

Women's Political Branding in the Local Arena: The Political Communication Strategy of Indah Damayanti Putri

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Abstract: This study aims to analyse the political communication strategy employed by Indah Damayanti Putri (IDP) in building her political branding during the 2020 Regional Head Election (Pilkada) in Bima Regency. Using a descriptive qualitative approach and grounded in Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory as well as Jones and Pittman's concept of impression management, this study explores how IDP constructs her image as a strong, empathetic, and grounded female leader. Data were collected through unstructured interviews with IDP, her campaign team, volunteers, and voters, and analysed thematically. The findings indicate that IDP applied four main tactics in her image-building strategy, namely ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, and supplication. These strategies were realised through intensive interpersonal communication, the use of social media, and the consistent performance of social roles in public. This research concludes that IDP's success was not only determined by structural political support but also by her ability to build emotional closeness and cultural relevance with the community. These findings contribute to gender-based political communication studies and affirm the importance of contextual approaches in developing female political branding in the local political arena.

Keywords: *political branding; women in politics; dramaturgy; regional election*

INTRODUCTION

In the world of modern politics, building an image is no longer merely a complement but has become an important part of political communication strategy (Kusuma, 2018; Rijalussaumi & Irma, 2025). Amid a society that is increasingly visual and digital, politicians are not only required to have vision and work programmes but also to be able to form a strong, consistent, and relevant public impression (Erick & Masyitah, 2020; Hattu & Telussa, 2024; Widjayanto & Naim, 2022). olitical branding emerges as one approach that meets these needs

– it becomes a bridge between the personality of the politician and the expectations and perceptions of the electorate. In Indonesia, political branding has developed in line with the widespread use of social media and the increasing need for an image that is not only attractive but also convincing (Rudini et al., 2025; Sanjaya & Budiarsa, 2024).

Various studies have shown how national political actors manage their branding with strategic and adaptive approaches. For example, Airlangga Hartarto, in the study by Sahid et al. (2022), built his image as a religious technocrat, with a communication approach targeting traditional voters, religious figures, and strengthening the internal party base. On the other hand, Ganjar Pranowo appeared as a leader who is close to grassroots communities, religious, and culturally literate. Through the social media platform Twitter, as described in the study by Hadjirah & Suranto (2023), he presented himself as a friendly, intelligent, and enthusiastic figure, especially to the younger generation.

The branding phenomenon is also increasingly strong in political campaigns that utilise visuals and symbols. Fitri et al. (2024) analysed how the Prabowo–Gibran pair used TikTok to build a relaxed, “*gemoy*” (cute), and religious impression, targeting young voters with a light and approachable communication style. Female figures in politics have also begun to appear as important subjects in political branding studies, as seen in the research by Gendis & Ahmad (2023) on Puan Maharani’s Instagram account. Puan used various visual elements, such as colour, gesture, and image composition, to form the impression of a smart, strong, and elegant politician. Meanwhile, Anies Baswedan, as studied by Kurniasih & Setianti (2024), portrayed himself as an authentic and communicative leader, with a relaxed yet captivating rhetorical style, through consistent and contextual posts on Instagram.

However, one point of concern is that most of these studies focus on male politicians or women at the national level. There have been few studies highlighting how a female politician in the regions, especially in non-metropolitan areas such as Bima, builds her political branding in a political arena that is still heavily influenced by patriarchal values, local culture, and kinship politics. Yet, the local political space holds its own complexity, both in terms of communication strategy and the social challenges faced by women in their efforts to build a strong public image.

This study aims to fill that gap. By taking the case study of Indah Damayanti Putri (IDP), the only woman who has successfully led Bima Regency for two terms, this paper seeks to understand how IDP shaped her political branding through a measured communication strategy. Not only relying on digital communication through social media, IDP is also active in building warm interpersonal relationships with the public. The dramaturgical theory of Erving Goffman and the concept of impression management by Jones and Pittman are used to analyse how IDP arranged her roles and political stage in order to be accepted and elected by the public. Tactics such as ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, and supplication coloured her communication style during the 2020 regional election campaign.

