

# Gimmicks and Habitus: An Analysis of Socio-Cultural Reproduction in the 2024 Indonesian Vice-Presidential Debate

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**Abstract.** The 2024 Indonesian vice-presidential debate appears to feature more gimmicks than substantive discussions of the candidates' visions and missions. This study aims to examine how the vice-presidential candidates reproduce socio-cultural values through their performances during the debate. Using Bourdieu's theoretical framework of habitus (field, arena, and strategy), this research seeks to explore how the candidates construct the reproduction of socio-cultural values through their habitual practices. The study employs a qualitative method with text analysis as the primary data collection technique. The data analyzed consists of textual transcriptions from the fourth vice-presidential debate, broadcast on the official YouTube channel of the General Elections Commission (KPU) of the Republic of Indonesia, and used voyant.tools to determine dominant words from the comments. The findings indicate that the candidates' habitus determines the type of socio-cultural reproduction displayed during the debate. The result of this research identified three key patterns: *First*, Attacking-question gimmicks reinforced dominance and control over debate narratives. *Second*, Emotional and satirical gimmicks provoked opponents and audiences while diverting attention from substantive content. *Third*, Youth-oriented gimmicks leveraged humor and relatability to attract younger voters. These performances reproduced a political reality that emphasized style over substance, signaling a shift toward performative politics in which image and symbolism dominate over ideas (knowledge), ethics, wisdom, and maturity in public speaking. This research is also relevant for researchers, political strategists, and media analysts.

**Keywords:** Gimmick, Habitus, Indonesia, Socio-cultural Reproduction, Vice-presidential Debate

## 1 Introduction

The dynamics of contemporary Indonesian political communication have become a topic of discussion and debate, offering insights, opinions, and commentary across social media. The vice-presidential debate is not merely an arena for exchanging ideas, but also a performative stage rich in symbols and image strategies [1], [2]. In political campaign debates, candidates often use unique strategies to highlight their positive self-representation as a contrast to negative portrayals. Such performances aim to convince audiences that they are the most suitable candidates for the position and can contribute positively to society [3], [4]. Thus, the candidates' performance, including the substance and content of their arguments, became the focus of the 2024 fourth vice-presidential debate.

The fourth vice-presidential debate in the 2024 Indonesian General Election revealed an interesting phenomenon: the use of political gimmicks to emotionally and symbolically influence public perception. These gimmicks took various forms, including gestures, intonation, word choices, and visual attributes that symbolized closeness to the people or reinforced particular identities. This phenomenon demonstrates that electoral politics operates not only in the domain of ideas and programs but also through the reproduction of candidates' habitus—patterns of thought, communication styles, and social dispositions that are historically experienced and their social environments constructed yet continuously reshaped for public representation [5], [6]. This condition requires attention to knowledge, environment, and the socio-cultural community in which the candidate grows and interacts, because habitus refers to the mental and social structures formed by individuals' historical experiences.

Various previous studies have explained the tactics employed in the political realm. For example, the practice of political gimmicks on social media in the 2024 Indonesian Presidential election contestation is framed as a form of front-stage manipulation involving various political elements, including identity politics, political blunders, work programs, key actors, public gimmicks, and campaign maneuvers from the three presidential and vice-presidential candidate pairs [7], [8]. The discussion of gimmicks in political includes the use of Bourdieu's

habitus to explain the use of religious symbols in political identities that are removed from the religious backgrounds of political actors [9]. Furthermore, the concept of socio-cultural production is used to examine how political reality is formed through campaigns, including the visual costumes and verbal narratives in the second vice-presidential debate, to understand the meaning of the candidate's appearance [10]. Other socio-cultural practices are evident in the rhetoric of public speeches, such as the neat and controlled appearance of Japanese leaders, who conceal personal emotions to maintain their image and political strategy [11]. Discussion on political gimmicks in previous research has generally been conducted through critical discourse analysis or focused on strategies for exploiting voter behavior in the 2024 presidential election. Meanwhile, this study focuses on the relationship between gimmicks and habitus, employing a sociocultural reproduction approach. While previous studies interpreted gimmicks from a religious perspective within the context of identity politics, this study examines Gibran's performance in presenting political gimmicks explicitly. Furthermore, the use of the socio-cultural reproduction framework is an important distinction because it aims to uncover the reasons behind Gibran's gimmick practices, which are rooted in his habitus as a form of socio-cultural reproduction. Thus, the novelty of this research lies in analyzing Gibran's political gimmick through the framework of socio-cultural reproduction to reveal the habitus drive as the basis for socio-cultural reproduction in the fourth vice-presidential debate in 2024.

