

## **Celebrity Politicians, Digital Campaigns, and Performances of Political Legitimacy in Indonesia’s 2019 Elections**

ANNISA R. BETA<sup>1</sup>

University of Melbourne, Australia

TABEREZ AHMED NEYAZI

National University of Singapore, Singapore

This article looks into celebrity politicians’ social media campaigns during Indonesia’s 2019 elections. It examines the visual political communication strategies of celebrity politicians, particularly how they use their fame and celebrity status to make claims as political candidates and how they transform their fame into political legitimacy through social media. In the process of establishing their political legitimacy, celebrity politicians deploy “affective power.” While conventional politicians may use similar strategies on social media, the celebrity politicians’ online performance styles are foundational in how the celebrities construct and maintain their often-precarious political legitimacy to the public. Three patterns emerged. First, celebrity politicians used images of them surrounded by people to indicate their celebrity status and political legitimacy. Second, they highlighted their work ethic and commitment to the public cause. Third, they used visual markers of allegiance to the presidential candidates to claim their political legitimacy. This article contributes to the study of celebrity politicians by extending our understanding of the performance and construction of political legitimacy by celebrity politicians on social media.

*Keywords: celebrity politicians, political legitimacy, social media, Indonesia*

“When a musician goes into politics, many would doubt him. They say politics is not for musicians. They say we just want power. They also doubt our knowledge of politics,” so Giring Ganesha (2019c) laments in the voice-over of a video he uploaded to his Instagram account (0:04). Giring, the former lead singer of one of the biggest pop bands in Indonesia, Nidji, can later be seen in the video walking toward his constituency and interacting with the people around him, giving a passionate speech about the importance of improving the quality of education for Indonesia’s next generation. Giring was a legislative candidate for

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Annisa R. Beta: annisa.beta@unimelb.edu.au

Taberez Ahmed Neyazi: taberez@nus.edu.sg

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Indonesia's People's Representative Council (DPR RI) in the 2019 Indonesia national elections, representing West Java (Dapil Jabar 1). He was among more than 60 celebrities who ran for legislative candidates at national and regional levels in 2019, 14 of whom were successful in their run for seats in DPR RI and Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD; Agustina, 2019; Pambudi, 2019; Pasha, 2019). Giring failed to secure a seat. Nevertheless, his claim about how the public often doubts a celebrity's political capacities and knowledge shines a light on the celebratization of politics (Ekman & Widholm, 2014; Street, 2004) and increasing mediatization of politics (Hjarvard, 2013), which have fundamentally shifted electoral politics, not only in Indonesia but also in many parts of the world.

The ascendancy of Donald Trump to the American presidency in 2016 proved the challenge celebrities pose to conventional political processes and analyses (Street, 2018). While celebrities like Trump could deploy "provocative pronouncements, attributed comments, distorted facts, and an off-the-cuff ('politically incorrect') speaking style" to win over voters and gain media attention (Wells et al., 2016, p. 670), in other parts of the world, like Indonesia, celebrity politicians, like Giring, often have to go the extra mile to demonstrate the legitimacy of their political ability. By deploying various strategies, celebrity politicians attempt to establish their political legitimacy. One of the important strategies adopted by celebrity politicians, according to Wood, Corbett, and Flinders (2016), is to play a performative role through which they appear more human by exposing their "imperfection and emotional vulnerability" (p. 588). While this is an influential presumption, our study suggests otherwise. This is because celebrity politicians, defined here as politicians who enter politics from entertainment or sports industries, first have to perform the most important role—that is, establishing their political legitimacy. In the process of establishing their political legitimacy, celebrity politicians deploy "affective power" instead of revealing their personal flaws, as argued by Wood and colleagues (2016), to appeal to potential voters (p. 594). This performative role is often played out in digital space. This article, therefore, examines how celebrity politicians deploy affective power to *construct* and *perform* their political legitimacy on Instagram.

Discussions on celebrity politicians have mainly focused on Western democracies, although there are more examples of celebrity involvement in politics in emerging Asian democracies, such as India and Indonesia (Marsh, Hart, & Tindall, 2010). Celebrities have been involved in Indonesia's electoral politics as early as 1971, performing in campaign rallies or endorsing politicians and political parties (Lindsay, 2005). As Indonesia's democracy revived post-1998, celebrities have transformed themselves into political authorities in public (Baulch, 2017). The number of celebrities who ran for legislative seats rose steadily in Indonesian legislative elections, from 23 in 2004 to more than 80 in 2014 (Ahmad, 2020; Darmawan, 2015). The increasing number of celebrities turning into and gaining important positions on the political stage go hand in hand with the democratization of postauthoritarian Indonesia and the direct electoral system implemented since 2004. The fame of the celebrity helps political parties gain popular votes and thus more parliamentary seats (Ahmad, 2020).

