

The Formation of Political Preferences Among Generation Z in the Prabowo-Gibran Campaign on Instagram

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Abstrak

This research highlights the political preferences of Generation Z within the context of the Prabowo-Gibran campaign on Instagram, a platform that has become a vital arena for shaping political imagery in the digital age. Through visual content analysis with a netnographic approach, this study explores how visual communication strategies and personal narratives are designed to respond to the dynamics of Generation Z's political preferences—a generation known for being critical, visually oriented, and hungry for authentic representation. The findings reveal that Prabowo presents himself as a firm nationalist figure, symbolizing stability and traditional strength, while Gibran positions himself as an inclusive young leader, rooted in local innovation and the aspirations of a new generation. The use of aesthetic elements such as modern visual design, strategic hashtags, and the integration of AI reflects a clever adaptation to the digital language of Generation Z, which seeks not only information but also emotional and aesthetic experiences. This study uncovers that the political preferences of Generation Z in the Prabowo-Gibran campaign on Instagram are influenced not only by the substance of political messages but also by the campaign's ability to engage collective imagination through fresh, interactive, and relevant visual mediums. In modern democracy, Instagram is no longer merely a campaign tool but a primary battleground for symbolic struggles that shape the political preferences of the youth.

Kata Kunci: Preference; Generation Z; Campaign; Prabowo-Gibran; Instagram

Introduction

Instagram stands as one of the most popular social media platforms in Indonesia, particularly among young voters. With over 80 million active users in the country, Instagram has emerged as an effective medium for candidates to digitally convey their campaign messages (Pineda et al., 2022). The platform enables innovative and creative interactions with voters, providing opportunities for political candidates to build positive images and garner widespread support (Boulianne & Larsson, 2023) (Baharuddin et al., 2022; Firdaus et al., 2024). Through its dynamic features, Instagram not only facilitates communication but also serves as a strategic tool for engaging with the electorate, particularly the younger generation, who are pivotal in shaping the outcomes of modern democratic processes.

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The candidacy of Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka in the 2024 Presidential Election has not been without controversy, sparking both support and opposition among the public. One of the primary issues is the allegation of constitutional rights violations in Gibran's candidacy (Sulistiyowati et al., 2024). As the son of President Joko Widodo (Jokowi), Gibran is perceived to have received political favoritism through direct endorsements from his father, leading to accusations of an attempt to perpetuate a political dynasty (Fealy, 2024). His perception is further reinforced by the fact that Bobby Nasution, Jokowi's son-in-law, currently serves as the Mayor of Medan, suggesting that Jokowi's political dynasty is becoming increasingly structured and systematic. (Kimura & Anugrah, 2024).

On the other hand, Prabowo Subianto continues to face intense scrutiny over allegations of past human rights (HR) violations, particularly during his tenure as the commander of Kopassus. Cases such as the 1998 activist abductions and controversial military operations remain a significant political burden that is difficult to detach from his public image. Despite Prabowo's efforts to construct a narrative of nationalism and firm leadership to garner public sympathy, the human rights issue persists as a tool wielded by political opponents to undermine his legitimacy (McGregor & Setiawan, 2019).

The success of Prabowo-Gibran in winning the 2024 Presidential Election has created an intriguing dynamic in Indonesia's political landscape, particularly through their adept use of digital political campaign strategies on social media. The pair demonstrated their prowess by adaptively and innovatively optimizing digital campaign spaces, which ultimately had a significant impact on voter preferences (Perdana Aditya & Imam Muhammad, 2024). Prabowo-Gibran leveraged Instagram as a primary tool for their campaign, utilizing algorithms, user demographics, and relevant content trends to achieve their political objectives (Guess et al., 2023; Lim, 2023). Various elements offered by social media—such as aesthetically pleasing visuals, interactive content, and strategic hashtag usage—were effectively employed by the duo to capture the attention of voters, particularly from Generation Z (Permadi et al., 2024).