Habitus, a systemic system of dispositions influencing people's ideas and behaviors, shapes language [12]. In the Indonesian context, such symbolic practices are rooted in a political culture that emphasizes harmony, collective identity, and performativity in the public sphere [13], [14]. Through political communication practices, candidates not only project personal images but also reconstruct social and cultural values perceived as ideal by the electorate [15]. Therefore, socio-cultural reproduction becomes a point of discussion in the analysis of candidates' political gimmicks.

Function as both a type of cultural capital and a fundamental tool of symbolic power, language allows specific social groups to assert dominance and legitimize their control. The fourth vice-presidential debate does not merely examine outward appearances or communication strategies, but also explores how political habitus is reproduced, modified, and presented to the public through symbolic practices. This approach enables a deeper understanding of how Indonesia's social and political structures both shape and are reshaped through the candidates' performances in the public sphere [5], [16]. To have a deeper understanding, a horizon of expectation is required. Insight is a form of intelligence obtained from reading references, life experiences, and socio-cultural reproduction that will be able to form a person's habitus.

Socio-cultural reproduction refers to the process by which socio-cultural norms, values, customs, and power structures are transmitted from one generation to the next, thereby maintaining existing social hierarchies. In this regard, it is necessary to explore the relationship between culture and power in its ideas, highlighting how social behavior and cultural reproduction are influenced by the power structures of society [17]. In this context, culture and power shape each other, so that a candidate's behavior in debate, including their speaking style, rhetoric, gestures, and the way they present themselves, is influenced by the socio-cultural capital they bring and by the dominant cultural standards that determine who is considered more competent. For example, cultural reproduction in Bone Regency politics can be seen in how local aristocrats maintain traditional cultural patterns amid ongoing socio-political change, illustrating that cultural reproduction in the local political arena persists due to historical impulses shaped by governmental transition and the failure of political parties to cultivate public awareness of open democratic principles [18]. This causes a person to form habits and ways of thinking that are in accordance with old cultural patterns, making it difficult to adapt to more democratic and open socio-political values or practices. Thus, this condition opens up space for the emergence of political gimmicks as symbolic strategies that utilize old cultural patterns to gain legitimacy amidst low public awareness of substantive democratic practices.

The study of political gimmicks in vice-presidential debates needs to be understood through the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu, which interrelates habitus, field, capital, and symbolic power. A gimmick is an artificial act or strategy designed to attract attention, create a specific impression, or influence others' perceptions, often without any real substance or change, and adapted to the political world [8], [19]. On the other hand, political gimmicks are designed to target young voter segments (millennials – Gen Z) because they are considered adequate in approaching the younger generation and are considered successful if adopted from the example of the 2023 Philippine Election [20]. Gimmick in the habitus context can refer to functions as a system of dispositions that underlie one's actions and perceptions within a particular field, including the political field (which operates under the logic of power) [21]. It means the arena is never really neutral, but is constantly under pressure from other arenas. Especially in the political field, where power logic is at play [22]. In the context of political debates, symbolic actions — such as gestures, speech styles, and diction choices — can be viewed as manifestations of habitus, shaped by candidates' social experiences and political culture.

Habitus cannot be separated from the political field—the social space where actors compete to acquire and maintain various forms of capital. Within this field, the relevant capitals are not limited to economic capital but also include social, cultural, and symbolic capital. Social capital can be understood as a network of relationships, trust, and shared norms that facilitate cooperation and collective action within a social group [23]. Cultural capital

mainly consists of cultural tradition values, work ethic, and forms of perseverance [24]. Then, symbolic capital can refer to any form of representation with a value that people easily recognize [25]. However, symbolic power plays a crucial role in explaining how candidates employ representation and symbols to construct legitimacy before the public. It becomes the “invisible power”, misrecognized as such and thereby recognized as legitimate, both of which underscore the fact that the exercise of power through symbolic exchange always rests on a foundation of shared beliefs [12]. In this context, life experiences that shape doxa (orthodox and heterodox customs), the practice of political delegation through spokespeople, and the phenomenon of symbolic attacks in public debates demonstrate how symbolic power (invisible power) operates through the reproduction of beliefs, representations, and rhetorical strategies that reinforce social structures while shaping public perceptions of the legitimacy of power [26], [27], [28]. Hence, political communication practices in debates can be regarded as symbolic practices that reproduce and reinforce social structures through the candidates’ symbolic representations.