Examinations of celebrity participation in formal politics in non-Western and emerging democracies are urgent because the use of social media platforms in countries like Indonesia, India, the Philippines, and other emerging democracies is growing rapidly. On average, Indonesians spent about seven hours and 59 minutes online and three hours and 26 minutes on social media, more than one hour longer than the global average (six hours and 43 minutes online and two hours and 24 minutes on social media; Lee, 2020). The

increasing use of social media platforms in Asia has allowed the emergence of a “new public diplomacy,” within which members of the public, including celebrities, could make use of and benefit from the platforms to “mobilise public interest and advance their causes” (Cooper, Dobson, & Wheeler, 2017, p. 312). This article thus examines the ways in which celebrity politicians in an emerging democracy like Indonesia use their social media accounts and deploy affective power while constructing and performing their political legitimacy to, ultimately, win seats in the parliament. The article first presents the definitions of celebrity politicians, political legitimacy, and affective power that were employed for this research, followed by an outline of the methodology and discussion of the main findings and their implications.

### **Celebrity Politicians, Political Legitimacy, and Affective Power**

#### ***Conceptualizing Celebrity Politicians***

Celebrity politicians have been defined and categorized in different ways. For example, Street (2004) categorizes celebrity politicians into CP1 (celebrity *politician*) and CP2 (*celebrity politician*). CP1 refers to a traditional politician elected or running for a political position, whose background may or may not be from entertainment or sports, and who employs popular culture as part of their political strategies; CP2 refers to an entertainer who advocates social and political change, but does not run for office. Marsh and colleagues (2010) developed a typology of celebrity intersection with politics into five categories: (a) celebrity advocates who seek to set political agendas and influence policies; (b) celebrity activists/endorsers who use their financial capital and popularity to support politicians; (c) politician celebrities who are politicians whose relations with celebrities have shifted their popularity; (d) politicians who use other’s celebrity are those who get a benefit from the endorsement of popular public figures; and (e) celebrity politicians are “celebrities who go beyond one-issue politics and become office seekers” (Marsh et al., 2010, p. 324). Following Marsh and colleagues (2010), in this article, we focus on celebrity politicians—namely, those who previously worked in the entertainment or sports industries and use their popularity to get elected.

Celebrities’ involvement in politics and the deployment of celebrity culture within politics, thus, should not be seen as out of place. While the involvement of celebrities in elections and the celebritization of politicians are often claimed as markers of the failure of democratic political processes (West & Orman, 2003), it is not a new phenomenon, and it marks changes in political communication (Street, 2004). Street (2018) argues that being a celebrity helps celebrity politicians get media attention. They need to use their status and act it out to influence media coverage in a particular way. With the rise of social media, it has become much easier for celebrities to express themselves and reach out to their followers, although it may not always help them get coverage in the traditional media. Thus, we need to ask what type of celebrity role is being performed and constructed. This can be seen from media narratives, the stylistic conventions adopted in their political performance, and audience reactions. Media narratives include the “metaphors and analogies” used when journalists report celebrity politics; performance styles refer to the “form of political engagement” deployed by celebrity politicians to perform their politics to appear “authentic”; and audience reactions look into the recipients and their reactions to the political performances (Street, 2018, pp. 9–10). This article is interested mainly in what Street (2018) calls the

"performance styles" (pp. 9–10) of celebrity politicians in Indonesia, specifically how those performances are used to claim political legitimacy.

### ***Celebrity Politicians and Political Legitimacy***

Political legitimacy is a central concern for celebrity politicians. It refers to the public perception of one's capacity to govern or to be an authority (Klassen, 2011). A celebrity's cultural legitimacy is usually sourced from their fame and position in the cultural industry (films, music, television, and others). The more publicity they have, the more relevant they are in the cultural industry (Marshall, 2014). As they enter the political field, a celebrity politician's political legitimacy is usually sourced from their charisma and fame, making use of their popularity to be accepted as a legitimate leader and therefore earning them the capacity to create change (Partzsch, 2018). While conventional politicians may use similar strategies, we propose that the celebrity politicians have to actively convert their cultural legitimacy to construct and maintain their political legitimacy to the public.