The novelty of this study lies not only in its focus on a female figure in local politics but also in the selection of a theoretical perspective that positions political communication as a social performance full of strategy. By dissecting how impressions are formed, maintained, and communicated by IDP, this study offers a new perspective on political branding, especially for female politicians at the local level who often have to work twice as hard to gain public legitimacy.

This study aims to explore the political communication strategy of Indah Damayanti Putri in building her political branding during the 2020 regional election in Bima Regency. Furthermore, this research seeks to understand the dynamics of using impression management in shaping the political image of women and how these strategies operate within a unique socio-cultural context such as Bima.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach that aims to understand in depth the political communication strategies used by Indah Damayanti Putri (IDP) in building her political branding during the 2020 Regional Head Election in Bima Regency. This approach was chosen because it suits the research objective, which is to explore phenomena contextually and interpretively, and to reveal the meaning behind the political communication actions of a female figure within a local context.

Methodologically, this study is based on a constructivist paradigm, which views social reality as the result of subjective constructions shaped by social interaction, symbols, and meanings embedded in social actions. Therefore, the researcher does not act merely as a passive observer but as the main instrument in exploring and interpreting data reflectively and critically.

Data in this study were collected through three main techniques: observation, documentation, and unstructured interviews. Observation was conducted on IDP's campaign activities both directly and through video documentation, particularly those published on social media, especially on IDP's official Facebook account. Documentation in the form of campaign video uploads, digital posters, and narratives delivered through social media served as primary sources for analysing how IDP formed impressions and self-image to the public. Additionally, unstructured interviews were conducted with IDP as the key informant, as well as with several supporting team members and citizens as additional informants to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of public perceptions and communication strategies employed.

The informants in this study were selected purposively based on their involvement, social position, and knowledge of the campaign and political communication processes of Indah Damayanti Putri (IDP) during the 2020 Bima Regional Head Election. The primary informant was IDP herself, as the central figure of this research. In addition, supplementary informants were chosen based on more specific criteria, namely: (1) holding a strategic position within the campaign structure (such as team leader or volunteer coordinator); (2) representing key voter groups such as women and youth; and (3) possessing reflective capacity to critically assess IDP's political communication. For example, a community leader was selected due to his role as both a public opinion observer and a mediator of grassroots aspirations, while female and youth voters were chosen due to their active engagement with the campaign, either in-person or via social media, and their ability to articulate informed perspectives. To ensure that their viewpoints were sufficiently representative, triangulation was carried out by comparing data across various sources, social backgrounds, and categories, and through member checking with key informants to validate the accuracy of the interpretations.

Table 1. List of Informants

No	Name of Informant	Status/Role	Remarks
1	Indah Damayanti Putri, S.E.	Regent of Bima; Main Informant	Explains personal strategy and political communication approach used during the campaign, both online and offline.
2	M. Syarifuddin, S.Pd.	Head of IDP–Dahlan Campaign Team	Provides information on campaign strategy, image formation, and the role of social media in delivering political messages.
3	Hj. Nurhayati, M.Si.	Member of Women's Volunteer Team	Explains the role of women's communities in the campaign and IDP's emotional approach to female voters and marginal groups.
4	A. Rahman, S.IP.	Community Leader and Local Political Observer	Provides public and external perspectives on IDP's political image and gender challenges in local politics.
5	Nuraini	Resident of Woha Subdistrict; Female Voter	Expresses responses to IDP's campaign messages both directly and through social media.
6	Ridwan	Youth from Bolo; Young Voter	Shares the youth perspective on IDP's political communication style on social media, especially Facebook.