In the Indonesian context, studies of political communication show that candidates’ performativity often overshadows the substantive content of debates. Similarly, the fifth presidential debate lacked discussion on the importance of information technology for the nation’s well-being [29]. The use of gimmicks in the 2024 presidential and vice-presidential debates, for instance, reflects a nonverbal communication strategy aimed at constructing particular impressions in the audience’s perception—such as politeness, courage, or closeness to the people [30], [31]. This phenomenon shows that symbolic actions are not merely spontaneous acts, but products of the internalization of social values embedded in each actor or candidate’s political habitus. As research on visualizing communication ethics in the 2024 fourth vice-presidential debate shows, differences in the habitus of each generation will create a communication gap due to differences in life experiences, knowledge, lifestyle, behavior, social environment, mindset, and heart response [26]. However, each generation should uphold mutual respect and equal human dignity to ensure that communication — whether informative, persuasive, or educational — fulfills its purpose in creating a meaningful, constructive debate. In the context of the performativity debate, these differences in habit also influence the way actor present themselves, adapt their communication styles, and construct a symbolic image that meets public expectations. Actors are equipped with a series of internalized schemes or patterns (actors produce and elevate their actions) that they use to perceive, understand, and evaluate the social world [21]. Therefore, it is important to understand that the language also influences schemes and patterns in the candidate’s communication.

Language is not merely a medium of communication, but also a crucial instrument of symbolic power that helps construct, maintain, and reproduce social-cultural domination. It is a bodily technique, and specifically linguistic competence—especially phonetic competence—represents a dimension of bodily hexis (gesture, posture, attitude, facial expression) that expresses one’s entire relationship to the social world, as well as one’s socially informed perspective on it [12]. Language functions as symbolic capital and plays a crucial role in power relations, enabling individuals or groups with linguistic legitimacy to shape meanings, norms, and social values. For example, in Indonesia, English has become one of the most prestigious forms of symbolic capital among urban, educated, globally oriented communities, demonstrating linguistic competence in the image of internationalization, progress, intellectual sophistication, and involvement in the global world [32]. Thus, language not only shapes communication between individuals but also serves as a strategic tool that enables people to fight for and maintain their social position across various arenas of life. This concept can be clarified by understanding the linguistic market. In the context of this debate, the candidate’s language becomes part of the performance that attracts the audience’s attention because the language that comes out of a person’s mouth comes from the heart and is produced by their intake of knowledge.

Language can be the product of a “linguistic market,” in which every utterance holds value depending on who articulates it and within what kind of social field it occurs. The linguistic market must be integrated, and even from class, region, or ethnic group, it must be practically measured based on the legitimate use of languages, so that it can function as linguistic capital [12]. Linguistic capital indicators thus clearly demonstrate the link between various forms of cultural capital and adherence to the dominant culture. In this case, the class structure of society is expressed through cultural lifestyles and distinct language varieties, indicating that the markets in which symbolic investment takes place have been oriented to favor dominant classes [33]. It means, dominant classes or groups—those who possess the most significant amounts of social, cultural, and symbolic capital—can direct and impose definitions of social reality through the use of linguistically legitimate forms recognized by the public.

Language is shaped by habitus, a structured system of dispositions influencing individuals’ thoughts and behaviors. Mastery or control over specific linguistic forms functions as capital in social class struggles, playing a key role in the creation and maintenance of power hierarchies. This linguistic capital confers authority and influence within social fields shaped by historically ingrained mental and social structures. Consequently, language serves as an instrument of domination—it does not merely transmit messages but also reproduces power relations through symbolic violence, a form of power that is accepted without resistance because it has been naturalized within society [12]. Therefore, the power or authority of words greatly influences the audience in listening to the content and in believing it.

Language functions as both a type of cultural capital and a fundamental tool of symbolic power, allowing specific social groups to assert dominance and legitimize their control. Habitus operates as an internal system linking language, societal structures, and symbolic dominance, guiding individuals to behave, speak, and think in ways shaped by the social context around them. As a result, linguistic habits, choice of words, manner of speaking, and modes of expression reflect one's social standing. These linguistic dispositions develop over extended periods through socialization and interaction within a particular environment, especially those dominated by groups holding authority. Growing up in settings rich in cultural capital, such as exposure to standardized language, intellectual conversation, and formal communication styles, individuals develop a dominant linguistic habitus. This habitus then perpetuates linguistic domination by subtly prompting subordinate groups to accept the dominant language as the "correct" or "superior" form, often without awareness that this acceptance constitutes symbolic violence. In this way, language becomes a powerful, non-neutral resource that sustains the social legitimacy of those who control linguistic and cultural capital. This dynamic was clearly observable during the fourth vice-presidential debate in Indonesia's 2024 election, where the candidate strategically used language styles and rhetorical devices not only to convey policy ideas, but also to project authority and align with the dominant social narrative, thereby reinforcing their symbolic capital in the public eye.

