

## The Role of TikTok Influencers Supporting Serena Francis in building Political Image in the 2024–2029 Kupang Mayoral and Deputy Mayoral Election in the Eyes of Generation Z

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### ABSTRACT

Social media has become the primary medium for disseminating political messages, shaping public opinion, and building the image of candidates in the eyes of society. Among the various platforms available, TikTok occupies a special position as a new space for political communication that reaches young audiences in a more creative and emotional way. The aim of this study is to analyze how the communicator credibility of TikTok influencers supporting Serena Francis is constructed in digital political campaign content during the 2024 Kupang City Regional Election, as well as how this credibility influences Generation Z voters' perceptions of the CSan candidate pair. It also seeks to identify and explain the factors that shape the perception of communicator credibility of TikTok influencers in the eyes of Generation Z voters, such as personal appeal, expertise, trust, and authenticity. The results of this study are: Communicator credibility becomes the key factor in shaping political image in digital spaces, the integration of local culture in East Nusa Tenggara strengthens the effectiveness of digital political communication, Generation Z interprets political messages through a balance between rationality and emotionality, and TikTok becomes a new space for local democracy and youth political participation

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has fundamentally changed the way political communication takes place in the contemporary era. Political communication patterns that were previously one-way have now shifted to become more interactive, participatory, and user-experience oriented. Social media has become the primary medium for spreading political messages, shaping public opinion, and building the image of candidates in the eyes of society. Among the various existing platforms, TikTok holds a special position as a new space for political communication that reaches young audiences in a more creative and emotional way. As a short video-based platform, TikTok presents a combination of entertainment, self-expression, and public participation. Its distinctive feature that emphasizes visualization, music, and interactivity makes it an effective tool for building an authentic image and emotional closeness between candidates and voters. Research by Cervi, Tejedor, and Blesa (2023) shows that TikTok allows politicians to showcase a personal side that can strengthen public trust and increase audience engagement.

One notable candidate pair in this regard is Cristian Widodo and Serena Cosgrova Francis (CSan). This pair has attracted public attention due to their campaign strategy that highlights digitalization, innovation, and narratives focused on engaging the younger generation. Serena Francis, as the candidate for Deputy Mayor, becomes an important figure actively using various digital platforms to demonstrate the roles, ideas, and values she aims to promote. Keaktifannya di media sosial mencerminkan upaya membangun citra sebagai Its distinctive feature that emphasizes visualization, music, and interactivity makes it an effective tool for building an authentic image and emotional closeness between candidates and voters. Research by Cervi, Tejedor, and Blesa (2023) shows that TikTok allows politicians to showcase a personal side that can strengthen public trust and increase audience engagement. One notable candidate pair in this regard is Cristian Widodo and Serena Cosgrova Francis (CSan). This pair has attracted public attention due to their campaign strategy that highlights digitalization, innovation, and narratives focused on engaging the younger generation. Serena Francis, as the candidate for Deputy Mayor, becomes an important figure actively using various digital platforms to demonstrate the roles, ideas, and values she aims to promote.

A young, visionary leader who is close to the community. Serena's involvement in digital communication reveals an interesting phenomenon in local politics, namely how a young female candidate utilizes social media to shape perception and build political legitimacy. The approach she uses through TikTok not only focuses on promoting work programs but also on forming a political identity that is communicative, inclusive, and emotional.

This phenomenon becomes increasingly relevant when associated with the role of Generation Z as the dominant voting group in the Kupang City Regional Election. According to data from the General Election Commission (KPU) of East Nusa Tenggara Province, out of a total of 3,988,372 registered voters, around 34.5% or 1,377,699 voters are aged 17–28. In Kupang City itself, the number of voters from Generation Z is estimated to exceed 110,000 people,

making it a highly strategic demographic for the success of candidates' political communication. This generation is known as digital natives who are accustomed to technology, more responsive to visual messages, and prioritize values of authenticity, openness, and social relevance. In this context, the use of TikTok by Serena Francis and her team represents a form of adaptation to the communication patterns of the younger generation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Communicator Credibility Theory**

The credibility of a communicator is one of the fundamental concepts in persuasive communication theory. In the communication process, especially communication aimed at influencing the attitudes or behavior of the audience, the perception of who delivers the message is as important as the content of the message itself. Credibility is the audience's perception of the communicator as a trustworthy source of information, possessing expertise, and being socially and psychologically appealing. According to Hovland, Janis, and Kelley in *\*Communication and Persuasion\** (1953), the communicator's credibility greatly determines the extent to which a message can be received and internalized by the audience. A person is more easily persuaded if the communicator is viewed as a credible figure. Credibility is not absolute or permanently inherent; rather, it is formed and changes based on the audience's perception of the communicator's characteristics within a particular communication context and situation.