(Source: Data, 2024)

The data analysis technique used in this study was thematic analysis, which involved a systematic process of coding and categorising data to identify patterns related to impression management tactics, as formulated by Jones and Pittman (1982). The analysis began with open coding of interview transcripts, field notes, and documentation, during which relevant phrases and statements were highlighted. These codes were then grouped into preliminary categories that reflected recurring themes. In the next stage, axial coding was applied to relate these categories to the five predefined impression management tactics ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, supplication, and intimidation. Interview quotations were selected based on their clarity, relevance, and frequency of recurrence across different informants, and then mapped to each tactic by identifying the corresponding indicators (e.g. expressions of humility for supplication or highlighting past achievements for self-promotion). This step-by-step approach ensured both transparency and analytical rigour in interpreting how IDP's political communication strategy aligned with each tactic.

Data validity in this study was reinforced through source and technique triangulation by comparing the results of observation, documentation, and interviews. Moreover, the researcher applied member checking, i.e., confirming findings with informants to ensure accuracy of interpretation. The entire research process was conducted with full respect for research ethics, including maintaining the confidentiality of additional informants' identities and obtaining consent before recording or using personal data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study found that the political communication strategy carried out by Indah Damayanti Putri (IDP) during the 2020 Regional Head Election in Bima Regency was closely related to impression management tactics in shaping her political branding. From the results of observations, interviews, and documentation of social media uploads, IDP consistently applied four of the five main tactics proposed by Jones and Pittman, namely ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, and supplication. The intimidation tactic was not significantly evident in IDP's political communication during the 2020 Bima regional election campaign. This absence reflects a deliberate strategic choice aligned with her political branding as a female leader who prioritised emotional closeness, humility, and moral integrity over dominance or coercion. In the traditional and religious sociopolitical context of Bima, where leadership by women is still subject to gendered expectations, employing intimidation would likely have conflicted with the values she sought to embody namely, compassion, community engagement, and maternal care. Her decision to emphasise ingratiation, supplication, and self-promotion instead suggests a conscious rejection of aggressive tactics that might have undermined her appeal, particularly among conservative and family-oriented voter bases.

Table 2. Tabulation of Interview Results

No	Name of Informant	Statement (Interview Quotation)	Coding / Category
1	Indah Damayanti Putri, S.E.	"I ran again not merely for power, but because I want to fulfil the people's mandate."	Exemplification
2	Indah Damayanti Putri, S.E.	"I am nobody without the support of the people, especially the mothers and volunteers in the villages."	Supplication
3	M. Syarifuddin, S.Pd.	"She often emphasised the importance of smiling and greeting the residents, as that is what makes the people feel close."	Ingratiation
4	Hj. Nurhayati, M.Si.	"Mrs IDP always expressed gratitude to the volunteers, even mentioning their names on stage."	Ingratiation
5	A. Rahman, S.IP.	"One of IDP's strengths is that she always conveys her achievements, but without seeming arrogant."	Self-Promotion
6	Nuraini	"I like it when she expressed condolences to the families of grieving residents, it was very touching."	Ingratiation / Public Empathy
7	Ridwan	"Her posts often reminded people to do good and help each other, not just typical political promises."	Exemplification

(Source: Data, 2024)

Based on data obtained through interviews with six informants consisting of Indah Damayanti Putri as the main informant, the campaign team, female volunteers, community leaders, as well as two active voters from among women and youth, it was found that IDP's political communication strategy during the 2020 regional election in Bima Regency led to the formation of a strong and structured political branding. This approach contrasts with the *coat-*

tail effect strategy commonly used at the national level, as seen in the case of Kaesang Pangarep, who was appointed Chairman of the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI) ahead of the 2024 election. Despite his high popularity, Kaesang's involvement failed to push PSI past the parliamentary threshold, largely due to the lack of a coherent branding strategy and weak ideological grounding (Siregar & Rahmawati, 2024). This finding highlights that effective political branding, as demonstrated by IDP, relies more on consistent communication, social proximity, and cultural contextual awareness than on mere public popularity. Through thematic analysis of the informants' statements, it was found that IDP consistently applied four of the five impression management tactics as formulated by Jones and Pittman (1982), namely:

