

*Decoding the Meaning of Gemoy as a Political Gimmick:  
A Semiotic Analysis Approach to Presidential Candidate Prabowo Subianto*

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**Abstract**

This research focuses on exploring the meaning of gemoy as a political gimmick in Prabowo Subianto's 2024 Indonesian presidential election campaign. It investigates how this term is strategically employed in the campaign to influence public perception and voter behavior. The proposed assumption is that the term gemoy functions as an emotional and cultural trigger, designed to generate positive sentiments and support for Prabowo, while potentially diverting attention from substantial political views. The theoretical framework integrates semiotic analysis, drawing on Roland Barthes' theory. Barthes' concepts are utilized to explore the cultural meanings of gemoy through the approaches of denotation, connotation, and myth. This research employs a qualitative approach involving a semiotic analysis of campaign video advertisements that highlight the use of gemoy. Findings indicate that visual strategies are used to shape public perceptions, emphasizing gemoy as a positive trait that enhances relatability and appeal to a broader audience.

Keywords: Semiotics, Gemoy, Political Gimmick, Political Advertisement

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## Introduction

The political contestation towards the presidential and vice presidential elections in 2024 has generated a significant amount of public attention. Various efforts have been made by presidential candidates and vice presidential candidates. These efforts are carried out as a form of campaign or political communication. The forms of campaigns and political communication are very diverse. Advertising is one form of campaign that is often used. Through advertisements, hopefully political messages can be conveyed to the community well.

Internet technology currently plays an important role in delivering messages in the form of political advertisements. In line with Beskow's research (2020) which states that the internet is a central medium of communication that provides affordances such as speed, reach, hypertextuality, multimodality, and interactivity, which can shape communication that is customized and used for political advertising. The political advertising landscape that is currently evolving is very diverse. It has evolved over time due to technological and political changes, and has been studied extensively to assess its effects on voters and the influence of money in politics (Peter, 2023). The overview shows that political advertising is an important aspect of political communication and campaign strategy.

In accordance with its function, political advertising can be realized in forms such as television and radio advertisements, print advertisements, online and social media advertisements, outdoor advertisements, online videos and viral content. In addition to these forms of advertising, participation in television debates or public forums can also be considered a form of communication campaign. In the political contestation of the 2024 presidential and vice presidential elections, the jargon or narrative of political figures has special attention. Each presidential and vice-presidential candidate pair has their own political jargon and narrative and represents their figures, both presidential and vice-presidential. The jargon and political narratives they create are certainly inseparable from the political agenda of each pair.

From the perspective of political communication, social media has become a very effective tool for the winning team of presidential candidates to convey political messages and build an image. Verdy (2024), in an interview reported by CNN Indonesia, explained that the three presidential candidates, Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, and Ganjar Pranowo, deliberately used various political gimmicks to attract public attention and convey the message that politics is more open and no longer elitist. Gimmicks such as "Anies Bubble" or "Abah Indonesia", "Gemoy", and "White Hair" or "Salam Hunger Games", are designed to build emotional closeness with voters, especially among millennials and Gen Z. Through social media, these gimmicks are designed to build emotional closeness with voters. Through social media, these gimmicks are used to shape narratives that are closer to people's daily lives, thus creating the impression that the three presidential candidates are more "affordable" and "populist" than the traditional political image that tends to be elite.

The political jargon or narrative of presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto in the current political contestation has become the concern of many people. This attention is represented in the news that often appears in the media. As in the media coverage of Liputan6.com, it was said that the campaign with the gemoy dance competition was quite effective in boosting Prabowo Subianto's electability. In the competition, the gemoy jargon was used to attract support from the public. Alejandro (2020) in his research stated that the use of jargon can

help facilitate communication and enable a more efficient and precise communication process.