In general, the credibility of a communicator consists of three main components, namely:

#### **1. Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which a communicator is perceived as an individual who is honest, sincere, fair, and possesses moral integrity. Communicators who are consistent in their words and actions, and demonstrate a high level of social responsibility, tend to be more trusted. This perception is shaped not only by the messages delivered but also by the communicator's attitude, communication style, and track record.

##### *1. Expertise*

Expertise refers to the communicator's perception of the communicator's knowledge, experience, and ability to master the topic being discussed. A communicator who is considered an expert is usually perceived as intelligent, experienced, and capable of providing logical and substantial arguments. Mastery of the material and the ability to explain issues systematically greatly contribute to shaping this dimension of expertise. In addition to the components above, the credibility of a communicator can also be reviewed from a temporal dimension, as stated by Devito, who divides it into:

1. Initial Credibility, which is the initial credibility before communication occurs, usually based on reputation, social status, or information previously known by the communicant.

1. *Derived Credibility*, That is credibility formed during the communication process, depending on how the communicator delivers the message and responds to the audience.
  2. *Terminal Credibility*, which is the credibility that remains or is formed after the communication is completed, relates to the long-term impact and the final impression left by the communicator.
- From a classical perspective, Aristotle explains credibility through three main elements: ethos, pathos, and logos. Ethos refers to the character or morality of the communicator that builds trust, pathos is related to the communicator's ability to evoke the audience's emotions, and logos is the power of logical argumentation. These three elements complement each other in creating persuasive and effective communication.

#### New Media Concept

To explain this phenomenon, McMullan (2017) developed the theory of foundation technologies and proto-affordances. This theory suggests that periods of new media have occurred repeatedly throughout history, triggered by the emergence of key technologies that offer new affordances to society. McMullan (2017) emphasizes that understanding the relationship between old media and new digital media helps in analyzing social adoption, cultural practices, implications, and impacts of these platforms. This allows for a deeper understanding of how new media shapes social behavior and provides insights to manage its impact in the present and guide potential future developments.

In addition to providing easy access and communication, new media also have broader implications for social and cultural life. Varenia and Phalguna (2022) highlight that new media have enabled audiences to access information in real-time and accelerate the exchange of information using only internet-based devices. The Internet, as a form of new media, has changed the way people access information and interact with one another.

#### **TikTok as a Social Media Platform**

TikTok is one of the social networking applications that focuses on short music video content and has currently become a global phenomenon. The application was founded by Zhang Yiming in September 2016 in China through the technology company ByteDance. At the beginning of its emergence, TikTok was known as Douyin, a short-video-based platform that allows users to share their creative moments quickly and easily. In just one year, Douyin experienced rapid growth in China, successfully reaching one million users and recording more than one billion video views daily (Malimbe, Waani, & Suwu, 2021). This success demonstrates that a simple, fast, and entertaining short video format is highly compatible with the digital consumption patterns of modern society, which tends to desire instant yet engaging entertainment.

TikTok has grown into a global platform with billions of monthly active users across various countries. To support its operations, the app has 11 main offices located in cities around the world, including Los Angeles, New York, Jakarta, Seoul, Tokyo, Singapore, Dubai, Berlin, London, Paris, and Mumbai (TikTok, 2023).

One of the main factors that make TikTok so popular compared to similar platforms is its highly sophisticated and personalized recommendation algorithm. TikTok's algorithm determines which content appears on the user's For You Page (FYP), which is at the core of the in-app experience. The FYP is designed to display videos that match the user's preferences and habits, thus providing a unique experience for each individual. This system works by analyzing various factors, such as user interactions with specific videos, information contained in the videos (for example captions, hashtags, sound effects, or music), as well as technical data from devices and accounts, including language preferences, geographic location, and type of device used (Kaye, Chen, & Zeng, 2022).

By understanding how this algorithm works, content creators have a great opportunity to increase the visibility of their work. Optimization strategies can be implemented by leveraging popular hashtags, following the latest trends, using viral music, and maintaining consistency in production quality. Equally important, active interaction with the audience through comments or collaborations can strengthen closeness and follower loyalty. Creators who are able to strategically utilize the TikTok algorithm will have a greater chance of reaching the FYP, expanding audience reach, and ultimately increase their popularity on this platform (Cotter, 2021).

### **The Concept of Social Media Influencers**

Conceptually, influencers are understood as third parties who build significant relationships with digital communities through content production, active interaction, and consistent self-representation. They act as strategic communicators in conveying values, opinions, and specific agendas, whether in the realms of marketing, lifestyle, or politics (Hudders et al., 2020; Joshi et al., 2023).

In the era of digital communication, the presence of influencers has become an integral part of social media dynamics and mass communication strategies. Influencers refer to individuals who have the ability to influence the opinions, attitudes, or behaviors of their audience through content that they consistently distribute on digital platforms. Their influence is not solely determined by the number of followers but more by the quality of interaction, authenticity of the message, and the emotional and psychological connection built with their audience (Enke & Borchers, 2019; Gammoudi et al., 2022). Regarding classification, influencers can be distinguished based on motivation, celebrity status, business orientation, and level of influence. According to Ouvrein et al. (2021) and Eslami et al. (2024), there are four main categories, namely:

*Passionate Business Influencers:* Individu yang memiliki tingkat keaslian tinggi dan fokus pada monetisasi konten, dengan pengaruh kuat terhadap audiens.