Ingratiation: Building Closeness and a Friendly Impression

The ingratiation strategy was the most dominant approach applied by Indah Damayanti Putri (IDP) in building her political branding during the 2020 Bima regional election campaign. She actively created the impression of being a friendly, warm figure, closely integrated with the community. This was evident from IDP's habit of expressing condolences, congratulating newlyweds, greeting children during impromptu visits, and openly thanking volunteers and supporting communities. Hj. Nurhayati, a member of the female volunteer team, confirmed that IDP often mentioned volunteers' names on stage as a direct form of appreciation for their contributions. This attitude strengthened the impression that IDP was not merely an administrative leader, but also part of a community respected and honoured by her people. This aligns with Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory, where the front-stage performance is key to influencing audience perceptions, especially in localised political settings (Zhang, 2025).

This approach was not only stylistic but strategic. IDP employed ingratiation to bridge social distance and counter potential scepticism surrounding her candidacy as a woman in a male-dominated political culture. By highlighting warmth, empathy, and social closeness, she constructed a political persona that resonated with local values of kinship and community solidarity. These actions served to reframe her gender not as a limitation, but as a moral advantage. Moreover, her recurring use of culturally resonant language, emotionally expressive gestures, and community-based interactions both in physical campaign events and digital spaces illustrates how ingratiation was consciously orchestrated to foster trust, strengthen identification, and cultivate a sense of personal connection with the electorate.

Self-Promotion: Displaying Capacity and Experience

IDP also highlighted her competence through a self-promotion strategy that was subtle yet consistent. In various campaign activities, she conveyed her achievements during her tenure as Regent of Bima, such as rural infrastructure development, free healthcare services, and programmes for women's empowerment and MSMEs. M. Syarifuddin, as head of the campaign team, stated that these achievements were packaged in a sustainability narrative, not merely as personal accomplishments. Community figures such as A. Rahman assessed that IDP was able to communicate her successes without seeming boastful. This strategy built the public perception that IDP possessed credible leadership capacity and was worthy of re-election. This reflects the argument by Lalancette & Raynauld (2019) that political branding requires a balance between projecting leadership capacity and maintaining authenticity.

Exemplification: Highlighting Values and Exemplary Character

The exemplification strategy was visible in IDP's efforts to frame herself as a moral, dedicated, and spiritual leader. In her campaign speeches, she often encouraged the public to

help one another, uphold social solidarity, and place collective interest above personal interest. In her campaign narrative, IDP emphasised that her candidacy was not driven by ambition for power, but rather by a desire to complete her moral responsibility to the people. Ridwan, a young voter from Bolo who actively followed IDP's Facebook content, considered the messages she conveyed as containing sincere and consistent ethical values, not merely empty political promises. This strategy strengthened the image of IDP as a role model in local leadership. This strategy resonates with Van Zoonen's (2005) concept of "value-laden performances", in which women in politics are often expected to embody both care and competence (Mustaqim, 2019).

Supplication: Demonstrating Humility

In addition to showing leadership strength, IDP also presented humility as part of her political image. She often stated that she was just an ordinary woman able to carry out her duties thanks to the trust and support of the community. On various occasions, including on social media, IDP mentioned that her achievements were the result of collective work, not solely personal success. Nuraini, a resident of Woha District, noted that IDP's humble approach made people feel closer and more trusting. This supplication strategy was effective in creating an inclusive and grounded leadership impression, especially amid a culture that values simplicity and sincerity. In a cultural context that values modesty and sincerity, this approach proved effective in reinforcing IDP's image as an inclusive and grounded leader (Zhou, 2022).