One of the contributions of this article, then, lies in its extension of thinking about the performance and construction of political legitimacy by celebrity politicians on social media. Wood and colleagues's (2016) categorization of superstar celebrity politician (SCP) and everyday celebrity politician (ECP) informs this study. They argue for the importance of the idea of "normality" in celebrity politicians' constructions of their image, within which the idea of being "normal" or "just like us" is used to gain support from the public (Wood et al., 2016, p. 582). They distinguish SCP and ECP strategies based on media platforms, marketing techniques, and performative roles. Celebrity politicians employing ECP strategies are noted to be more successful today. ECP strategies include the use of postbroadcast media like social media platforms to help the celebrity politician appear nontraditional and interactive. The ECP marketing technique requires a sense of "spontaneity" that represents the celebrity politician's friendliness toward their constituent. ECP also requires celebrity politicians to perform their "authenticity," which helps the public feel closer because the politician seems imperfect, vulnerable, and "close," in contrast to conventional politician's unapproachability. In this article, we demonstrate how Indonesian celebrity politicians make use of the ECP model, while still benefiting from the celebrity-fans model. Yet we critique the Wood and colleagues (2016) assumption that celebrity politicians in their attempt to appear normal reveal their vulnerability, which may be true of celebrity politicians who do not have to prove their political credentials. However, celebrity politicians who do not possess political capital cannot afford to appear vulnerable, as this will reveal their fallibility and may not be helpful in attracting supporters. This is more so in case of Indonesia where conservative groups in general prefer a strong leader with established and traditional background (Mietzner, 2013).

Much like politicians, celebrities embody the public (Marshall, 2020). The rise of social media has changed the ways in which politicians and celebrities perform their roles as the embodied representatives of the public. The well-managed "representational cultural regime" is now challenged by the upsurge of "presentational media" like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others, generating a new "presentational cultural regime" (Marshall, 2014, p. xxxiv). This new cultural regime challenges and reorganizes not only the supremacy of conventional presentational media, like television and radio, but also reconfigures how politicians, celebrities, and common people organize their "meaning, significance, and power" in public (Marshall, 2014, p. xxxiv). Social media and online cultures have changed the "structure of political and



cultural legitimacy into quite a different shaping and expression of what can be categorized as fame, influence, and agency" (Marshall, 2020, p. 90). Additionally, it is only very recently that researchers have looked into how visual-centric social media like Instagram is used by politicians in their campaign (Filimonov, Russmann, & Svensson, 2016; Lalancette & Raynauld, 2019; Russmann, Svensson, & Larsson, 2019; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). The increasing use of social media around the world has transformed modes of political campaigning. Instagram's visual-centered interface, in particular, allows the emergence of new visual political communication strategies. It is therefore important to understand how celebrity politicians make use of social media to not only perform approachability but also make use of socially mediated public life (Baym & boyd, 2012) to claim political legitimacy. We propose that, to establish legitimacy, celebrity politicians make use of "affective power," as we explain below.

### ***Celebrity Politicians and Affective Power***

Although both politicians and celebrities embody the public, celebrities cannot make claims to political legitimacy as easily as politicians can. A well-known politician like Justin Trudeau, for instance, could use social media to boost his political legitimacy and credibility as a leader (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2019), but this may not be the same case for celebrity politicians as they have to *first* establish their legitimacy on the formal political stage before they can claim credibility to represent and lead their constituency. Despite this "challenge" of establishing political legitimacy, we propose that celebrity politicians' advantage lies in their initial status as celebrities, which gives them affective power to begin with. Following Marshall (2014), we define affective power as the emotional attachment that the public or the audience has to celebrities which, in turn, allows the celebrities to traverse private and public realms easily. Celebrities, in general, embody affective power: They are attractive and charismatic. A sense of connection between the public and the celebrity figure is always *already* there, even before they meet in person. However, affective power may also evoke different responses, and it is especially important for celebrity politicians to maintain "images" and "imaginaries" about themselves that are appealing to the voters. It is therefore important to focus on how celebrity politicians *act*. Street (2018) points to the importance of going beyond defining celebrity politicians through their status as celebrity and examining how they "*act out* their politics": their statements and how they articulate them are key (p. 9). Further, the celebrity may highlight their personal, intimate, and individual leadership qualities to gain legitimacy (Marshall, 2014, p. ii).

Social media platforms are, therefore, the ideal medium through which celebrity politicians can deploy their affective power. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, as Papacharissi (2015) argues, are the medium through which affective publics form. Affective power is most effective when it is networked digitally. The connections afforded by social media activate affective patterns based on feelings and emotions. Multiple studies have shown how such affective patterns that social media platforms afford have generated opportunities for individual users to not only heighten their popularity among their peers but also to gain lucrative commercial success by becoming microcelebrities on social media (Abidin, 2015, 2016; Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017; Marwick, 2015; Marwick & boyd, 2010). Celebrities who gained popularity through more "conventional" entertainment and sports industries have also benefited and even revived a sense of connection and closeness with their fans through social media (Marcus, 2015).