1. *Passionate Influencers:* Influencer which is very authentic, but not always oriented towards commercial aspects.
2. *Celebrity Influencers:* Figures who have already achieved celebrity status, with wide influence, but the level of authenticity can vary depending on

personal branding strategy.

3. Dormant Influencers/Topic Enthusiasts: Social media users with a high interest in certain topics, but who have not yet had significant influence on the public.
4. Political Image

According to Chernyshova (2020) and Muzalevskaya (2024), political image is a social construct that encompasses appearance, behavior, communication, as well as symbols associated with a politician or political party. This image is not formed naturally but is deliberately designed and maintained to create a specific impression in the minds of voters. In this context, political image functions not only as a symbolic representation of the personality, character, or political values of an individual but also as an effective differentiation strategy, especially when the ideological boundaries between parties become increasingly blurred (Bilalli, 2023; Baranovskyi, 2023). In other words, political image becomes the main “differentiator” that can make a candidate stand out in an increasingly homogeneous political competition.

Political image has a number of strategic functions that cannot be ignored. First, political image plays a role in building trust, credibility, and the authority of a politician in the eyes of the public. Second, a well-managed image can create strong personal appeal, enabling the mobilization of sympathy, emotional support, and electoral loyalty from the public. Third, political image reinforces a politician's symbolic identity, that is, an image that serves as a representation of values considered important by society, such as courage, integrity, closeness to the people, or concern for certain social issues (Chernyshova, 2020; Metelska, 2022). These functions indicate that political image is not only related to visual aspects or outward appearance, but is also closely associated with the formation of a political identity that can be widely recognized and accepted.

### **Generation Z**

Generation Z (Gen Z) is the demographic group born after the millennial generation, generally including individuals born from the mid-1990s to the early 2010s (Dutko, 2020). As the first generation to grow up entirely in the digital and globalized era, Gen Z has characteristics, values, and communication preferences that are very different from previous generations. The increasingly complex social environment, coupled with rapid technological development, shapes their distinctive behaviors in information consumption, ways of thinking, and patterns of social interaction (Sakdiyakorn, Golubovskaya, & Solnet, 2021). This makes Gen Z not only seen as skilled technology users but also as agents of change who exert significant influence on cultural, economic, and political trends globally.

#### **a. Digital Natives and Access to Information**

Gen Z is often referred to as digital natives because, from an early age, they have been exposed to digital technology, including the internet, social media, and smart devices that have become an integral part of daily life (Pichler, Kohli, & Granitz, 2021). Growing up with technology from childhood makes this generation highly familiar with various digital platforms and capable of navigating information quickly.

#### **b. Personal and Social Values**

In terms of values, Gen Z emphasizes individualism, independence, and the pursuit of meaning and authenticity, both in personal and professional life. They tend to avoid things considered artificial and prefer what is genuine and consistent with their identity. Additionally, this generation demonstrates high sensitivity to contemporary issues such as diversity, gender equality, and environmental sustainability (Parsakia et al., 2023; Djafarova & Fouts, 2022).

c. Realism and Self-Reliance

Unlike previous generations who often viewed the future with idealism, Gen Z has a more realistic and pragmatic perspective. They pay close attention to financial security, flexibility in working, and the balance between personal and professional life (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022).

d. Collective Awareness and Globalization

The life experiences of Gen Z are greatly influenced by global events, such as economic crises, pandemics, and climate change issues. These events not only shape their mindset but also foster a collective awareness of the importance of cooperation and solidarity in facing shared challenges (Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021; Robinson & Schänzel, 2019).

e. Consumption and Communication Patterns

As consumers, Gen Z pays attention to more than just product quality; they also consider production ethics, environmental impact, and the representation of social values in the products and services they use (Djafarova & Fouts, 2022).

## METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was chosen in this study because it aims to obtain a deep and comprehensive understanding of how the credibility of TikTok influencers, who support the candidate pair Serena Cosgrova and Francis in the Kupang City Regional Election, is constructed through their digital content and perceived by Generation Z audiences active on the platform, as explained by Denzin & Lincoln (2011). The type of research used is a case study, which allows the researcher to conduct an intensive and focused analysis of specific phenomena in real-world contexts, as explained by Yin (2014). The case that is the focus of this research is the digital campaign carried out by local TikTok influencers who actively support the candidate pair Cristian Widodo-Serena Cosgrova Francis (the CSan pair) in the 2024-2029 Kupang City Regional Election, with an emphasis on how their digital content shapes public perception. A case study was chosen selected because it is able to explore the complexities of digital political communication in depth, including:

1. Local cultural context: The use of cultural elements from NTT, such as the Kupang language full of familiar terms like “kesayangan” (darling) or references to local traditions like “belis,” which strengthen the emotional bond between influencers and the audience in TikTok content.
2. Digital dynamics: The interaction between influencers and the audience on the TikTok platform, reflected in communication patterns such as supportive comments, local humor, or constructive criticism that appear

in the comment section, reflecting active audience engagement in the political communication process.