Political communication does not merely convey policy or programme messages, but is also laden with symbolism, values, and representations of social identities, including gender identity. Women in politics often face a dual challenge: proving their capability as leaders while simultaneously navigating entrenched social stereotypes linked to traditional gender roles. As a result, women's political communication strategies tend to be more complex, requiring them to accommodate distinctive social and cultural expectations (Hayatul Ikhsan, 2023; Latuheru & Fransisca, 2023). In local contexts such as Bima Regency where cultural and kinship values continue to exert strong influence the ability of a female politician to manage public communication becomes a critical determinant of her political legitimacy and success.

To better understand how political actors, particularly women, perform their roles in the public eye, this study employs Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory (1959), which conceptualises social interaction as a form of theatrical performance (Absari, 2025). In this framework, individuals politicians included are seen as actors performing roles in front of an audience (voters) with the objective of shaping perception. The "front stage" represents the public setting where actors present themselves in ways that conform to societal expectations, while the "back stage" refers to spaces where they can act without the burden of public scrutiny. In the context of political campaigns, front-stage activities include public speeches, social media engagement, and community visits, whereas backstage processes encompass the internal strategies and decision-making of the campaign team.

This dramaturgical framework is further operationalised through the concept of impression management, as articulated by Jones and Pittman (1982) (Prayogo et al., 2024; Saptanti, 2020). They propose five key tactics for shaping social perception: ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, supplication, and intimidation. Each of these tactics represents a deliberate effort by individuals to influence how they are perceived by others. Ingratiation

involves cultivating a favourable impression by displaying warmth, empathy, or offering compliments. Self-promotion centres on highlighting one's competencies and achievements to project an image of superiority. Exemplification portrays the actor as moral and devoted, while supplication involves revealing personal vulnerabilities to garner empathy and support. Intimidation, conversely, seeks to project strength and assertiveness.

In this study, four of the five tactics ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, and supplication were consistently evident in the political communication strategies of Indah Damayanti Putri during her regional election campaign in Bima Regency. She frequently displayed a warm smile, conveyed condolences or congratulations to constituents, and shared personal motivations for her public service manifestations of the ingratiation tactic. She also emphasised her achievements as a regional leader and demonstrated commitment to public welfare, exemplifying both self-promotion and exemplification. Supplication was observed in her ability to show humility and personal sacrifice in the face of political responsibilities, further strengthening emotional resonance with the public. These strategies illustrate how IDP consciously shaped a positive and relatable public persona through deliberate and structured impression management.

The dramaturgical theory developed by Erving Goffman (1959), as cited in (Amelia, 2024; Jafien & Rustanta, 2025), thus serves as a central analytical lens in this study. It provides a nuanced understanding of how political figures construct, maintain, and perform their identities strategically in public life. Every interaction whether through speeches, public appearances, or interpersonal engagements functions as part of a broader performance aimed at shaping public perception.

In the context of local politics, image-building strategies are not merely based on political rationality or programmatic rhetoric. They are also heavily influenced by cultural values, social norms, and local power relations (Fedro Syafiola & Ziqri, 2025; Harahap et al., 2024). These findings show that IDP's success in building political branding does not solely rely on institutional power or structural support from political parties, but also on her ability to design a communication strategy that aligns with local culture, patterns of social relations, and the expectations of society. IDP was able to construct an image of herself that is authentic, relevant, and acceptable within the cultural framework of Bima, which remains patriarchal, religious, and highly values social solidarity.

Becoming a female regional leader in an area such as Bima is not an easy task. The dominance of masculinity in the political sphere remains strong, and leadership spaces are still largely associated with male authority. In this patriarchal context, IDP's success in leading for two terms is not only an electoral achievement but also a symbolic breakthrough. Her communication strategy responded directly to gender-based challenges by emphasising warmth, humility, and moral credibility traits culturally accepted and even expected of women while simultaneously demonstrating competence and decisiveness through her public appearances and messaging. Through consistent use of ingratiation and supplication, she positioned herself as both nurturing and capable, which allowed her to overcome resistance to female leadership and build broad-based support. In doing so, she redefined the narrative of local leadership and reinforced the legitimacy of women's representation in regional politics.