The political jargon about gemoy is currently perceived as a form of strategy to attract people's emotions to support. In that strategy, the values to be conveyed regarding the 2024 presidential election are not implied. Schmidt, et al., (2008) in his research stated that attractive jargon or slogans to create a positive image of politicians by appealing to emotions to influence choices do not provide substantive solutions or resolve problems can be termed as political gimmicks. Political gimmicks are used as a means to gain popularity or short-term support, rather than focusing on long-term solutions or good policy changes.

The political campaign with the gemoy jargon of presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto can be captured from external advertisements in the form of billboards, posters, clothing prints, and in videos that appear in public forums. In the campaign, the images displayed showed Prabowo Subianto's face with artificial intelligence application edits to resemble the face of a gemoy child. Meanwhile, in videos in public forums, Prabowo Subianto often showed a gemoy dance that was viralized in several political agendas. The giggly images and videos show an invitation to provide support for the community. When viewed from the images and movements, there is no vision and mission, or even values that will be brought for the betterment of the nation.

This research offers novelty both in terms of theory and the object under study compared to Shane's (2018) research, which focused on Donald Trump's use of Twitter to build an authentic image using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, particularly the concept of indexicality. The novelty of this study is the applying of Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to analyze the visualization of "gemoy politics" in Prabowo Subianto's campaign, which centers on visual transformation and popular culture-based political communication. While Shane explored authenticity through text-based social media, this study delves into the meaning of denotation, connotation, and myth in visual advertisements, thus providing a new perspective on how political communication uses aesthetic elements and emotions to create a relatable and humanist image. This approach not only broadens the scope of semiotic analysis in the political context but also introduces a new phenomenon in Indonesian political culture that has not been widely studied before, namely the use of cute and adorable visualizations as a political communication strategy.

Based on the background above, this research aims to decode the meaning of gemoy as a political gimmick of presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto in the 2024 general election contestation. How the gemoy political campaign is really interpreted as a short-term strategy. The meaning of the gemoy images and videos is based on a semiotic theory perspective through semiotic analysis.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### ***Semiotic Theory***

Semiotics, or the study of signs, is an important tradition of thought in communication theory. The basic concept that holds this tradition together is the sign: the second basic concept is symbol, which is usually designed as a complex sign with multiple meanings. The semiotic tradition includes basic theories about the use of signs and symbols to denote objects, ideas, statements, situations, feelings, and conditions outside of humans. The

tradition of semiotic theories agrees on how the presence of signs represents objects, ideas, statements, situations, feelings, and conditions. In addition, it helps in understanding how the messages have meaning (Littlejohn et al., 2017).

Roland Barthes explains that semiotics is not a cause, science, discipline, thought, movement, or presumably even a theory. It is claimed to be “an adventure”. The purpose of semiotics according to him is to interpret signs both verbally and nonverbally. On the verbal side the field is called linguistics, but in principle Barthes is more interested in the nonverbal side. Barthes initially described semiotic theory as an explanation of myth. Subsequently, he used the term “connotation” to describe the set of ideologies considered as “signs,” which are always attached to and shape certain perceptions or identities. Connotation is a term that conveys deep meaning or concern. In Barthes' theory of connotation, the first thing that needs to be understood is his view of how the sign structure works.

The concepts of connotation, denotation, and myth provide an in-depth perspective in analyzing political communication practices. Klingner and Martens (2017) in their research stated that political communication uses symbols that not only describe issues but also create strong associations in the minds of voters. Smith and Anderson (2020) further explain that politicians use symbols and signs in their campaigns to form political identities that resonate with audiences, for example by using images or words that trigger certain social values. This shows that politicians not only communicate their policy programs but also create stronger identities that relate to voters' values and emotions.

