. Because

the data and analyses collected are primarily qualitative, this research is referred to as a qualitative method. In qualitative research, the subject should be natural, not manipulated by the researcher [12]. In addition, Creswell [13] provides an explanation of at least five qualitative methods: narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. This study uses phenomenology. The location is in Semarang. Mbak Ita, the Mayor of Semarang, and members of the Semarang City community are the units of analysis for the study. This study focuses on Mbak Ita's political communication strategy to build personal branding in preparation for the 2024 Semarang Mayoral election. The research data was collected through documentation and interviews. Triangulation was used to test the validity of the data. The collected data were processed and analysed using the interactive qualitative analysis method.

3 Results and Discussion

The achievement of various awards since Mbak Ita took office shows the ability of political communication in building a conducive political situation that influences public perception, builds trust, and forms public opinion so that the public support the policies stipulated. In addition to maintaining the quality of interaction between the community and the leader, the political communication that is implemented can also be an asset for contestation in the upcoming 2024 regional head election.

Rocheel Shape has explained some of the advantages of female leadership [14], such as motivating others, communicating well, making the work environment better, thinking strategically, listening to employee complaints, and understanding current problems. According to research conducted by Eagly, A.H., and Carli (2003), women have an advantage in democratic or participative leadership styles over men [15]. In addition, North PG (2018) said that women are better at leading than men, especially in gender-aligned fields, such as government and social services, but are less in the military [16].

Moreover, women have five characteristics as leaders: (1) They are more persuadable than men. Compared to men, women tend to be more ambitious; (2) They are "unapologetic" when they face wrong criticism, which means they are more vulnerable to criticism and rejection. However, women also have high courage, empathy, flexibility, and friendliness, which allows them to quickly recover from pain, learn from mistakes, and be positive; (3) Teamwork spirit, great women leaders tend to apply a comprehensive leadership style when it comes to making decisions and solving problems. Women, like men, have strong charisma as leaders; (4) Women are more flexible, considerate, and helpful to their staff. Women leaders dare to break rules and take risks because they are no longer in safe territory; they are also persuasive, confident, and have a strong ability to complete tasks [17].

The use of social media to build connections with constituents, initiate political discussions, and talk to the public directly is another important element of political communication [18]. Political communication networks created through social media are an effective way to encourage participation, feedback, contribution, and openness without distance between news sources and audiences [19]. As a result, social media users can use it to create personal branding and reach a larger audience without incurring

large costs. Another advantage gained by politicians is that they can form public perceptions of themselves while making political communication much easier [20].

Political communication is not only a medium for conveying messages but also for creating influences or effects that can change the understanding and views of message recipients. This concept is known as the communication effect, which includes changes that occur in the receiver of the message. The success of political communication is expected to change the perception of women's leadership, no longer associated with stereotypes of women who are not suitable to lead but more focused on competence and performance. Data from the field shows that the multicultural society of Semarang City with adequate education levels generally does not question gender in the constellation of powers. Meaning that people think Mbak Ita is qualified as a regional leader, because she has proved to have many achievements and awards in making the region more developed and prosperous.

During the process of building her personal branding, Mbak Ita uses four communication strategies. The first strategy, determining who you are, is the initial strategy to reflect on the individual who has already been attached to the object so that it can be differentiated from others. This strategy can be done by analysing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, or SWOT.

Strengths include: (1) the strengthened network with the supporting political parties, including PDIP, PKB, Democrat Party, Gerindra Party, Nasdem Party, Golkar Party, PSI, PAN, and PPP; and (2) the ability to massively promote innovative programmes on social media, such as the fried rice competition and urban farming programmes involving all schools in Semarang City, as well as being part of the education curriculum in schools, from PAUD, kindergarten, elementary to junior high school. With urban farming, citizens are expected to utilise open spaces to produce greener areas. Furthermore, innovations such as Melon Musk's Millennial Gotong Royong Overcoming Stunting programme, Rumah Pelita (Cross-Sector Stunting Handling House for Toddlers), and others. This is in line with the five characteristics of female leaders, including the ability to persuade; mostly, female leaders are more persuasive than male leaders.

Weaknesses include the ability to respond to criticism of programme innovations. Until now, it is suspected that Gajahmungkur Sub-District Head Ade Bhakti was demoted from his position and transferred to the Fire Department as Secretary of the Department on August 1, 2023, allegedly due to criticism of Mbak Ita's "Nasi Goreng Competition" programme. Mbak Ita herself explained that the transfer had nothing to do with "like and dislike" in her leadership and was merely a rotation of employees at the city level. In the case above, it shows that women leaders dare to take risks. They are no longer in safe territory; women leaders dare to break the rules and take risks.