Compared to the communication strategies of national political figures such as Ganjar Pranowo, Airlangga Hartarto, Prabowo-Gibran, or Puan Maharani, IDP's approach

demonstrates a fundamentally different mode of political branding shaped by the local sociocultural context. While national figures rely heavily on mass and digital media to construct broad and symbolic narratives such as Ganjar's youth-oriented progressivism via Twitter, Prabowo-Gibran's populist appeal through TikTok, Airlangga's technocratic-religious image via elite party channels, or Puan's curated visual authority on Instagram IDP's branding was rooted in interpersonal communication and cultural intimacy. Her campaign focused on face-to-face interaction, participation in local religious and traditional events, and emotionally resonant messaging grounded in shared values. This highlights how local-level political branding prioritises trust-building through physical presence and cultural embeddedness, rather than mass-mediated projection, making it highly adaptive to communal expectations and regional identity.

IDP, on the other hand, relied more on direct communication, affective gestures, and local symbols that resonated strongly with the people of Bima. She did not impose grand narratives that were modern or elitist, but framed her campaign using everyday language, direct visits, and close social relationships. Her political communication was not built through high-tech visual production, but through strong symbolic simplicity: smiles, condolences, warm greetings, and direct involvement in community life.

From a dramaturgical perspective, IDP played various complementary social roles: as a mother, she showed care and protection; as a friend, she greeted and listened to the people; as a leader, she displayed credibility and capability; and as a public servant, she demonstrated humility and dedication. Small gestures such as personally thanking people, mentioning volunteers' names on stage, or making time to attend residents' weddings became "social performances" that gradually but consistently shaped her political identity. It is in this realm that impression management becomes a key tool in building a political image that is not only accepted but also loved.

Studies by Street (2011) and Van Zoonen (2005) support this analysis by arguing that political performance is not only about content delivery but also about the emotional and symbolic engagement with the public (Mustaqim, 2019). Van Zoonen, in particular, highlights how female politicians often need to manage competing expectations of being both authoritative and approachable balancing professional competence with traditionally feminine traits to gain public trust. Similarly, Belabdi (2017) explore how localised strategies and affective communication have become central to successful political branding, especially in regional contexts where relational proximity is more valued than formal institutional imagery.

Therefore, IDP's success can be understood as a result of her ability to read the socio-cultural landscape of her constituency and develop a political communication strategy that integrates social performance, local values, and personal symbolism. This research affirms that in the realm of local politics, political success is not solely dependent on formal power structures, but also on the capacity to enact authentic, contextually relevant, and emotionally resonant social roles that align with the electorate's expectations.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the success of Indah Damayanti Putri (IDP) in winning the 2020 Regional Head Election in Bima Regency was not merely due to institutional support or

party strength, but rather due to her ability to build effective political branding through contextual and grounded communication strategies. Using Goffman's dramaturgical theory and Jones and Pittman's concept of impression management as the theoretical framework, this research found that IDP consistently applied four main tactics ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, and supplication to shape her image as a female leader who is strong yet humble, close to the people, and culturally relevant. This strategy was implemented through a combination of direct and digital communication, as well as through social roles performed authentically in daily interactions with the people of Bima.

From an academic perspective, these findings provide a significant contribution to the study of political communication and gender representation, particularly within the Indonesian local context that is rich in cultural and patriarchal values. This study expands the application of performative theories in understanding the political image-building strategies of women outside the national power centre. It also opens the way for broader comparative studies, both across regions and between different genders of candidates, to examine how political image construction is shaped within various social dynamics. For future research, it is recommended to integrate quantitative approaches or systematic digital media analysis to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the influence and effectiveness of political communication strategies, especially in shaping voter perceptions of female politicians in the digital era.

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