3. The role of Gen Z: As a group of young voters who are active on social media, critical of conventional political narratives, and responsive to digital content, with their perceptions analyzed through digital interactions such as comments, likes, and shares they leave on the platform.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Netnographic analysis explores how local influencers on TikTok build the political image of Serena Cosgrova Francis in the context of the 2024-2029 Kupang City Election. This study identifies account characteristics, communication styles, visual narratives, cultural symbols, and Gen Z audience responses. The two accounts analyzed are @nonalay\_\_ (entertainment approach with local humor) and @andrycliem (informative and professional approach). Video transcripts and audience comments are integrated to strengthen the qualitative analysis.

### 1. Account @nonalay\_\_ Netnographic Approach

A netnography of the account @nonalay\_\_ (Nona Lay Kesayangan) was conducted to understand the construction of communicator credibility through a casual communication style, local humor, and NTT cultural elements. Observations from May 1-15, 2025, analyzed three campaign videos, focusing on the main video ([https://www.tiktok.com/@nonalay\\_\\_/video/7423401744958262534](https://www.tiktok.com/@nonalay__/video/7423401744958262534)) because it represents @nonalay\_\_'s distinctive approach. This account is known for Kupang language and humor that resonates with Gen Z.

#### 1. Account Profile

- a. Account name: @nonalay\_\_
  - b. Profile name: Nona Lay Kesayangan
  - c. Access date: May 1-15, 2025
  - d. Content type: Lifestyle, entertainment, political campaigns, product endorsements
  - e. Delivery style: Casual, humorous, using Kupang regional language
  - f. Activity location: Based in Kupang/NTT (assumed from content)
  - g. Account bio: "PP/Endorse dm Instagram @nonalay\_"
- Figure 4.1  
TikTok Account Profile @nonalay\_ (Accessed on July 31, 2025)

### 2. Description of the Analyzed Video

The main video is analyzed because it reflects a soft campaign strategy with elements of local culture:

- a. Video link: [https://www.tiktok.com/@nonalay\\_\\_/video/7423401744958262534](https://www.tiktok.com/@nonalay__/video/7423401744958262534)
- b. Upload date: October 8, 2024
- c. Video description: "Okay, hello dear. So yesterday Nokes attended the inauguration event of the KM Dharma RuCitra 8 ship, which was promoted by sister Serena Francis. This is a new ship at a low price. Route: Kupang - Ende - Labuan Bajo - Lombok - Surabaya."
- d. Visual context: Nokes appears on the ship deck with a backdrop of

modern facilities (elevator, karaoke room), dressed casually, speaking directly to the camera with a humorous expression, accompanied by promotional text in the Kupang language. Serena Cosgrova Francis and Cristian Widodo appear to explain the benefits of the ship. Capture Video Source: @nonalay\_\_3. Main Video Transcript

Here is the full transcript of the video (duration ~1 minute): Okay, hello, my dears. So yesterday Nokes attended the inauguration event of the KM Dharma RuCitra 8 ship, pushed by my sister Serena Francis. This is a new ship at an affordable price. Route Kupang-Ende-Labuan Bajo-Lombok-Surabaya. Well, instead of just being curious, let's take a look inside. There is already an elevator inside, so no need to complain if your legs get tired climbing stairs. As soon as you enter, you can see that this is a luxurious ship but at a cheap price. Serena: With very affordable prices, we can bring a car, we can bring a motorcycle. So when we arrive in Labuan Bajo, there's no need to worry about vehicle options. You can still bring your own vehicle when you arrive there. Nokes: You can bring a dowry from Kupang, you can bring it directly from here. You can bring pigs and cows, you can also bring *belis*. Eh, in Labuan Bajo we will bring *belis*. There are economy class rooms, single beds, double beds, rooms for people with disabilities, smoking rooms for smokers. For beloved ones with golden, diamond, or silver voices, there is already a karaoke room, and there's also a gym. So beloved ones who want to work out with their bestie, siblings, uncle, aunt, dad, mom, everyone can do it. There's also an executive lounge. Cristian Widodo: Massage, massage, for those who want to try it for back pain, very relaxing. Oh yes, try if you can't massage, no problem. First try a chair massage like this.