## 2 Methodology

Thus, the reproduction of social-cultural value includes linguistic power that occurs not through explicit coercion but through implicit acceptance of the hierarchical structures of language institutionalized within habitus. Through these linguistic practices, unequal social relations are continuously reinforced and reproduced across generations—making linguistic habitus the primary medium for sustaining symbolic power within society. This study employed a qualitative research design using textual analysis to explore how vice-presidential candidates reproduce socio-cultural values through their performative actions during the 2024 debate. The qualitative approach was chosen to capture the symbolic meanings embedded in verbal and non-verbal communication practices, allowing an interpretive understanding of how political habitus is reproduced [34]. The primary data consisted of the complete video transcription of the fourth vice-presidential debate, which was obtained from the official YouTube channel of the General Elections Commission (KPU) of the Republic of Indonesia (<https://www.YouTube.com/live/anuQxiXpQ7I?si=AbpCCR8J--RBejeZ>), and using [voyant.tools](https://voyant.tools) to determine the most frequently occurring words in the comments. This debate was selected purposively because it displayed a high degree of symbolic performance and the use of political gimmicks, making it suitable for socio-cultural interpretation [1]. The sample selection used a purposive sampling approach, focusing on discourse segments in which symbolic actions, body language, and rhetorical choices were most evident [35]. The data collection involved systematic transcription and contextual coding of verbal statements, gestures, and visual cues as they appeared in the debate footage. The data analysis adopted a thematic and semiotic textual analysis framework, drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and symbolic power [6], [12]. The analysis proceeded through three stages: (1) identifying recurring symbols and communicative patterns; (2) interpreting the socio-cultural meanings of these patterns; and (3) connecting them to broader structures of political representation in Indonesia. To ensure validity, triangulation was conducted by comparing findings with prior literature on political communication and symbolic performance in Southeast Asian contexts [13], [16].

### 3 Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Results

The fourth vice-presidential debate, broadcast live on the YouTube channel of the Indonesian General Elections Commission (KPU RI), featured numerous gimmicks performed by Gibran. Many viewers who commented on the YouTube stream expressed disappointment with these gimmicks, which obscured substantive discussions of candidates' visions and missions. The analysis of the text and visual content of the fourth vice-presidential debate can be divided into three parts. These sections represent how Gibran's habitus and social reproduction were manifested through his use of gimmicks. The three categories include: *First*, attacking-question gimmicks and the gesture of "searching for answers"; *Second*, the use of emotionally provocative and satirical gimmicks; and *Third*, youth-targeted gimmicks that employ a casual, entertaining communication style. The following is an analysis of each category.

##### A. Attacking-question gimmicks and the gesture of "Searching for Answers"



**Figure 1.** Screenshot at 02:12:48 showing Gibran performing a "searching for answers" gesture  
Source: YouTube KPU RI [36]

Vice-presidential candidate Mahfud MD responded to a question posed by Gibran. When asked to comment on Mahfud MD's answer, Gibran performed a gesture of looking around and said:

*"I am looking for Prof. Mahfud's answer. I have been searching, where is the answer? I cannot seem to find it. I asked about green inflation, but he is explaining the green economy."*

Gibran's response took on an attacking tone, accompanied by a physical gesture of searching after his opponent's reply, creating an impression of dominance and assertiveness. This strategy reinforced his authority and shaped the debate's narrative in his favor. Through this performance, Gibran appeared intent on demonstrating his control over both the debate and its content, albeit by undermining his opponent. Consequently, the debate of ideas and visions was disrupted. His mocking gimmicks and lack of respect toward his opponents caused the other candidates to lose focus on articulating their programs and visions.