It must be noted that populist leaders have also used affective power to appeal to their supporters. In an important study, Moffitt (2016) argues that populism should be understood as a political style that could be used by a wide range of actors and celebrity is one of them. He thus emphasizes the “performative aspects of populism” (Moffitt, 2016, p. 38). Importantly, populist leaders deploy “emotively performed authenticity” to gain legitimacy among the supporters (Kissas, 2020, p. 272). In this performative spectacle, digital media has become an important channel through which populist leaders create, promote, and distribute their performance (Moffitt, 2016). One of the important strategies of populist leaders to gain attention in the mass media is to present themselves as celebrity. In this way, for Moffitt, celebritization of politics is one aspect of populism, while mediatization has further helped populist leaders to reach out to the larger audience. While acknowledging the wider context in which celebrity politics is used, the focus in this article is both the affective power and the performative aspects of celebrity politics.

Our analysis below shows how when celebrity politicians attempt to claim their political legitimacy, they would do mediated “performances” to deploy their affective power and prove their capacity to represent the public. These performances are done as a way to address a “gap” between their cultural legitimacy and their political legitimacy. Social media becomes a key medium to bridge that gap.

### **Methods**

For this article, we focus on the participation of celebrities in electoral politics and their online campaigns on Instagram during the 2019 Indonesian national election. The 2019 election was historical for Indonesian democracy because it was the first time simultaneous elections were held for the president, vice president, the 711 seats of the People’s Consultative Assembly (MPR), and 19,817 seats in provincial and municipal legislative bodies. It was also the second time candidates Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto rivaled each other in a presidential election. For this article, we started with a list of 10 celebrity politicians from both sides of the coalition supporting presidential candidates Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto (see Table 1). These politicians had gained fame before they ran for office for their work in the music, broadcasting, film, and sports industries. We chose celebrities who announced their candidacy for the 2019 elections and also those who were active on Instagram. We tracked their public Instagram pages, specifically the posts uploaded between January 17 and April 17, 2019, the official campaign dates of the elections. With the help of trained research assistants, we gathered 991 posts uploaded by the accounts, and we did an initial analysis by coding the posts into two key categories: political and nonpolitical. In total, there were 441 political posts. Political posts refer to images that obviously show (1) the celebrity taking part in political campaign activities such as visiting their constituencies or giving speeches promoting their candidacy, (2) the celebrity’s support for one of the presidential candidates, (3) the celebrity’s campaign materials such as the use of campaign videos, posters, or hashtags, and (4) the celebrity’s discussion and concern about certain political issues. Posts that could not be categorized as such were considered to be nonpolitical because they were usually uploaded in relation to the celebrity’s daily activities outside their campaigns, often depicting them with friends and family members. Posts that were categorized as political were then coded in greater detail by looking into the emotions they show, the events indicated in the post, the place identifiable from the background or their surroundings, the campaign attributes they use, their gestures, and whether or not there is any hashtag or mention in the post. The emotions coded include happiness, enthusiasm, and empathy, which we found to be present in most of the posts shared by celebrity politicians

in our sample. The gestures include the hand signs they show in photos to signify their alliance with the presidential candidates, signing one for Jokowi and two for Prabowo. Some also had their fist up, long considered as a signal of progressiveness and camaraderie (Kohn, 2016).

**Table 1. Initial List of Instagram Accounts of Celebrity Politicians Running for Legislative Seats in Indonesia's 2019 Elections.**

Name	Job	Side	Follower Count	Total Posts Uploaded	Total	
					Political Posts	Won the Election
Agustina H (Tina Toon)	Musician	Jokowi	429,900	114	98	Yes
Eko Hendro Purnomo (Eko Patrio)	Comedian/ Actor	Prabowo	1,756,068	102	31	Yes
Emilia Contessa	Musician	Prabowo	29,022	13	7	No
Giring Ganesha	Musician	Jokowi	304,695	64	23	No
Kirana Larasati	Actor	Jokowi	628,101	100	71	No
Moreno Soeprapto	Athlete	Prabowo	76,512	46	22	Yes
Mulan Jameela	Musician	Prabowo	1,500,000	86	19	Yes, contentious
Rachel Maryam	Actor	Prabowo	118,473	58	50	Yes
Sahrul Gunawan	Actor	Jokowi	645,063	252	60	No
Wanda Hamidah	Model/ Actor	Jokowi	149,122	156	60	No

*Note.*

1. Jobs: The jobs listed refer to their entertainment or sport industry careers before becoming politicians.
2. Side: The political coalition they were part of, between presidential candidates Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and Prabowo Subianto (Prabowo).
3. Follower count: Based on the information provided on their Instagram account page and Social Blade (<https://socialblade.com/>) on December 9, 2019.
4. Number of total posts uploaded: Counted January 17–April 17, 2019.
5. Political posts: Posts that visualize the celebrities taking part in political campaign activities, their support for the presidential candidates, and their political campaign materials, or discuss political issues.