Previous studies on the use of social media in political campaigns have predominantly focused on platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, particularly within the context of elections in Western countries (Adi et al., 2018; Allcott et al., 2024; Jawad Z. Salic, 2023; Ritonga et al., 2017; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019; Widayat et al., 2022). However, research specifically examining the use of Instagram as a primary medium for political campaigns in Indonesia, particularly by the Prabowo-Gibran duo, remains significantly limited (Junior & Hanif, 2024; Rinna A. Putri et al., 2023;

Susetyawidianta & Gerald, 2024). The evolving dynamics of politics, coupled with advancements in information technology, necessitate more contemporary and contextually relevant analyses to address the current landscape (Maharani & Nurafifah, 2020).

This research aims to fill a gap in the existing literature by providing an in-depth analysis of the use of Instagram as a digital campaign tool by the Prabowo-Gibran duo, a perspective that has yet to be explored through the lens of Generation Z. The primary focus of this study is to examine how Instagram is strategically utilized to appeal to young voters and enhance the electability of the pair in the 2024 Presidential Election. Through this approach, the research is expected to offer new insights into the effectiveness of social media within the context of modern political campaigns in Indonesia.

Method

To analyze the political preferences of Generation Z in supporting Prabowo-Gibran on Instagram, this study employs the netnographic method. According to (Fernando, 2021) netnography is a suitable approach for understanding the perspectives of Instagram users as reflected in the virtual world. This method enables researchers to explore data in depth through interactions and user-generated content on Instagram. Data collection began by examining posts from verified (blue badge) Instagram accounts *prabowogibran*, *prabowo*, and *gibran_rakabuming* which are active and consistently share content related to the Prabowo-Gibran political campaign. The account selection was based on the hashtag keyword *#prabowogibran*, considering its high volume of follower reposts and visibility, identifying these accounts as frequently searched and influential in political discussions about the candidate pair. The sampling strategy focuses on posts that demonstrate significant interaction such as likes, comments, and reposts reflecting the communicative dynamics of Generation Z audiences. Data was systematically collected using online documentation techniques, utilizing the capture or screenshot feature on smartphones to gather relevant images of posts related to the research topic. The collected data was then classified based on the research questions. Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach, focusing on developing themes or topics inductively from the images. The emerging themes were narrated and conclusions were drawn to address the research objectives (Fernando et al., 2022).

Discussion

Instagram and Politics

Indonesia, with a population of over 270 million people, boasts a vast and rapidly growing base of internet users. According to the 2023 report by We Are Social and Hootsuite, more than 170 million people in Indonesia actively use social media. Among the various platforms available, Instagram stands out as one of the most popular. The majority of Instagram users in Indonesia are young people, particularly those aged 18-34, who account for nearly 70% of the total user base. This makes Instagram an ideal platform for reaching a dynamic, progressive, and influential demographic, including in the realm of politics.

With over 100 million active users each month, Instagram plays a crucial role not only in social contexts but also in the political landscape. The platform is equipped with advanced and innovative features, such as Stories, Reels, and other visually engaging and interactive integrations, making it increasingly popular compared to other social media platforms like TikTok, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. These features provide users, particularly the younger generation, with the space to explore creative and immersive content. The growing popularity of Instagram among Indonesian youth further solidifies its position as a strategic medium in modern digital communication.

The latest data shows that Instagram usage in Indonesia has continued to grow significantly. In 2024, Instagram became the most popular social media platform in Indonesia, with 84.80% of internet users actively using the app, equivalent to approximately 173.59 million users. This widespread popularity has made Instagram an increasingly relevant tool for political campaigning, as politicians leverage the platform to reach the public more effectively and broadly, particularly in capturing the attention of younger audiences. Data analysis reveals that Instagram has the highest engagement rate in the political sector compared to other platforms, with an average engagement rate reaching 3%. This figure indicates that political content on Instagram garners significant attention and interaction from users, making the platform a highly effective medium for political campaigns.

Instagram: The Political Medium of Generation Z

In the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election (Pilpres), Instagram has emerged as a highly effective tool for political campaigning. Politicians and political parties have leveraged the platform to reach and engage with voters, particularly first-time voters or Generation Z (Generation Z), who are heavily reliant on social media as a primary

source of information. Instagram allows politicians to convey their messages in a more personal and visually appealing manner, making it easier for young audiences to receive and understand these messages (Kulau, 2024). During the 2024 election, many politicians and political parties adopted Instagram as their primary campaign medium (Harahap, 2020). With over 100 million active users monthly, Instagram has become a strategically vital platform for reaching young voters, especially Generation Z, who have grown up in the digital age and are highly active in social media spaces (Rizky & Aji, 2024).