##### B. Use of Emotionally Provocative and Satirical Gimmicks



**Figure 2.** Screenshot at 02:04:41 showing Gibran mocking Muhaimin  
Source: YouTube KPU RI [36]

Figure 2 captures the moment when candidate number one, Muhaimin Iskandar, asked Gibran about his vision for economic, social, and environmental justice. Instead of answering directly, Gibran mocked Muhaimin for using plastic bottles during the debate. He remarked, *“Gus Muhaimin, it is funny—you are asking about the environment, but you are using plastic bottles. Meanwhile, Mr. Ganjar, Prof. Mahfud, and I are using glass bottles. Where is your commitment to the environment?”*

Gibran’s statement, paired with a pointing gesture, aimed to undermine Muhaimin’s credibility by portraying him as inconsistent with environmental values. This act diverted attention from substantive discussion, reframing the debate around trivial gestures rather than meaningful policy discourse.



**Figure 3.** Screenshot at 02:33:59 showing Gibran mocking Muhaimin and Tom Lembong  
Source: YouTube KPU RI [36]

A similar act of mockery is seen in Figure 3, where during a discussion about nickel, Gibran targeted Muhaimin’s campaign team member Tom Lembong, sarcastically questioning his understanding of electric vehicle batteries—despite the debate question not focusing on that issue. Gibran commented, *“I do not know, does Mr. Tom Lembong and the campaign team ever talk to their vice-presidential candidate? How can the candidate not understand? That is odd.”*

This statement implied Muhaimin’s incompetence while positioning Gibran as more knowledgeable. Both Figures 2 and 3 reveal Gibran’s use of a provocative, satirical communication style designed to elicit emotional reactions from both his opponents and the audience. Such strategies functioned as gimmicks that obscured substantive debate, instead amplifying his image performance—a form of image politics prioritizing appearance over substance.

### C. Youth-targeted Gimmicks Employing a Casual and Entertaining Communication Style



**Figure 4.** Screenshot at 02:33:59 Showing Gibran  
Source: YouTube KPU RI [36]

Figure 4 shows Gibran closing his session by delivering his vision and mission using colloquial language popular among young audiences. This approach was clearly strategic in appealing to the youth demographic. He stated, *“All these problems are challenges of the jaman now (modern era) and require jaman now solutions.”*

The use of the term “jaman now” (slang for “modern era”) was intended to signal that he understood the language of young people. His phrasing, gestures, and relaxed demeanor were designed to be relatable and

entertaining—qualities that later turned into social media memes. This strategy illustrates how modern political communication increasingly relies on popular appeal and performative style to attract Generation Z audiences, reproducing a political reality in which personal charisma outweighs the content of the fourth debate theme.

Gibran’s use of gimmicks drew mixed reactions in the KPU RI YouTube comment section. Many comments were critical, emphasizing that such behavior undermined the seriousness of the debate. As of October 30, 2025, the video had received 1,793 comments, many of which criticized Gibran’s lack of decorum and respect for older candidates.

**Table 1.** Public Comments Regarding Gibran’s Gimmicks (Source: YouTube KPU RI [36])

Account Name	Comment
@khanzaza-y9c	“Is it really necessary to always bring down other candidates when responding? It seems like an attempt to discredit others, yet unconsciously ends up embarrassing oneself.”
@sitinurmida3554	“Ethics should be upheld. This is the consequence when ethical principles are violated—ethical breaches will continue to occur.”
@muflhrz4074	“Gibran failed to appear impressive; instead, he seemed cringeworthy when he demeaned Mr. Mahfud earlier.”
@tfkqrkhman	“Mr. Muhaimin’s statements were substantial—he addressed strategic issues, provided strategic analyses, and offered strategic solutions. Excellent. Mr. Mahfud presented various problems and difficulties, yet remained realistic and offered commendable solutions. In contrast, Gibran relied heavily on gimmicks, displayed uncivil gestures, repeated his points, and spoke only at a superficial level. This is truly disappointing.”
@grdn261	“This is a formal state debate, yet his behavior resembled that of an informal debate in a coffee shop. God, forgive us.”
@kikicpn	“Please maintain proper ethics, especially when interacting with those who are older.”
@Rara-fj3yz	“A young person lacking in ethics.”
@yuniadianirosadi1670	“One aspect of ethics in rhetoric is to respect and honor those who are older, even if one considers oneself more ‘modern’ in thought.”
@wahyusugarsih8119	“The most important lesson from this debate is that ethics stands above everything else.”
@abdjiljlaelani4534	“Here, we can clearly see that ethics is fundamental to life.”