After the results of the election were made official in August 2019, we continued our examination using visual discourse analysis (Rose, 2016). The steps of visual discourse analysis include (1) revisiting the initial coding and going through each post uploaded on the four accounts within the campaign period to identify key themes on their political posts; (2) examining how the celebrities did their campaign—in particular, how they presented themselves to their followers to be able to understand the intricacies and

ambiguities underlying celebrity culture in Indonesia; and (3) identifying the claims to truth the celebrities deployed to win the election. We focused on the posts uploaded by four celebrity politicians who successfully gained seats in the House of Representatives: Agustina H (Tina Toon), Moreno Soeprapto, Eko Hendro Purnomo (Eko Patrio), and Rachel Maryam.<sup>2</sup> We compared their posts with those uploaded by the six celebrity politicians on our list who were unsuccessful. Our goal was not to provide specific measurements on how the celebrities effectively planned their Instagram campaigns to win legislative positions. Rather, we were interested in unpacking their visual political communication strategies, specifically how they use their fame and celebrity status to make claims as political candidates and how they transformed their fame by using affective power into political legitimacy through social media.

### Findings

#### ***Fans or Voters? Popularity and Political Legitimacy***

We found that celebrity politicians used images of them surrounded by people from their constituency as a way to indicate their celebrity status and, at the same time, political legitimacy. It is important to note that these celebrities did not deny their popularity as a person from the entertainment or sports industry. Rather, they made use of their popularity in their original industries to lay the ground or their legitimacy as a political candidate. The interest of voters who surrounded them and took selfies with them was represented as evidence of their capacity to “blend” in and work with the people, therefore making their political bid legitimate. More importantly, there is an obvious attempt by the candidates to blend the category of fans and voters. We argue that the blending of the fans and voters’ category (fans/voters for short) is key to the way celebrity politicians visualize their political legitimacy. Below, we provide three examples from Agustina H., Giring Ganesha, and Moreno Soeprapto.

A first-time candidate like Agustina H. (Tina Toon) did not shy away from using her “branding” as a singer to interact with voters. She was a child singer who gained popularity after she released her single “Bolo-bolo” in 1999, using the name Tina Toon. She extensively recorded her campaigns on Instagram, using her singer name Tina Toon to attract voter interest. For instance, as seen in Figure 1, Agustina H. uploaded an image of herself with two women from her constituency. Her caption says that she agreed to visit an older woman who was a member of her constituency. The older woman, looking happy yet frail, can be seen in the image with Agustina H. who seems cheerful and more than happy to visit her. This also shows the affective dimension of her campaign strategy. By showing that she is accessible to ordinary fans, she brings what Wood and colleagues (2016) call “authenticity” in reaching out to voters. At the same time, through this post, she shows empathy toward ordinary citizens even though she is a popular celebrity. Moreover, Agustina H. uses her singer name, Tina Toon, on almost all the campaign materials uploaded on the platform. In other words, Agustina H. deployed people’s nostalgia of her popularity as a child singer to

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<sup>2</sup> We deferred from including musician Mulan Jameela from this list because her victory was contentious. She did not earn enough votes during the elections, yet she managed to become a member of the House of Representatives (DPR) through the intervention of her party, Gerindra, after the results were announced (Kompas, 2019).

gain votes, and this strategy has successfully earned her a seat on Jakarta's Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD).



**Figure 1. Agustina H. (Tina Toon) visiting a woman from her constituency. The caption reads, "[She said she] wants to be visited by Bolo-bolo," referring to a song Tina released in 1999 as a child singer (Toon, 2019c).**



**Figure 2.** In this video, Giring Ganesha, the ex-lead singer of the pop band Nidji, shared how a young woman from his constituency passed out after talking to him. The video ends with a text saying "sincerity generates love" that overlays part of the video in which Giring holds the young woman who passed out (Ganesha, 2019a).

Giring Ganesha, who was unsuccessful in his election bid, used the same strategy. Giring, who was the lead singer of the pop band Nidji, often depicted himself surrounded by his fans/voters. For instance, in a video uploaded to his Instagram account, Giring showed how he made a fan/voter pass out (see Figure 2). The video started with him hugging and talking with a young woman at a campaign event. The woman asked for Giring's prayer for her health; meanwhile, Giring inserted some of his campaign promises about ensuring the health of his constituency. The woman, who seemed to be a fan, then asked if she could sing a song by Giring. When Giring cut her off and teased her about the lyrics, the woman seemed to be overwhelmed and passed out.