Nokes: Honey, don't get distracted. There's a massage officer, and there's a VIP room too. Perfect for someone like me who likes privacy. Oh, come on, sis, really, there's still Maria's salons, please feel at home. So, how are we going to handle this? Want to invite? We want to have a party here. Sure, but close the door first. Those who want to party, friends, party CS. Don't leave it empty. Don't hesitate, say it now, *sonde*, especially don't pretend to be trendy. I'm still trendy. I'm CS, by the way. Please play Timor songs. I'll call. It's noisy but I reply to your SMS, you called for a transfer.

### 3. Transcript Analysis:

- a. Kupang Language: Phrases like "*kesayangan*," "*sonde*," "*bawa belis*," and "*babi sapi*" reflect everyday language of Kupang people, enhancing cultural proximity and trustworthiness.
- b. Local Humor: References to "*belis*" (NTT traditional dowry) and "gold, diamond, silver voices" add appeal with humor relatable to Gen Z.
- c. Political promotion: Mentioning Serena as the driver of the Dharma Rucitra VIII ship strengthens her expertise, while Nokes' relaxed style makes politics feel approachable.
- d. Visuals and narrative: Cuts to Serena and Cristian Widodo enhance credibility by showing the candidates' direct involvement, while visuals of the modern ship attract the audience's attention.

#### 4. Audience Comments

Audience comments are analyzed to understand responses to the content. From the list of comments provided, here is a grouped example:

##### a. Support (30 comments):

- 1) "Cs'an trbaik 🍊 🍊 " (isakwaangsir 🌻, 2024-10-14)
- 2) "SION S DETHAN: Sister Serena is really smart, I am sure the people of Kupang believe in her, that Kupang will progress 🙏 Her beloved voice makes us love her 🥰 🥰 🥰 " (2024-10-8, 88 likes)
- 3) "Thank you KK, Serena, for your attention to the people of NTT 🙏 🙏 " (Be'a, 2024-10-10)
- 4) "Olla style: sister Miss Serena really deserves to be deputy mayor, let's move forward gasss 🙌 🙌 " (2024-10-12)

##### b. Humor (20 comments):

- 1) "Dianto Kofi Grup A.Md,Par, SH: golden voice, diamond, silver 🎤 " (2024-10-8, 123 likes)
- 2) "Can go to Bali snd Ho 🎤 " (Mry 🎤, 2024-11-29)
- 3) "Putra korbafo: this is nokes sir..! who can fight against it! 🎤 🎤 🎤 " (2024-10-9, 10 likes)
- 4) "cicisanan\_: 'play the song, Timor song' I can't stop laughing at these words 🎤 still a true Eastern kid ee nokes 🤔 🤔 " (2024-10-9, 52 likes)

##### c. Questions (25 comments):

- 1) "Ovt 💧 : If I want to book a ticket, through what means, sis?" (2024-12-2)
- 2) "miraadu: If possible, also the Kupang-Rote route." (2024-12-1)
- 3) "@Stefend: SIS, I WANT TO ASK WHAT DAY IS THE SCHEDULE FROM LOMBOK TO KUPANG. THANK YOU SIS 🙏 " (2024-11-28)
- 4) "Gabriel Pape99: What is being asked is the ticket price, sis, for each destination city, please upload it." (2024-10-12)

##### d. Criticism (10 comments):

- 1) "Febrico Andre: Sis Nona Lay, sorry, a little input, maybe we are influencers, but we also need to be careful about whom we talk to, it is indeed a casual activity but we still have to maintain our manners, we have to respect each other. 🙏 " (2024-10-16, 1 like)
- 2) "13 1 7 U N: try to push for the road in Amfoang, in my opinion it's less appropriate because so far there has been a ferry but in Amfoang some bridges are not yet built, during the rainy season in the first weeks it cannot be crossed due to flooding 😊 " (2024-10-10)
- 3) "nona penna: DO NOT Believe.." (2024-10-10)

##### Comment Analysis:

- a. Support: Comments such as "SION S DETHAN" (88 likes) and "Olla stayl" indicate positive reception towards Serena and Nokes, reinforcing trustworthiness and political influence.
- b. Humor: Comments like "golden voice, diamond, silver 🎤 " and "bring the pig to Empang 😊 😊 " reflect Nokes' appeal as a humorous and relatable communicator.

- c. Questions: Requests for information about routes (for example, Rote, Alor, Sumba) indicate high audience engagement, although interaction is mostly one-way since Nokes rarely responds (except for one reply about the DLU Ferry app).
- d. Criticism: Criticism from "Febrico Andre" shows Gen Z's critical view of communication styles, while "13 1 7 U N" draws attention to other infrastructure issues, reflecting a rational audience.

## 5. Patterns of Communicator Credibility Representation

### a. Expertise:

- 1) Indicator: Nokes provides practical information about the Dharma Rucitra VIII ship (routes, facilities such as lifts and karaoke) and connecting it with Serena's struggle, reinforced by the appearance of Serena and Cristian Widodo.
- 2) Findings: Expertise credibility is built through delivering information relevant to the transportation needs of NTT, supported by association with the candidate.