Digital political campaigns on Instagram leverage a variety of innovative features to deliver concise and diverse content. Features such as Instagram Live enable candidates to interact directly with voters, while Instagram Stories allow them to share campaign moments in real-time (Olof Larsson, 2023). The visual content presented is not only engaging but also helps convey political messages more effectively compared to text alone (Towner & Muñoz, 2022; Vargo & Hopp, 2020). The interpretation of the content provides valuable insights into the campaign activities being conducted, while simultaneously shaping a positive image that aligns with the preferences of young audiences (Towner & Muñoz, 2022). This is achieved through online activities in the form of words or actions by their followers, which attract widespread public attention (Susila et al., 2020).

Generation Z, the demographic cohort born between the mid-to-late 1990s and the early 2010s, represents a generation that has grown up in an era of rapid information expansion, with digital technology as an integral part of their daily lives. They are often referred to as *digital natives*, having been born and raised alongside the rapid development of internet technology (W Retno Wiratih et al., 2022). This has made them highly proficient in using various digital platforms, including Instagram. The platform serves as a space for Generation Z to express themselves, share interests, and interact with the wider world. Instagram provides them with the opportunity to access information quickly and engagingly through creative visual content. In the context of elections, Generation Z occupies the position of first-time voters—those who have reached the age of 17 and gained the right to vote. They tend to seek political information through social media, with Instagram being one of their primary sources. This reliance on visually-driven and interactive content makes Instagram a critical medium for reaching and influencing this demographic during electoral campaigns.

Through Instagram, Generation Z can stay updated on current news, learn about political candidates, and understand key issues being discussed. The visual and interactive content presented on Instagram is often more appealing to young audiences

compared to traditional media. Recognizing this, politicians and political parties have come to understand the importance of Instagram in reaching Generation Z and have utilized the platform to run effective campaigns. One notable strategy is influencer marketing, where influencers with large followings are employed by politicians to expand the reach of their campaigns. Generation Z tends to follow influencers they trust and are often inspired by their opinions and recommendations (Fitriyani et al., 2024). Influencers can help convey political messages in a more personal and relatable manner, which is often more effective than traditional campaign advertisements. This approach not only enhances engagement but also builds a stronger emotional connection with young voters, making political campaigns more impactful in the digital age.

In addition, the use of hashtags has become a crucial strategy in Instagram campaigns. Successful campaigns often create strong, memorable hashtags that users adopt to demonstrate their support. These hashtags help organize campaign-related content and facilitate the dissemination of information. When a hashtag gains traction and becomes a trend, it can significantly boost campaign visibility and attract media attention (Husna & Mairita, 2024). The use of Instagram as a tool for digital political campaigning has proven its strategic importance in targeting Generation Z, a generation known for being critical and tech-savvy. The fact that Instagram dominates Generation Z's information consumption underscores that mastering this platform is not merely an option but a necessity for political actors seeking to expand their support base. Instagram is not just a campaign venue; it is also a vital instrument in reconstructing the relationship between politicians and Generation Z voters. The success of a campaign on Instagram hinges on the ability to blend traditional political messaging with fresh, interactive, and inclusive digital approaches.

This research highlights that Instagram is the primary battleground in modern democracy, especially in influencing the political preferences of Generation Z. With the right strategies—such as collaborating with influencers, using effective hashtags, and presenting engaging visual content—politicians can build emotional connections with young voters and enhance their electability (Durrah et al., 2020).

Campaign Posts by Prabowo-Gibran on Instagram

Modern political campaigns have shifted towards digital approaches, known as digital political campaigning, which leverages technology and platforms such as social media to disseminate messages, mobilize support, and influence public opinion (Ridout et al., 2024). The advantages of this approach lie in its broad reach, cost efficiency, direct interaction with voters, and the ability to precisely target messaging (Rahyadi & Aras,

2020). Unlike conventional campaigns, which are long-term and focus on consistency, digital campaigns are dynamic and adaptive. For instance, election campaigns are typically short-term and concentrate on boosting electability as voting day approaches (Aspinall, 2005). In this context, social media becomes a crucial tool for building images and influencing voter preferences within a limited timeframe.