We also found that both new and veteran celebrity politicians would upload images or videos capturing how their fans/voters wanted to take selfies with them; with this, they captured and saturated the constituency excitement for their political candidacy. For instance, Moreno Soeprapto, a former racing driver running for his second term in office, showed how "emak-emak" (a colloquial term used to categorize older women) were really excited and enthusiastic to give him support and take "wefies" (group selfies) with him in a post consisting of a video and series of photos and captioned with "Emak-emak Racing Team. Solid. Let's keep on fighting. Thank you for your aspiration and support" (Soeprapto, 2019d). There was no clear indication of what Moreno was discussing with the women. The post, rather, instills the idea that fan/voter excitement is key to what Moreno, as a political candidate, was "fighting" for.

This strategy demonstrates how celebrity politicians leverage their fame to garner support from their constituency. The request and reaction of the fans may not seem surprising to researchers who study celebrity and fan cultures. However, we contend that it marks the shift of the role of celebrities in the highly mediatized political landscape of newly democratized Indonesia. The fact that they upload the images and videos on Instagram to showcase how their fame leverages their political bid demonstrates the insertion of celebrity culture logic in considerations of political legitimacy. While conventional politicians found Instagram as an effective PR tool to visualize their political prowess as leaders to voters thereby creating a sense of accessibility and closeness with the people, these celebrity politicians claim closeness and accessibility as something that they already have. The public familiarity is then considered as a site within which trust and, thus, their political legitimacy could be claimed. While the election results differed for the three candidates, it is worth investigating how they use the category of fans with the category of voters as a potential site through which political legitimacy could be visually represented.

### ***Exemplary Work Ethic***

Another common theme in celebrity politicians' Instagram posts was their work ethic to illustrate their "seriousness" and "commitment" to public issues. The posts typically involved the celebrity politician photographed giving speeches, participating in important meetings, talking to their campaign team, and visiting the constituency (*blusukan*). The images or videos in the posts consistently showed celebrity politicians working with and surrounded by fans/voters and would focus on facial expressions that indicated seriousness or emphatic smiles to the people and their surroundings. Such posts depicted celebrity politicians explaining complex public issues to ordinary citizens in a manner that reveal their knowledge and grasp over the topic as well as commitment to the cause.

The Instagram posts included images and videos of the celebrities participating in campaign events with members of their constituency. Standing in front of the crowd and looking engaged seemed to be a way to perform one's political legitimacy. Almost all the celebrity politicians we followed had at least one post that demonstrated their closeness with the people. These posts were the assemblage of various photos showing affection and affinity of celebrities toward common people, as well as their charisma (see, for instance, Contessa, 2019; Ganesh, 2019b; Gunawan, 2019; Hamidah, 2019; Purnomo, 2019b; Sayidina, 2019c; Soeprapto, 2019e). Further, photos of the celebrity politicians' visits to the constituencies, which President Jokowi calls *blusukan*, were present in almost all the celebrity politicians' Instagram feeds during the campaign period as a way to demonstrate their familiarity and engagement with the people and their environment. As a strategic communicative technique, *blusukan* becomes a means of appearing connected to the people (*rakyat*) and to promote policies that may impact the lower class or poor citizens while also projecting the humility of the political candidate (Simorangkir & Pamungkas, 2017). Rachel Maryam, for instance, who was running for her third term in office, could be seen in multiple posts participating in not only formal events but also everyday activities in her constituency in Bandung (see Figure 3). Tina Toon uploaded images and videos of her discussing the issue of clean water, flooding, and lack of infrastructure in North Jakarta, her constituency (see Figures 4 and 5). This "man of the people" imagery provides celebrity politicians with not only vertical political legitimacy (affiliations with political party elites) but also a horizontal one—a show that the people could trust them because the celebrity politician was interested in their lives.



**Figure 3.** In this post, Rachel Maryam uploaded multiple photos showing her joining her team and voters in a meatball soup stall. The caption demonstrates her familiarity with the food stall, a show and tell of her "local" knowledge (Sayidina, 2019b).



**Figure 4.** Tina Toon is seen in a video visiting her constituency in North Jakarta and pointing to the lack of infrastructure support for clean water in the area (Toon, 2019a).