Mass media, including social media, play a central role in the formation and dissemination of political myths, which are social constructions that associate certain symbols and narratives with political values, identities or ideologies. According to McMahan and Porter (2021), the media not only functions as an information channel that conveys policies, but also as a tool to build the image and credibility of politicians. Through visual symbols such as logos, images, and videos, as well as verbal narratives in the form of speeches or tweets, the media creates deeper meanings that shape the way people perceive their potential leaders. Ultimately, this process influences public perception and shapes the political identity internalized by voters, which in turn influences their voting behaviour. Social media, with its ability to spread messages quickly, accelerates the formation and propagation of these political myths.

### ***Semiotics in Political Perspective***

The understanding of semiotic theory is essential for mapping today's political advertisements. Semiotics helps us understand political advertising by providing a framework for analyzing the signs and symbols used in advertising (Andrey, 2020). In this way, the mechanism of making and the function of the advertisement can be known and how the advertisement affects the recipient of the message. This is in accordance with research conducted by Yuliya (2018) which states that semiotics is used to understand how these signs produce meaning and how they affect the recipients of the messages conveyed. The investigation will also go deeper to see the characteristics of social nature and the ways in which advertising shapes perceptions in society.

By examining the structural alignment of signs and the process of significance, semiotics helps us uncover the elements and functions of advertising, thereby explaining how it affects audiences (Peeter, 2022). In addition, semiotics allows us to analyze the structure of advertising language, predict how audiences may interpret advertisements and understand

how they work (Yanni, et al., 2016). Such interpretation can be done by analyzing discourse through messages conveyed in political campaigns. By understanding the messages conveyed in political advertisements, it will provide insight into the imagination of national identity that is being formed and the construction of identity that is being built (Andrey, 2020). This analysis is particularly relevant in the case of political advertising, where the use of signs and symbols is essential to convey political messages and influence public opinion. Therefore, semiotics provides valuable insights into the nature and impact of political advertising. Moreover, semiotics offers a comprehensive framework for identifying the visual and textual elements of political advertisements and their influence on society.

### ***Political Contestation in Indonesia 2024***

The situation of politics in Indonesia for the 2024 presidential election has brought many surprises. The point of view to assess can be seen from several perspectives that are related to communication studies. Analysis of the political contestation map can be seen by examining communication strategies, media influence, public discourse, and the role of technology in delivering political narratives.

1. **Media and Political Communication**

The role of the media was crucial, the different media were framing political events and candidates in various and different ways. The framing of political events is influenced by factors such as professional norms, journalistic culture, and the agenda-setting and interpretive functions of the media (Matthias, 2012).

2. **Political Messages**

Political candidates and political parties use various communication strategies to build their messages and attract the attention of a diverse public. They use various platforms such as traditional media and digital media to reach their target audiences (Taras and Davis, 2022).

3. **Public Opinion and Perception**

Political communication plays an important role in shaping public opinion. Messages about politics can influence people's perceptions. In line with this, research has shown that people have a negative view of corruption, which is seen as a serious threat to economic and social progress (Umrah, 2022). Digital media enables audience personalization and fragmentation in the media. The influence of media on society and politicians is defined as the media process, and has a major impact on changing and shaping public opinion.

4. **Digital Communications and Campaigns**

Political campaigns today leverage digital platforms for engagement, fundraising, and mobilizing support. The rise of digital media and social media platforms has led to a rapid increase in the innovation and adoption of technology use in campaigns (Karolina, et.al., 2023). However, this digitalization of political communication also presents challenges and opportunities. Digital media has the potential to optimize the behavior of political candidates, organizations, and political parties in a dynamic political environment (Alhassan, 2018).

5. **Crisis Communication**

Political figures handle crises and controversies by using various communication strategies to manage public perceptions and maintain their credibility. They use collective narratives and symbolic resources to foster social cohesion during times of crisis (Yaling, 2023). They also rely on persuasion and emotional appeals, often using video content and evocative imagery to capture and maintain voters' attention.