Political advertising on social media plays a crucial role in shaping the image of candidates and differentiating them from competitors through strategic positioning (Raynauld & Lalancette, 2023). Beyond highlighting strengths, digital campaigns also create emotional connections with voters, particularly the younger generation, by delivering relevant messages that align with viral trends (Raynauld & Lalancette, 2023). This involves crystallizing a political identity that distinguishes a candidate from other election participants, making them an appealing choice for voters (Ohme, 2019; Zulli & Towner, 2021). This involves crystallizing a political identity that distinguishes a candidate from other election participants, making them an appealing choice for voters (Bast, 2021). To ensure effectiveness, digital campaigns must understand their target audience, such as young people, by designing messages that resonate with their values and aspirations (Parmelee et al., 2023). Constructing an image that harmonizes with the interests of younger generations has become the cornerstone of successful modern political campaigns (Sampietro & Sánchez-Castillo, 2020).

1. Narrative of Nasionalism

Prabowo Subianto, as a senior political figure and Chairman of the Gerindra Party, leverages Instagram to reinforce his image as a firm and committed nationalist leader dedicated to Indonesia's sovereignty. Through the official TKN media center account @prabowo.gibran, Prabowo's political image is crafted with an emphasis on nationalism, symbolizing the struggle of the Indonesian people and embodying unity to improve the lives of the nation and homeland.

Political communication by Prabowo on this platform frequently highlights his activities as the Minister of Defense. These posts not only showcase his official duties but also convey strategic messages related to national security, sustainable development, and government policies aligned with President Joko Widodo's (Jokowi) vision. An analysis of these posts reveals that Prabowo uses social media to effectively communicate his policies and political vision to the public. His primary objective is to build and strengthen his image as a competent, dedicated, and integrous leader in fulfilling his national responsibilities.

Figure 1. Nationalist Themed Posts



Source: Prabowo's Instagram Account.

Based on the aforementioned posts, Prabowo Subianto utilizes Instagram as a strategic tool to construct his image as a firm, populist, and dedicated nationalist leader committed to the sovereignty of the nation. His posts not only highlight formal activities, such as his official duties as Minister of Defense, but also capture moments of direct interaction with the public. For instance, he frequently shares photos and videos of visits to remote areas, interactions with members of the military and police, and his participation in social and humanitarian activities. These contents are meticulously designed to bring him closer to the people, foster emotional connections, and showcase his humane side as a leader who is attentive to the aspirations of the public.

Each of Prabowo's posts also reflects an effort to reinforce the narrative of his leadership through national symbols, such as the Indonesian flag, references to significant historical events, and powerful rhetoric about national sovereignty. These messages aim to solidify his image as a guardian of the nation's integrity, committed to Indonesia's progress. Furthermore, Prabowo highlights his involvement in global issues, such as peace agendas and international conflict resolution. This demonstrates that he

is a leader who not only thinks locally but also possesses a global perspective, adding a diplomatic dimension to his persona.

Prabowo's communication strategy on Instagram also emphasizes humanitarian values and concern for communities, particularly in remote areas. Posts showcasing social and humanitarian activities not only strengthen support from his existing base but also attract a broader audience, including international constituents. By presenting himself in informal settings and directly engaging with the public, Prabowo successfully portrays himself as a relatable leader who understands the people's struggles and is ready to act in the nation's best interests.