**Figure 5. Tina Toon walking on a flooded surface along with members of her constituency in North Jakarta (Toon, 2019b).**

#### ***Allegiance to Presidential Candidates for Political Legitimacy***

We found that celebrity politicians use visual markers of allegiance to the presidential candidates to perform and claim their political legitimacy. The 2019 elections combined both presidential and legislative elections, with the presidential election taking much public attention since it was the second time Joko Widodo (Jokowi) competed head to head with Prabowo Subianto (Prabowo). The use of the campaign hashtags and hand signs as well as selfies with and participation in the campaign events of the presidential candidates are prominent in the posts that we analyzed.

The hashtags of Jokowi and Prabowo were used on multiple occasions by all the celebrity politicians to mark their connection with the presidential candidates. In the posts uploaded by those on the Jokowi side, we found—among others—Tina Toon using #01Jokowi03PDIP, #01IndonesiaMaju (01 Indonesia Progresses), #01JokowiAmin, and #Kerjakerjakerja (Work, work, work). On Prabowo's side, Moreno Soeprapto and Rachel Maryam, for instance, used #adilmakmurbersamaprabowosandi (fair and prosperous with Prabowo and Sandi), #2019gantipresiden (2019 change the president), and #2019prabowosandi. The hashtags allow celebrity politicians to take part and position their posts within the hashtags used for the presidential campaign. The hashtags were not only tools to join others using the same hashtags; rather, they were part of a set of visual elements to mark the celebrity politician's posts. In addition to the hand signs and selfies, the hashtags became a set of campaign visual communication tools that marked the celebrity politicians' political legitimacy through association with the presidential candidates. Such visuals often carried the emotions of happiness and enthusiasm. This is explained below.



**Figure 6. Eko and representatives from National Mandate Party (Partai Amanat Nasional) with the No. 2 hand sign, signaling their allegiance with Presidential Candidate Prabowo (Purnomo, 2019a).**



**Figure 7. Moreno and Nur Asia Uno, wife of Vice Presidential Candidate Sandiaga Uno—Prabowo’s running mate, with the No. 2 hand sign (Soeprapto, 2019f).**



**Figure 8. Rachel with Harun, a local beverage seller, photographed with the No. 2 hand sign, showing their support for Prabowo (Sayidina, 2019a).**

The hand sign of Prabowo's campaign—a thumb and index finger that represent the number 2, or Prabowo's electoral number—has become part of the posts of celebrity politicians who supported him. In multiple images, Eko, Moreno, and Rachel enthusiastically put up the hand signs with voters from their constituency or fellow politicians. Of the 31 political posts Eko uploaded, nine show him putting up the hand sign; while Moreno uploaded seven posts showing him with the hand sign out of 22 political posts. Almost half of Rachel's political posts (24 of 50) show her doing the sign. Specific gestures like the hand sign signaled to their social media account followers their allegiance to a specific presidential candidate, which arguably is the easiest and most practical way to signify the celebrity politician's legitimacy (e.g., see Figures 6, 7, and 8). As Jürgen Streeck (2008) proposes, politicians' bodily behavior should be understood as a specific cultural practice in a particular political communicative ecology. The hand signs, Karen Strassler (2020) suggests, have long been a key part in the orchestration of political performances within Indonesian visual political cultures. Furthermore, "selfies" with the presidential or vice-presidential candidates were also a key part of the celebrity politicians' campaigns (see, for instance, Soeprapto, 2019g; Toon, 2019f, 2019g). Selfies could also be understood as a way to perform "togetherness" with the presidential candidates. "Togetherness" took different forms, such as a side-by-side image of the celebrity politicians' posters or leaflets with the presidential candidates (for instance, Purnomo, 2019e; Sayidina, 2019d; Soeprapto, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c), participation in campaign events to support the presidential candidates (for instance, Purnomo, 2019c, 2019f, 2019g; Soeprapto, 2019j; Toon, 2019e), and sharing promotional videos of or with the presidential candidates (for instance, Purnomo, 2019d; Sayidina, 2019e; Soeprapto, 2019h, 2019i; Toon, 2019d).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This article shows how celebrity politicians perform an act to construct their image to gain political legitimacy. The performative role enacted by celebrity politicians are often played out in the digital space, and Instagram has emerged as a central platform for celebrity politicians to reach out to their potential supporters. By focusing on Instagram posts of four candidates who won the 2019 Indonesian national elections, this article reveals the performative role played out by celebrity politicians on a visual-centric medium to gain political legitimacy. Three themes emerge. First, the mixing of the fan/voter categories demonstrates how celebrity politicians deployed their popularity (sourced from their jobs in the entertainment and sports industries) to visualize and make a bid for political legitimacy. Second, the performances of exemplary work ethic are captured to visualize their seriousness and commitment to the public cause. Last, their allegiance to presidential candidates was also important. Affiliation seemed to be understood as a currency that might help them gain political legitimacy.