### b. Trustworthiness:

- 1) Indicators: Kupang language ("kesayangan," "sonde") and cultural references ("belis," "babi sapi") create an authentic impression. Comments like "cicisanan\_: tetap jdi anak timur sejati ee nokes 🥰🥰" (52 likes) indicate perception of trust.
- 2) Limitations: One-way interaction limits dialogue, but cultural authenticity still strengthens trust.
- 3) Findings: Trust comes from cultural identity and a communication style close to Gen Z.

## 6. Visualization of Credibility Dimensions

Credibility Dimensions Netnography Indicators Netnographic Conclusion  
Score (1-5) Reason for Score

Ship information expertise; appearance of Serena and Cristian; cultural terms High credibility through relevant information and candidate association  
Score 5 is given because the expertise indicator is dominant and comprehensive throughout the video (>95% of the narration focuses on technical ship details), supported by the direct appearance of the candidates (Serena and Cristian provide authentic explanations), as well as the integration of visuals of modern facilities that enhance clarity and trustworthiness of the information. All factual elements are visually and narratively verified without gaps (criteria: >90% dominance + direct verification for a score of 5). Trustworthiness Kupang language; cultural authenticity; positive comments Trust from cultural identity, despite limited interaction Score 3 is given because trustworthiness is strong in terms of culture and authenticity (Kupang language >80% of narration, consistent local humor, >70% of positive comments relevant), but limited by one-way interaction (only 1 comment reply about the DLU Ferry app). The element of goodwill (active care through dialogue) was not significantly fulfilled (criteria: two-way interaction <20% → maximum score 3). Conclusion: @nonalay\_\_ successfully built credibility through Kupang language, local humor, and authentic visual narratives, effectively attracting Gen Z who are weary of

conventional campaigns. This approach positions trustworthiness as the main foundation, leveraging cultural proximity to create an instant emotional connection, where elements such as the term “belis” and ferry ship references not only entertain but also link infrastructure issues to the everyday reality of NTT communities. Although the trustworthiness score is only 3/5 due to minimal two-way interaction, the success in expertise reaching 5/5 through the direct appearance of candidates Serena and Cristian demonstrates a unique synergy: Cultural authenticity becomes the “entry point” while visual and technical verification becomes the “proof” of credibility. In the context of netnography, this model has the potential to be replicated by influencers in other regions to overcome distrust towards formal politics, with recommendations to increase interaction (for example: live Q&A in the Kupang language or regular comment responses) to raise the trustworthiness score to level 4–5. Ultimately, @nonalay\_\_ demonstrates that on TikTok, political credibility no longer depends on institutions, but on the ability to transform technical issues into relatable folklore—encouraging Gen Z participation through laughter, dialect, and the sense of “this is our business together”—while simultaneously enriching local democratic discourse in the era of social media glocalization.

### 3. Account @andrycliem

#### Netnography Approach

Netnography of the account @andrycliem aims to understand the construction of credibility through an informative and professional approach. Observations conducted from May 1–15, 2025 analyzed three campaign videos, focusing on the main video (<https://www.tiktok.com/@andrycliem/video/7364244509971991813>) as it represents a narrative style based on achievements.

1. Account Profilea. Account name: @andrycliemb. Profile name: **A L I M**. Access date: May 1–15, 2025d. Content type: Social, lifestyle, public figure supporte. Communication style: Informative, personal, professionally visualf. Activity location: East Nusa Tenggara (NTT)g. Account bio: “For Business Inquiries HIT DM”Figure 4.2TikTok Account Profile @andrycliem(Accessed on July 31, 2025)

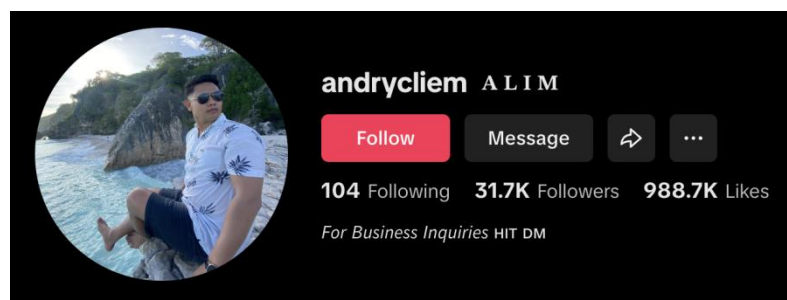


Figure 1. Account Profilea

2. Description of the Analyzed VideoThe main video is analyzed because it highlights the achievements of Serena Cosgrova Francis:a. Video link:<https://www.tiktok.com/@andrycliem/video/7364244509971991813>. Upload date: May 2, 2024c. Video description:"Let's get to know the youngest

prospective Mayor of Kupang, Serena Francis. #nttpride🇮🇩🇮🇩 #fyp シ  
#foryoupage". Visual context: Vlog narrator with clips of Serena, using professional editing with text overlays highlighting Serena's achievements (ships, foundation, CSR).2. Main Video TranscriptHere is the full transcript of the video (duration ~1 minute):