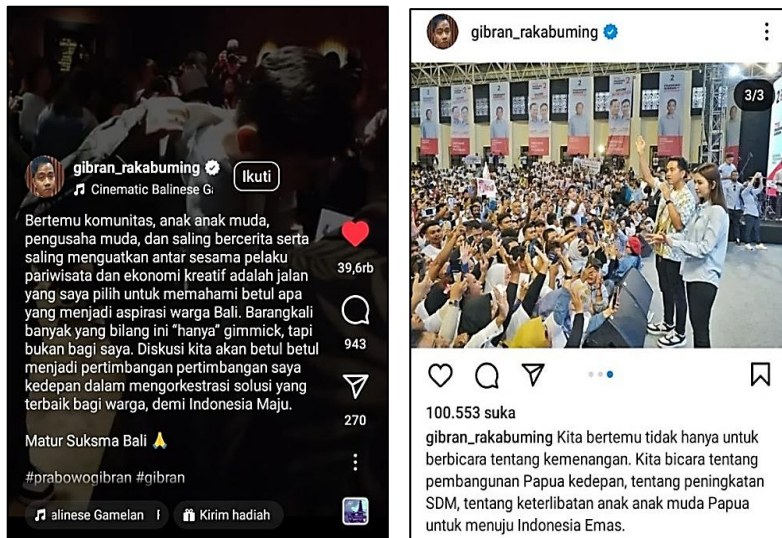
In conclusion, Prabowo's use of Instagram represents a strategic and intelligent approach to political communication. Each post is carefully designed to convey key messages: care for the people, closeness to the community, and a commitment to global peace and national progress. This strategy has successfully reinforced Prabowo's image as a leader who is not only firm and dedicated but also humane and responsive to both global and local issues. Thus, Instagram serves not merely as a tool for information dissemination but as a medium for constructing a political identity that resonates with the values and aspirations of modern society. The success of this strategy is evident in the enhancement of his positive image among voters, particularly Generation Z, which has emerged as a pivotal demographic in determining the outcome of the 2024 General Election.

2. Campaign for Youth Community

Gibran Rakabuming Raka adopts a more profound and personalized approach in utilizing Instagram, emphasizing personal aspects and direct interactions with the public. Through his personal Instagram account, he frequently posts about the programs he has launched during his tenure as Mayor of Solo, with a primary focus on the development of MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) and the digital creative sector—areas that align closely with the interests of the youth market.

Gibran Rakabuming Raka's personal Instagram account highlights his focus on demonstrating his closeness to the community and his active role in governance. His posts frequently showcase his flagship programs, particularly those related to the development of MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises), the digital creative sector, and social initiatives such as stunting prevention. These programs reflect his priorities in empowering local economies and fostering innovation, strategically designed to capture the attention of the younger generation and align with their aspirations.

Figure 2. Posts with The Theme of Youth Community



Source: Gibran Rakabuming's Instagram Account.

Gibran consistently shares photos and videos that highlight his direct interactions with the public, including listening to grievances, offering practical solutions, and actively participating in development projects across various regions. These posts not only showcase his day-to-day activities but also construct a narrative portraying him as an accessible, transparent, and empathetic leader who is deeply attuned to the needs of the community. His emphasis on MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) and the digital creative sector underscores his commitment to advancing local economies and nurturing the creative potential of the younger generation. Each post is meticulously crafted to explain the objectives, achievements, and societal impact of these programs, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of his policies.

In addition, Gibran utilizes Instagram as a tool to demonstrate transparency in his leadership. By sharing daily activities, development projects, and the implementation of policies, he provides a clear picture of the ongoing efforts by the city government. This approach not only enhances accountability but also builds public trust in his leadership. Gibran also actively engages the younger generation in various initiatives, both through the programs he supports and via direct interactions on social media. This un-

derscores the importance of youth participation in urban development and leverages their creative potential for collective progress.

Gibran's strategy in utilizing Instagram reflects a holistic and modern approach to political communication. He successfully integrates personal, professional, and innovative elements to build an image as a leader who is close to the people, visionary, and responsive to the needs of the younger generation. Through this approach, Gibran not only strengthens local support but also captures the attention of a broader audience, including Generation Z, who are the primary target of his digital campaign. This strategy has proven effective in enhancing his popularity on social media, significantly contributing to the legitimacy and public support for the Prabowo-Gibran ticket in the 2024 General Election. Gibran's use of Instagram as a political communication tool demonstrates that modern campaigns must be willing to adapt to the dynamics of the digital age to win the hearts of today's voters.

3. Campaign by Using Hashtags and Trends

Prabowo-Gibran strategically employs hashtags to broaden the reach of their posts and align their content with trending issues in digital campaigns. The use of hashtags enhances Generation Z engagement on Instagram, fostering a deeper connection with the broader narratives unfolding across social media platforms.