## ***Gimmicks in Political Contestation***

Political gimmicks refer to strategies or tactics used in political communication to create an emotional connection with voters or to gain their support. It involves the use of attention-grabbing techniques or devices that may not necessarily provide substantive or meaningful information. Political gimmicks are now often used by figures who will advance in political contestation both abroad and in Indonesia. Political gimmicks are used with the aim of appealing to public emotions and sentiments, rather than focusing on substantive policy issues. Gimmicks can take various forms, such as catchy slogans, theatrical performances, or exaggerated promises. The use of gimmicks in politics is motivated by the desire to please voters and gain their support, especially during election campaigns (Scalmer, 2002).

Political tactics using gimmicks currently play a role in gaining support from the state (Soehl & Karim, 2021). These gimmicks are often used by political elites to pursue their respective political agendas and gain power. They are adept at using slogans and restructuring initiatives to mobilize support and achieve their goals (Gerstner, 2018). Social networking sites (SNS) have become a tool for politicians to build support and mobilize political movements. These sites are used to gain attention and recognition, and to promote candidates to the public who have the right to vote. The picture above shows that political gimmicks can be used to manipulate public opinion and advance a political agenda. Although when it is done it is often at the expense of the interests of society and the future challenges that the country must face.

## **Research Methods**

This research explores the meaning of gemoy as a political gimmick in Prabowo Subianto's 2024 Indonesian presidential election campaign using a constructivist paradigm. This paradigm helps researchers understand how individuals or groups give meaning to experiences or events related to the political strategy. To dig deeper, this research was conducted using a qualitative approach, particularly in understanding the meaning of gemoy in Prabowo Subianto's advertisements and political agenda.

This research uses a semiotic approach by Roland Barthes to answer the research questions. This method bases the analysis on the three main characters of Barthes' theory, which are denotation, connotation, and myth, to understand the meaning of signs. This semiotic approach is used because media is assumed to be communicated through a set of signs. This shows that semiotic analysis seeks to interpret the signs on the communicating object. The object of this research is a video campaign advertisement for presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto that represents the concept of gemoy politics. The concept of gemoy in the context of politics is displayed through political advertising videos that show Prabowo Subianto's body movements or swaying as part of his campaign strategy.

Data collection in this study was conducted by downloading political advertisement videos of presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto featuring body movements that represent gemoy politics from the YouTube platform. The videos were taken from the official account of the winning team of presidential and vice presidential candidate Prabowo-Gibran. After the data in the form of videos was obtained, observations and identification were made by taking screenshots (captures) of the videos, which were then sorted based on gestures that showed gemoy politics.

## Results and Discussion

The analysis in this section uses Roland Barthes' semiotic approach to understand how Prabowo Subianto's personalization is represented in the political visualization that carries the “gemoy” gimmick. This approach refers to the three types of signs developed by Barthes, namely denotation, connotation, and myth, which are used to explore the meaning in each visual element that appears in the advertising video. The video is analyzed through several carefully selected scenes to illustrate how each level of signs works simultaneously in constructing political messages. By focusing on visual elements such as facial expressions, body movements, and narrative context, this analysis reveals how the “gemoy” strategy becomes a communication tool aimed at shaping Prabowo's image as a more humanist, friendly, and close-to-the-people figure.