Opportunities include the existence of the Sapa Mbak Ita Application, which can be used as a means for the people of Semarang City to convey aspirations and complaints to the Mayor of Semarang directly while branding Mbak Ita as an aspirational, transparent, and accountable leader. Threats include the strong patriarchal culture in Javanese society, which carries stereotypes that women are less qualified to lead than men.

The second strategy, determining who you are, was implemented using the Sapa Mbak Ita application. An application that serves as a medium for the people of Semarang City to convey aspirations and complaints to the Mayor of Semarang directly. This application is not completely new because it is a rebranding of Lapor Hendi, which previously served as an interaction channel between the community and the Mayor or other elements in the Semarang City Government. So far, Sapa Mbak Ita has been used to facilitate citizens in obtaining information, submitting aspirations, and making complaints about public services online in Semarang City. The legal base used by Sapa Mbak Ita in managing public complaints is Semarang City Mayor Regulation Number 5 Year 2023 on Public Service Complaint Management Guidelines.

The "Sapa Mbak Ita" application (<https://www.instagram.com/sapambakita/>) allows people to follow their aspirations and complaints and also communicate directly with all parts of Semarang City Government. Most of the Sapa Mbak Ita channels work in collaboration with SP4N-Lapor!, which can be found on its official website at sapambakita.lapor.go.id. Other methods include sending WhatsApp reports to 0812-1500-0512 with the format "sapambakita", "name", "location", "content of report", and "is it difable?"(Y/N), the Sapa Mbak Ita Android app, twitter at @sapambakita with the hashtag #sapambakita, and the 1708 SMS service with the format lapor spasi sapa Mbak Ita [21]

The third strategy is to position yourself. This is a way to find features and qualities that distinguish you from your competitors. As a woman skilled in household affairs, Mbak Ita created a new program called "Lomba Nasi Goreng Mbak Ita" to welcome the 78th anniversary of Indonesian Independence. The program involved the Family Empowerment and Welfare (PKK) Team throughout Semarang City and began with a multi-tiered selection starting at the neighbourhood (RT) level and selecting champions from 177 advanced villages at the city level. Personal branding is indirectly strengthened by this program, especially among women.

The fourth strategy is to manage your brand. The nickname Mbak Ita is a wise choice for branding, given that there has never been a female mayor or deputy mayor so far. In Javanese, the term "Mbak" is used to refer to women and seems familiar but does not indicate social class differences. Like a product, your brand needs to be framed through "word of mouth," in which personal branding must be able to inspire trust in every customer. The more customers who put their trust in you, the stronger the word of mouth will be.

Since Mbak Ita took office as mayor, Semarang City has received several awards. This shows her effective political communication skills in leading the region. Bob Lichter formulated the definition of political communication as the production, transmission, and effects of information about politics, political opinion, and public policy. In this concept, political communication not only includes the delivery of political information but also involves the impact or influence generated from the process on political understanding, political views, and public policy [22].

Based on the awards achieved by Semarang City since Mbak Ita's leadership, it can be seen that the success of the leadership process emphasised the ability of political communication in the art of leading. Mbak Ita has the ability to influence others to achieve synergistic goals, which has led to various awards. According to Gibson

(1986), leadership is the ability to influence others through relationships and communication to achieve goals. Hemhill & Coons describe leadership as the behaviour of a person who leads group action to achieve a common goal.

When she first emerged as Semarang City's first female mayor, many doubted her abilities. The distrust of the people of Semarang City was once again influenced by the assumption that women were not fit to lead in politics and government. This perception certainly needs to be proven by giving women the opportunity to lead. This is based on a study conducted by Eagly, A.H., & Carli (2003), which found that women have several advantages in leadership styles, such as democratic or participatory, in comparison to men.

Furthermore, North PG (2018) states that women are more effective in leadership than men, especially in gender-aligned fields such as social services and government, but less effective in the military. The Main Level Child Friendly City (KLA) title currently achieved by Semarang City shows that Mbak Ita is able to plan, establish, and implement all development programmes well. This rating is nearly the highest of the five criteria set by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (Kem PPPA), ministerial agencies, and the Independent Team: Pratama, Madya, Nindya, Utama, and KLA. This phenomenon is in line with Shape's opinion that women are better at motivating others, communicating, creating a positive work environment, thinking strategically, listening to complaints, and analysing new problems.

4 Conclusion

Mbak Ita, as the first female leader in Semarang City, has been able to utilise political communication in her role as a woman, which has become her branding that distinguishes her from male leaders. Program innovations since her position as mayor of Semarang City have led to achievements in various awards, including the Top-Ranked Child Friendly City program, the successful handling of stunting, and the urban farming program. There are three political communication strategies that are built, such as strategies to strengthen networks with political parties, massive branding of programs in the media, and personal branding on digital social media.

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6 Disclosure of Interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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