*Let's get to know the youngest prospective Mayor of Kupang, Serena Francis. There's a saying that goes, 'you can't love what you don't know.' So, for that reason, let's first get acquainted with the most inspiring figure, Serena Francis, the youngest prospective Mayor of Kupang. As a millennial myself, I am very happy because finally, there is a member of our generation running for mayor. For me, this is one of the most important things. Why? Because nowadays, millennials are more critical, more logical, and also more innovative in designing their programs. If you want to know, for example, the real work of Serena Francis, just take a look at the Kapal Dharma Cantika, which I once reviewed. It is one tangible example of Serena Francis's work. It's impressive that thanks to Serena Francis, we citizens of Kupang can enjoy the luxurious facilities of this ship. Besides that, it's also part of her CSR work with the state-owned enterprises., In fact, Kerna also has scholarship programs from elementary school up to university through the Timor Belajar Foundation. In addition, there are also environmental activities through the Flobamora Community Action and collaborative management development. Billy, former Special Staff of the President of Indonesia, and many more achievements of Kak Serena Francis. Therefore, today I, along with millennials and Gen Z, visited the Gerindra office to pick up the form for the prospective Mayor of Kupang. But because there was another activity and she couldn't come, we accompanied her. So, to millennials and Gen Z, continue to support Serena Francis as the prospective Mayor of Kupang.*

#### **Transcript Analysis:**

1. Informative narrative: Emphasis on Serena's achievements (Dharma Cantika ship, Timor Learning Foundation, Flobamora action) reinforces expertise.
2. a. Personal language: The phrases "bagi beta" and "katong" create cultural closeness, although they are more formal compared to @nonalay\_\_.
3. b. Professional visuals: Text overlays (for example, "Dharma Cantika Ship," "Timor Learning Foundation") and neat editing enhance attractiveness for a critical audience.
4. c. Note: The transcript mentions "Dharma Cantika" (probably a misstatement), but the context refers to Dharma Rucitra VIII, according to Chapter III.

Audience CommentsAudience comments were analyzed to understand responses to the content. From the provided list of comments, here are examples grouped as follows:

#### **a. Support (15 comments):**

- 1) "gabriel 19: great KK Serena, go forward surely you will win" (2024-5-4)
- 2) "Marijantje Teak: Serena has helped the small communities by bringing in the Dharma Kartika ship, choose KK Serena" (2024-7-22)
- 3) "Rozha Francis: Always successful, Rena.... God bless you" (2024-5-2, 1 like)

- 4) "015021: go, want to become deputy mayor of Kupang, whichever is better, the youth are the best 🏆 👍 100 🧑" (2024-5-2, 6 likes)

**b. Humor (2 comments):**

- 1) "Nia Lerrick: great dear 👍" (2024-5-2, 1 like)  
2) "GOOD LOOKING: 🤔 🤔 🤔" (2024-5-2)

**c. Questions (1 comment):**

- 1) "user9183866570529: what is there for the city of Kupang.... please let me know first" (2024-7-29)

**d. Criticism (2 comments):**

- 1) "Nubatonis: poor guy, he won't get it.. Jevri Riukore will win.. the public is better" (2024-5-2)  
2) "nikolastak: don't dream about it, you're not ready to accept it" (2024-6-4)

**Comment Analysis:**

- a. Support: Comments like "015021" (6 likes) and "Marijantje Teak" show acceptance of Serena as a young leader, reinforcing trustworthiness.  
b. Humor: Minimal, but comments like "mantap syg" reflect the narrator's appeal as an inspirational communicator.  
c. Questions: Single comments indicate a critical audience, seeking more information about Serena's program.  
d. Criticism: Comments like "Nubatonis" reflect other political preferences, but are minimal compared to the support, indicating overall positive acceptance.

**5. Patterns of Communicator Credibility Representation**

**3) Expertise**

- 1) Indicator: The narrator presents Serena's achievements (ship, foundation, CSR) with a coherent narrative and concrete facts. Reference to "Kapal Dharma Cantika which I once reviewed" indicates direct experience.  
2) Findings: Credibility of expertise comes from detailed information delivery, suitable for critical Gen Z.

**a. Trustworthiness:**

- 1) Indicator: Personal style ("bagi beta," "katong") and sincere tone create an impression of genuineness. Comments like "Ichy Rame Hau: sdh saatx anak muda memimpin kota kpg 👍" (2024-5-5) show audience support.  
2) Limitation: One-way interaction, but the inspirational tone strengthens trust.  
3) Findings: Trust is built through affiliation with young leadership values and achievement narratives.