Although the celebrity politicians we discuss in this article tried to appear more human and accessible to ordinary citizens, there were hardly any instances of them revealing their personal flaws and imperfections (Wood et al., 2016). This performative role needs to be contextualized and understood within the particular cultural context. In Indonesia, the perfection or the "superhuman" quality of the celebrities goes hand in hand with their increasingly important role in reimagining the public in relation to postauthoritarian politics. Baulch (2017) points out that the relationship between celebrities and their fans in the Indonesian public is not simply consumptive; rather, it is related to "moral and ethical endeavor" (p. 211). New media is especially effective in facilitating celebrities in their role as leaders in an emerging

political public built by a sense of cultural nationalism. Our analysis also shows how celebrity politicians made sure that their allegiance to the political parties and presidential candidates are captured on their social media posts. This activates a link between the qualities of the presidential candidates (Jokowi Widodo and Prabowo Subianto) and the celebrity politician. Celebrity politicians could make claims to political legitimacy by performing "perfection" on social media as a way to navigate the intersections of cultural legitimacy, nationalism, and politics in a newly democratized Indonesia. Establishing such a connection thus offers celebrity politicians a gateway to enter into political arena and entrench their authority to both challenge and work with the established politicians.

Further, the production of images and the following imaginaries on social media is not entirely representational, but affective (Hirdman, 2017). Celebrities benefit greatly from the affective patterns of emotions and feelings networked through social media (Papacharissi, 2015). The meaning transmitted through images needs to affectively resonate with viewers to entice and engage them with the message. Celebrity politicians deploy their affective power to be persuasive and attract a following. They make use of a repertoire of communicative techniques including emphasizing their work ethics, closeness to the presidential candidates, and the ordinary aspects of their extraordinary life to perform and gain political legitimacy. The use of emotional appeal by celebrity politicians, which often included hugging their fans, conversing and being surrounded with the crowd, or taking a selfie with ordinary people, was the most noticeable dimension in their performance. This demonstrates how affective relationship with voters is created by celebrity politicians to mobilize them to achieve their political goal.

Given the fact that celebrity politicians hail from cultural industries and lack political capital, they need to perform to show that they are serious in serving the public. Such performance takes the form of demonstrating their understanding of public issues and economic and political affairs. Through their performance, celebrity politicians try to create a public perception by highlighting their self-sacrifice by giving up a comfortable life in the larger public interest. They want to be seen with the crowd, an indication of their ordinary life and the ability to connect with ordinary people. Further, they also emphasize their capacity to discuss with the people and to develop initiatives to improve public services. As such, they could perform their work ethics as future public representatives and their seriousness as politicians.

The deployment of affective power by celebrity politicians to establish their political legitimacy has been greatly facilitated by digital media. The performative politics no longer just depends upon rhetoric or the words that are conveyed and delivered, but has expanded to include gestures, self-presentation, and even how one dresses (Moffitt, 2016). Taking selfies with supporters is an important aspect of digital media affordances, which have been creatively used by both celebrity and traditional politicians. While the performative dimensions are important for populist leaders as well, for celebrity politicians the performative elements become an extension of their previous role to act out in front of the people. The increased mediatization of politics has certainly helped the celebrity politicians to perform and present themselves in a stylized way to the public. Our study showed that in the mediatized performance, celebrity politicians have been focusing more on "images, self-presentation, body language, design and 'staging,'" which have also been supported in the previous studies (Moffitt, 2016, p. 40). While the conventional politicians may deploy similar strategies to mobilize voters, they are exempted from the burden of establishing their political

legitimacy. In this way, celebrity politicians' performance needs to be doubly improvised to not only establish their political legitimacy but also to appeal to the voters.

While our study makes an important contribution to understand how visual communication has been used in political campaigns, it has certain limitations. Our study is based on the analysis of Instagram posts of only a selected number of celebrity politicians. Future studies may benefit by analyzing the use of other social media platforms such as Facebook. Moreover, as social media uses grow in Indonesia and other developing countries, it would be useful to examine how celebrity politicians integrate different platforms in their strategy to mobilize support. Furthermore, we have not compared the posts of visual communication strategies of celebrity politicians with established politicians. With the global rise of populism, which has put the performative dimension of mobilization at the center stage and requires active use of visual communication strategies, it would be helpful to compare the mobilization strategies of celebrity politicians with that of established politicians to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their characteristics. Nevertheless, our study makes an important contribution in advancing our understanding of how the performative dimensions in celebrity politicians' campaign strategies have helped them command affective power and establish their political legitimacy.

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