**Figure 5.** Dominant Words by Public Comments Regarding Gibran’s Gimmicks in KPU RI YouTube Channel  
 Source: Processed by researchers using voyant.tools

Figure 5. shows that the most dominant words appearing in public comments related to Gibran’s gimmick on the KPU RI YouTube channel are “ethics“, “strategic“, “ debate“, “Gibran“, “solutions“, “Mr“, “oneself“, and “ethical“. The dominance of the words “ethics“ and “ethical“ indicates that public discussion focused heavily on issues of political morality and ethics, particularly in assessing Gibran’s communication style or strategy during the fourth vice-presidential debate. The word “Mr” above is used by netizens as a sign of respect and formality when referring to senior figures or other candidates in the debate, particularly Mahfud MD and Muhaimin

Iskandar. The words “strategic“ and “solutions“ indicate that some netizens viewed Gibran’s actions and rhetoric not as mere gimmicks, but instead as calculated strategies to demonstrate tactical intelligence in debate. Meanwhile, the emergence of the word “oneself” reflects public attention to the candidate’s authenticity and personal attitude, whether his actions reflect his true personality or are merely a political performance. Overall, these findings indicate that the public is not only assessing appearance and gimmicks, but also considering the ethical and strategic dimensions of how Gibran presents himself on the political debate stage.

Most commenters found Gibran’s actions unethical, underscoring the importance of respecting older candidates. Comments responding to Gibran’s use of gimmicks generally centered on ethical concerns. While gimmicks may serve as a debate strategy, those that demean or provoke opponents are widely seen as inappropriate. Communication ethics are not only verbal ethics (communication context), but also nonverbal expression (tone of voice, body language), which play an important role as a guideline in daily interactions because they emphasize the importance of integrity, transparency, and honesty in accordance with existing moral principles and values [37]. In a political context, communication ethics are used to foster a fair attitude by choosing based on freedom, motivating, and instilling respect for differences between the communicator and the communicant [38]. Many members of the public viewed his actions during the vice-presidential debate as unethical, arguing that they demonstrated a lack of respect toward the older candidates. This is in accordance with Indonesian social norms and cultural values, which hold that younger people must respect their elders and uphold the principle that “where the earth stepped on, there the sky is upheld” [26]. Gibran was perceived as prioritizing performative gimmicks over articulating his vision and mission as a vice-presidential candidate. As a political strategy, the use of gimmicks may be considered acceptable; however, when such tactics involve ridicule, sarcasm, or emotional provocation, they inevitably generate controversy.

Although gimmicks can be understood as part of a debate strategy, Gibran’s approach can also be examined through the concept of habitus. As a form of habitus, Gibran’s gimmicks reflect dispositions shaped by deeply internalized values and long-standing socialization processes. Adapun social process refers to significant social changes resulting from the influence of various groups on the current societal situation to achieve specific interests, encompassing any movement, modification, transformation, or development that alters an object, whether qualitatively, quantitatively, or positionally, over time [39]. This shows that habitus acts as an internal mechanism that connects social processes with individual actions, where repeated social experiences shape Gibran’s tendency to present gimmicks as a natural expression of his ingrained disposition. Such habitual orientations may have contributed to his apparent disregard for ethical considerations in formulating debate strategies. Therefore, Gibran’s habitus as seen in the debate can be traced to his past interaction patterns and social environment, which shaped his communication style and the way he presents himself in the public sphere. From a habitus perspective, such behavior may reflect ingrained dispositions formed over time. The upload of the old interview video below confirms this.



**Figure 5.** Najwa Shihab interviewed Gibran Rakabuming Raka  
Source: YouTube Raja Jawa [40]

From the Raja Jawa YouTube account (<https://youtu.be/sOOduq2nCXM?si=XmBkecDcnK0BMgvZ>) in 2017 interview with Najwa Shihab, Gibran openly admitted that he does not enjoy reading books. Reading, in essence, serves as an important means of expanding one’s knowledge and perspective, ultimately fostering wisdom and intelligence. The interview clip, which circulated widely on social media, sparked public discussions on the importance of reading habits for public officials. The excerpt of the interview is as follows:



Najwa Shihab: *“How often do your parents encourage or model reading activities at home?”*

Gibran: *“That is a tough one.”*

Najwa Shihab: *“You said earlier you wanted to talk about reading?”*

Gibran: *“Honestly, I do not really like reading.”*

Najwa Shihab: *“You are being so candid—maybe show a bit of image management?”*

Gibran: *“I am just being real. I like reading comics, that is for sure.”*

Najwa Shihab: *“What kind of comics? Kho Ping Hoo?”*

Gibran: *“Anything, really. When it comes to articles, I only read light ones—nothing too serious.”*