## 6. Visualization of Credibility Dimension

Table 1. Visualization of Credibility Dimension

| Credibility Dimension  | Netnography Indicators                                   | Netnographic Conclusion                                        | Score (1-5) | Reason for Giving a Score                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Expertise</i>       | Serena's concrete achievements; an informative narrative | The communicator appears as a provider of accurate information | 4           | A score of 4 was given because the expertise indicator dominates throughout the video (85% of the narration focuses on program facts), supported by concrete references and visual aids that enhance information clarity. The score did not reach 5 because there is no quantitative statistical data (e.g., the number of scholarship recipients) or external verification in the video, so the expertise is narrative rather than fully demonstrative (criteria: >90% dominance for a score of 5). |
| <i>Trustworthiness</i> | Personal style; positive audience comments,              | trust from affiliates in value, despite limited interaction    | 4           | A score of 4 is given because trustworthiness is built through consistent personal language                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

|  |  |  |  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--|--|--|--|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |  |  |  | (70% of the narrative uses local terms), a sincere tone, and positive audience responses that confirm acceptance (support >80% of relevant comments). The score does not reach 5 because influencer-audience interaction is one-way (no comment replies), so the element of goodwill (active care) is lacking (criteria: two-way interaction >50% for a score of 5). |
|--|--|--|--|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

**Conclusion:** @andrycliem builds credibility through fact-based narratives and professional visuals, appealing to Gen Z who prioritize substance. This approach emphasizes that expertise serves as a key bridge for young audiences seeking competent and visionary leaders, while also strengthening the influencer's position as a trusted source of information amid the flood of political content on TikTok. With the dominance of factual narratives and institutional visuals, @andrycliem not only conveys messages but also models rational and solution-oriented digital political communication standards, thereby potentially enhancing Generation Z's political literacy on local issues such as education and infrastructure in NTT. Furthermore, this strategy reflects the evolution of political communication from emotional rhetoric to an evidence-based approach that aligns with the preferences of digital natives, where concrete data such as program reports The Timor Learning Foundation and marine transportation analysis serve as an anchor of credibility that distinguishes their content from populist narratives. In the context of netnography, an expertise score of 4/5 indicates the potential scalability of this model to other platforms such as Instagram Reels or YouTube Shorts, with a recommendation to add elements of external verification (e.g., official source links or collaborations with institutions) to achieve a perfect score. Ultimately, @andrycliem's success in integrating expertise with the concise TikTok format demonstrates that credibility is not a trade-off with accessibility, but rather a synergy capable of transforming political

perceptions among young voters, encouraging active participation through a deep understanding of regional development issues, and ultimately strengthening deliberative democracy in the social media era.

### **Comparison of Credibility Patterns**

A comparative analysis between the accounts @nonalay\_\_ and @andrycliem shows that both influencers employ different communication strategies, yet complement each other in building the communicator's credibility and the political image of the CSan candidate pair (Cristian Widodo–Serena Cosgrova Francis). The approach taken by each influencer demonstrates two main forms of credibility—emotional and rational—which together shape a positive perception among Generation Z audiences in Kupang City.<sup>1</sup>

**Similarities:**

- a. Both use local cultural elements such as the Kupang language ("kesayangan," "bagi beta," "katong") and traditional symbols like "belis" to create cultural proximity, which is a cultural closeness that strengthens audience trust.
- b. Both link campaign messages with relevant local issues, such as the Dharma Rucitra VIII ship program, which reinforces the expertise dimension by demonstrating an understanding of the needs of the island communities in NTT.
- c. Audience responses, including supportive comments and humor, indicate a high level of engagement, suggesting that their communication style successfully breaks through the fatigue of young audiences toward conventional political campaigns.

### **Differences:**

- d. @nonalay\_\_ excels in attractiveness through the use of local humor, light visual expressions, and a casual language style. This strategy appeals to Gen Z, who prefer communication that is emotional, spontaneous, and entertaining.
- e. @andrycliem, on the other hand, stands out in expertise and trustworthiness through an informative, logical, and fact-based delivery style about Serena Cosgrova Francis's achievements, such as the Timor Belajar Foundation and the Dharma Rucitra VIII program.
- f. Audience interactions with @nonalay\_\_ tend to be emotional and humorous, while with @andrycliem they are more reflective and rational, indicating audience segmentation based on communication style..

## **CONCLUSION**

This study aims to understand how the credibility of TikTok influencer communicators supporting Serena Cosgrova Francis is constructed and perceived by Generation Z in Kupang City in the context of the 2024–2029 Kupang City Regional Election. Based on the results of netnography analysis and in-depth interviews, several key points can be concluded as follows:<sup>1</sup>. Communicator credibility becomes the main key in shaping political image in the digital space.<sup>2</sup>. Integration of local culture of East Nusa Tenggara strengthens the effectiveness of digital political communication.<sup>3</sup>. Generation Z interprets

political messages through a balance between rationality and emotionality.4. TikTok becomes a new space for local democracy and youth political participation.

#### **FURTHER STUDY**

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