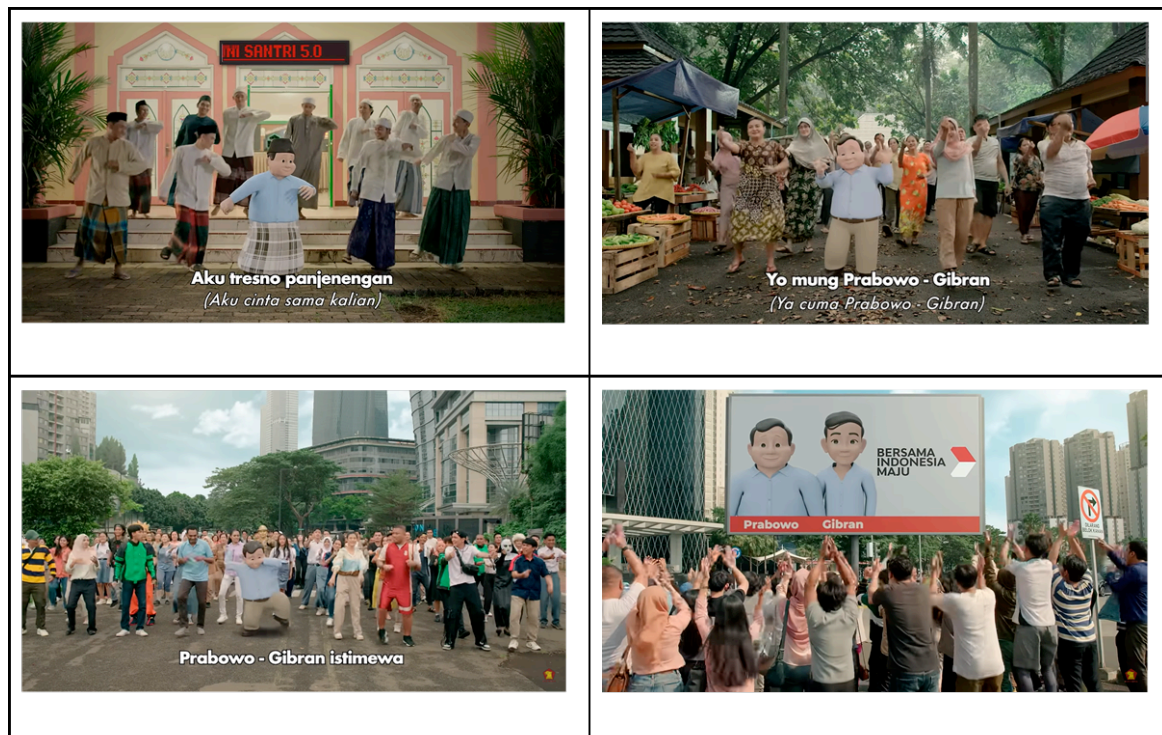


Figure 1: A Snippet of the Gemoy Advertising Video  
(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBkN9I9RUpA>)

### 1. Denotation

In Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, the denotation sign represents the literal or direct meaning contained in a sign before going into the deeper connotative meaning. In the context of a political advertisement that depicts Prabowo Subianto with a face that is artificially made younger or resembles a child, the denotative meaning is a visual representation that directly shows the figure of Prabowo in an unusual image. Visually, Prabowo's face is shown with a gemoy impression, a popular term in Indonesia that refers to something cute, sweet, and adorable, far from his previous image as a serious, formal, and authoritative leader.

At the denotation level, this image shows Prabowo with a more relaxed facial expression, with features that are intentionally modified to give a young and cute impression. Literally, this visual communicates Prabowo in a lighter and more playful form. The younger face removes the element of rigidity and assertiveness that is usually associated with him as a

senior political figure. Thus, the denotative meaning of this image is a direct presentation of Prabowo's figure that looks more approachable and humanistic, different from the formal image that is often attached to national leaders.

Through this denotative meaning, the visual political strategy seeks to convey the message that a leader does not always have to be portrayed as a serious and authoritative figure, but can also have a softer, friendlier and playful side. The image utilizes visual appeal to communicate the message without involving additional text or verbal narration, making it an effective political communication tool. As such, the denotative meaning in this analysis not only literally depicts Prabowo, but also paves the way to modify the public's perception of him at a very fundamental level.

## **2. Connotation**

Connotation marks provide deep meanings that go beyond literal representations, often shaped by the cultural, social and ideological context that surrounds the sign. In the image of Prabowo Subianto's *gemoy*, the connotation reflects a strategic effort to change public perception of him. Connotatively, this visual seeks to build Prabowo's image as a more humanistic, friendly, and close-to-the-people figure, moving away from the traditional stereotype of a serious, formal, and authoritative leader.