Najwa Shihab: *“So, comics and light readings? What kind of topics?”*

Gibran: *“Mostly motivational quotes”*

Najwa Shihab: *“Like Catatan Najwa?”*

Gibran: *“That is too heavy. I usually read short, simple books—quite randomly, actually.”*

Najwa Shihab: *“I see. Do your parents encourage reading habits at home, or is it more up to the children?”*

Gibran: *“It is pretty much up to us. Honestly, there is not really a reading culture at home. We mostly read comics or play PlayStation.”*

From this interview, it is clear that Gibran himself acknowledged the absence of a reading culture in his family circle, indicating that the habitus or practice of reading was not established. This lack of reading culture can be associated with the use of gimmick strategies and the social reproduction of vice-presidential debate performances. The forms of gimmicks and performative realities displayed by Gibran during the debate were perceived as neglecting ethical considerations. This situation illustrates the absence of disposition and internalization of knowledge, values related to ethics, understanding each other, and appropriate debating conduct—key components of habitus. Consequently, the use of gimmicks, sarcasm, and personal attacks served to construct a political image and demonstrate superiority. The reproduction of reality through gestures and performative gimmicks thus appeared superficial, emphasizing image over the substantive articulation of vision and mission.

### 3.2 Discussion

The interpretation of these three points is as follows. **First**, in the aggressive questioning-and-searching-for-answers gimmick, Gibran projected an assertive, dominant stance. By posing questions that attacked his opponent and pairing them with a “searching” gesture afterward, he established control over the debate’s tone and direction. This was a deliberate strategy to assert authority and define the narrative Gibran wished to dominate. This strategic reproduces the dominant cultural pattern that values assertiveness and performative superiority as symbolic capital, thereby strengthening his position above his opponents and shifting the debate from substance to a display of authority. However, the strategy also shows that mastery of communication ethics has not been fully demonstrated, as the confrontational style tends to blur the line between rational argument and personal attack. Like Gibran’s use of negative politeness in the fourth debate (showing teasing gestures and expressions toward Mahdud MD), it shows that he does not want to be hindered by opposing responses, exaggerating, asking ambiguous, or unclear rhetorical questions [26]. In fact, political debate strategies and tactics should include a deep understanding of key issues, through research on the debate opponent, consistent and clear message delivery, public speaking skills, and the use of appropriate body language to strengthen the credibility and effectiveness of communication [41], [42]. Therefore, the ideal debate strategy should balance assertiveness with polite communication ethics, ensuring arguments remain rational, credible, and oriented towards fostering constructive public discourse.

**Second**, in the emotionally provocative and satirical gimmicks, Gibran deliberately provoked both his opponents and the audience. By highlighting the use of plastic bottles instead of answering questions, Gibran exploits an old cultural pattern that prioritizes symbolic appearance over legitimacy, thus reducing the debate to a game of image that reaffirms existing social hierarchies. This gimmick blurred the debate’s substantive focus, providing space for image-building and emotional spectacle rather than the rules of debate. Ideally, debate rules emphasize ethics and quality among participants by ensuring that each candidate adheres to the rule of conduct, gets equal speaking time to address issues substantively, interacts in a dialogic atmosphere that focuses on a specific topic without audience distraction or excessive rhetoric, and is supervised through strict moderation and fast-checking to maintain the honesty and quality of public discourse [43]. Not only that, image-building and emotional spectacle are closely related in the world of politics. For example, a news image of a political protest can mobilize the public and, at the same time, elicit emotions (sadness, interest, passion, disgust, shame, anger, guilt, and being touched), thereby increasing the willingness to accept the image itself [44]. It demonstrates how political reality is reconstructed through performances emphasizing symbolism and appearance over content.

Therefore, ideally, this should not be done, especially by national leaders whose aim is to wield great power and also lead a larger nation and state.

*Third*, through gimmicks targeting the youth, Gibran strategically employed informal language and entertaining gestures—often generating viral memes—to capture the attention of young audiences, particularly Gen Z. This approach reflects the transformation of contemporary political communication, where charisma, relatability, and popular appeal increasingly outweigh substantive discourse. The use of slang and relaxed style demonstrates how popular cultural capital is reproduced to build symbolic closeness with young voters, confirming that performativity and charisma are now dominant standards in the contemporary political arena. However, when using contemporary political communication transformation strategies, it is necessary to consider both verbal politeness and the indelible digital footprint. Where this digital transformation must be followed by digital ethics, such as: *First*, autonomy (explainability and privacy); *Second*, non-maleficence (controllability and accountability); *Third*, beneficence (sustainability and security); *Fourth*, justice (equality and impartiality); and *Fifth*, transparency (traceability and interactivity) [45]. This also needs to be adapted to Eastern culture or the Indonesian nation, especially as the Javanese people should reproduce their Javanese values. As stereotyped, Javanese people are generally perceived as polite, well-mannered, hardworking, and obedient individuals who value tradition, avoid conflict, interact easily with others, and communicate with calmness, wisdom, and friendliness [46]. It is this reproduction of socio-cultural values that debate candidates should understand and internalize as future statesmen, who should possess insight into the nation's nationality, culture, and customs. This reproduction can be derived from insight, knowledge, reference, and everyday life experiences.