The use of hashtags in the digital campaign of Prabowo-Gibran demonstrates a strategic utilization of Instagram's algorithm. The more frequently certain hashtags are used, the greater the likelihood that the content will reach a wider audience and enhance its visibility. For instance, hashtags such as *#prabowogibranmenang*, *#indonesiamaju*, *#prabowogibransekaliputaran*, and *#prabowogibran* have garnered significant engagement, with the number of posts ranging from 12.1 thousand to 305 thousand based on searches in Instagram's search bar. This indicates that these hashtags are not only being utilized by the campaign team and their supporters but also by general users participating in political discussions surrounding the candidate pair.

These hashtags are effective in several ways. First, they help organize and categorize content, enabling users to quickly find posts that are relevant to their interests. Second, the hashtags allow Prabowo-Gibran's content to appear in search results for users interested in specific issues or campaigns, thereby expanding their audience reach. Third, by engaging in broader narratives through the use of hashtags, they can capitalize on trending momentum to enhance the exposure and relevance of their content (Omena et al., 2020).

Figure 3. Campaign Hashtags and Trends



Source: Instagram.

Moreover, analysis reveals that the use of hashtags also serves as a tool for building communities and enhancing engagement. The consistent and relevant use of hashtags creates dynamic discussion spaces where users can share perspectives, support campaigns, and participate in broader dialogues. This generates a multiplier effect, wherein each post using a specific hashtag contributes to greater visibility and increased interaction. The popularity of these hashtags further reinforces the political image of Prabowo-Gibran, particularly through the viral song "Oke-Gas." This song adds a modern and lighthearted touch to Prabowo's previously perceived stern and firm image, while Gibran complements this with a more aesthetic and minimalist approach. This transformation has successfully captured the attention of younger audiences and enhanced their political appeal (Irawan & Lexianingrum, 2024).

In addition, the use of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and animation has become an innovative element in their campaign. Visuals and audio created using AI, such as animated cartoon characters styled as "gemoy" (cute and endearing), went viral on social media and gained popularity among Generation Z (Rachmawati et al., 2024). The incorporation of these technologies adds a modern and

creative touch to their campaign, making the content more distinctive and memorable (Siregar et al., 2024).

By presenting content that is creative, aesthetically pleasing, and relevant, Prabowo-Gibran successfully positioned themselves as modern leaders who are adaptive to technological changes and attuned to the preferences of Generation Z. The strategic use of AI, animation, and hashtags demonstrates that their campaign is not merely following trends but represents a serious effort at innovation to capture the attention of younger generations. This strategy has strengthened their presence on social media, created memorable narratives, and built a solid, active, and emotionally engaged community of supporters. The campaign underscores that modern politics must adapt to the dynamics of the digital age to win the votes of young Generation Z voters.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that Prabowo-Gibran successfully utilized Instagram as a strategic tool to garner support from Generation Z. Prabowo emphasized his image as a firm and nationalist leader through formal content that highlighted nationalistic values, while Gibran showcased a personal touch along with innovative programs supporting MSMEs and youth creativity. This combination created a complementary narrative: Prabowo as a symbol of stability and experience, and Gibran as a representation of a dynamic and visionary younger generation. The strategic use of hashtags, creative content such as the viral song "Oke-Gas," and aesthetically modern AI-based visuals and audio proved highly effective in strengthening their image among Generation Z. High-quality visual aesthetics in each post also played a crucial role in capturing the attention of a tech-savvy and discerning digital audience. Additionally, an adaptive campaign approach that aligned with social media trends helped this duo build strong emotional connections with young voters.

This study affirms that the use of Instagram in political campaigns has become an effective strategy for influencing the political preferences of Generation Z in the Indonesian presidential election. However, the emotional closeness and interactive engagement created through social media also have the potential to drive impulsive and subjective political decision-making, as young voters' preferences are often shaped by digitally constructed political images. This condition indicates that social media-based political campaigns carry risks that may obscure voters' rational judgment. Thus, this dynamic presents both a challenge and a significant implication for digital democracy,

especially as Generation Z emerges as the dominant voter demographic in the contemporary political landscape.

Authenticity Statement

This manuscript is an original work free from plagiarism. All relevant references have been properly cited throughout the article, and this paper has neither been published previously nor is it under consideration for publication in any other journal.

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