The connotations highlighted in these visuals suggest that Prabowo's soft and gregarious side can be used to appeal to certain segments of the electorate, especially the younger generation who are more familiar with non-formal approaches to political communication. Such representations also suggest a change in people's taste in leaders, where warmth and humanity are considered important attributes that complement assertiveness. This image, with its *gemoy* connotations, creates a narrative that a leader can be a serious figure in his role, but also capable of presenting a lighter, playful side.

Furthermore, the use of *gemoy* connotations is also a strategy that aligns Prabowo with popular culture trends, where easy and entertaining visual appeals more easily attract the attention of the public. This also reflects how today's political culture is increasingly affected by the dynamics of social media, where an informal approach is often a strategy to attract public sympathy. In this case, the *gemoy* connotation serves not only as an aesthetic endeavor, but also as an effective political communication tool to build new narratives and broaden the appeal of political figures to a more diverse audience.

## **3. Myth**

In the case of the Prabowo *gemoy* image, the myth being built is the idea that a great leader does not always have to look formal, serious, or authoritarian, but can also have a more relaxed, humorous, and humanist side. This image engages elements of popular culture, such as humor and cuteness, to create a new narrative that is more relevant to current social and political trends.

The myth generated from this image reflects an attempt to overhaul the public perception of Prabowo Subianto as a firm and disciplined leader figure, which was previously closely associated with his militaristic image. In the image, the *gemoy* element serves to remove the rigid impression and create the impression that Prabowo also has a softer and emotional side. This is a form of humanization in political communication, which aims to bridge the distance



between leaders and ordinary people. By displaying a gemoy image, the public is given the view that a national leader can be closer and does not always have to appear formal or stiff to maintain his authority.

This strategy creates a new narrative that humor or cuteness is not a weakness for a leader, but an additional attribute that can strengthen emotional connections with the public. The gemoy myth appeals especially to the younger generation who are more familiar with popular culture and tend to judge leaders from a more relaxed and humanistic side. By presenting Prabowo in an adorable visual form, this image utilizes elements of the myth to create emotional closeness and evoke sympathy from voters who may feel alienated from the traditional image of a strict and authoritarian leader.

Moreover, this myth serves to adapt Prabowo to the changing dynamics of modern politics, where visual communication is often more effective than formal rhetoric in reaching a wide audience. The narrative also asserts that a leader who can show the other side of himself, in this case, the gemoy side, is a leader who is more flexible and responsive to the emotional needs of the people. Thus, the gemoy myth does not only function as a visual strategy, but also as an ideological tool to create a more personalized relationship between Prabowo and his voters, building an image of a leader who is not only firm, but also pleasant, humanist, and relevant to the contemporary socio-political context.

## **Conclusion**

This study examines the meaning of "gemoy" as a political gimmick in Prabowo Subianto's presidential campaign, using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, including denotation, connotation, and myth analysis. The approach provides insight into how visual elements are employed to create a more humanistic image of a leader, relevant to Indonesia's current political culture. At the denotative level, the "gemoy" image depicts Prabowo with a younger, funnier, and more approachable appearance, contrasting with his traditional image as a serious, formal figure. This shift in representation aims to communicate that a leader can be both authoritative and approachable, appealing especially to younger voters.

The "gemoy" portrayal serves as a visual strategy to build emotional closeness with the public, reflecting a shift in political communication from rigid and formal to humanistic, inclusive, and aligned with modern societal preferences influenced by popular culture. By integrating humor and cuteness, this strategy demonstrates that a leader can be relatable without compromising credibility. This transformation also adapts to the dynamics of social media, where informal impressions often resonate more with the public. The study is limited to a single political advertisement, so future research should explore multiple videos and include audience analysis to provide a deeper understanding of how "gemoy politics" impacts public perception.

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