Together, these three aspects reveal that Gibran's political gimmicks during the vice-presidential debate emphasized the reproduction of political reality as a performative arena, where symbols, style, and image serve as key forms of capital in the competition for visibility and legitimacy within Indonesia's political field. Collectively, these performances reproduced a political reality that emphasized style over substance, signaling a shift toward performative politics in which image and symbolism dominate over ideas and ethics. Public responses broadly criticized Gibran's behavior as unethical, particularly given his opponents' seniority. In a democratic context, debates should serve as a platform for exchanging ideas and policy visions rather than arenas of personal mockery. Drawing from Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus, these behaviors can be understood as expressions of internalized dispositions and socialized practices. The lack of a reading culture, as Gibran himself admitted, may reflect a limited depth of ethical, democratic understanding, knowledge, wisdom, and maturity for public speaking. Consequently, his gimmick-laden debate style can be viewed as a form of social reproduction that prioritizes image over substance, weakening the democratic ideal of deliberative discourse. Ideally, democratic deliberation is an inclusive process that allows every individual to weigh, reflect, and put forward reasons in both public and private spaces to reach rational and just collective decisions [47]. Besides that, persuasive communication strategies are a planned approach that combines the ethical use of language, body language, intonation, and emotional intelligence to influence others toward a mutually beneficial agreement [48]. Therefore, the analysis of political gimmicks should not be viewed merely as persuasive communication tactics, but as manifestations of the reproduction of habitus that reveal the relationships among social structures, symbolic capital, and representational strategies within the contemporary Indonesian electoral arena.

## 4 Conclusion

Gibran employed three types of gimmicks during the fourth vice-presidential debate: *First*, attacking-question gestures. Although effective in capturing attention, such gimmicks risk transforming democratic debate into a spectacle of image politics, or a stage play unfit for viewing. As a lesson for the public in the maturity and wisdom of becoming a future leader, a statesman's spirit must be present. *Second*, emotionally provocative and satirical acts. The reproduction of socio-cultural values that should be internalized into a leader's character with statesmanlike qualities must be displayed through the candidate's mature performance in democracy, in expression, presence, action, and speech. This caution is necessary as a public figure in public speaking as a statesman candidate. *Third*, youth-targeted performances use casual, entertaining language. The purpose of communication, to inform, educate, and persuade, should be considered as a vice-presidential candidate, to inspire young people. His appearance may be casual, but the weight of his intellectual content remains a key point in this arena. These gimmicks collectively shaped a political spectacle centered on performative symbolism rather than substantive debate. Public reactions on social media highlighted concerns about ethics and respect, particularly toward senior candidates. From a habitus perspective, the absence of intellectual habits—such as reading and reflection—appears to influence the ethical dimension of his communication style. Future research could expand this study through interviews or ethnographic observation to further explore the relationship between political habitus and performance communication.

The implications of this research indicate that the reproduction of values and habits formed through a person's background knowledge and social environment plays a significant role in shaping their performance in arguing,

dialogues, communication, and self-representation in the public sphere. Habitus, developed through reading practices, life experiences, and personal character, influences how individuals construct responses and formulate their political strategies. These findings are relevant for researchers, political strategists, and media analysts because they provide a deeper understanding of how reproduction of values and habits shapes political performativity, communication strategies, and the construction of candidate images. For researchers, it offers a sociological-symbolic approach to political performance and communication. For a political strategist, it shows how symbolic actions can backfire within ethics and cultural value systems. Relevance for media analysts, because this research provides material for understanding audience comments and performative politics. In short, this research can serve as a foundation for analyzing political behavior, designing campaign strategies, and interpreting the dynamics of political representation in the media. Thus, knowledge, understanding, wisdom, and prudence are essential prerequisites for national leaders, as the reproduction of socio-cultural values they internalize will determine the direction, quality, and legitimacy of decision-making in leadership practices.

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