



## Trust, Expertise and Public Appeal: Factors Influencing Perceptions of Political Brand Ambassadors in Indonesian Political Marketing

Vita Subiyakti<sup>1</sup>, Mohamad Irhas Effendi<sup>2</sup>, Dyah Sugandini<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Veteran National Development University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, [v.vitasubiyakti@gmail.com](mailto:v.vitasubiyakti@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Veteran National Development University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, [irhas@upnveteran.ac.id](mailto:irhas@upnveteran.ac.id)

<sup>3</sup>Veteran National Development University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, [dyah@upnveteran.ac.id](mailto:dyah@upnveteran.ac.id)

Corresponding Author: [v.vitasubiyakti@gmail.com](mailto:v.vitasubiyakti@gmail.com)<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The transformation of government communication in the digital age has led to an increase in the personalization of public policy communication through government officials who serve as political brand ambassadors. In the context of fiscal policy communication, the credibility of the Minister of Finance is a key factor in shaping public attitudes and perceptions toward government policies. This study aims to analyze the influence of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness on attitudes toward the political brand ambassador and its implications for the perception of the political brand ambassador in the figure of the Minister of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia, Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa. The study employs a quantitative approach using a survey method involving 310 respondents and is analyzed using PLS-SEM. The results indicate that trustworthiness and attractiveness have a positive and significant effect on attitudes toward the political brand ambassador, while expertise does not have a significant effect. Furthermore, attitudes toward the political brand ambassador were found to have a positive effect on perceptions of the political brand ambassador and mediate the effects of trustworthiness and attractiveness, but do not mediate the effect of expertise. These findings suggest that public perception of government officials is more influenced by integrity and symbolic appeal than by technocratic competence alone. This study contributes to the development of Source Credibility Theory within the context of political marketing and public policy communication in the digital age.

**Keywords:** Trustworthiness, Expertise, Attractiveness, Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador, Perception of the Political Brand Ambassador, Political Marketing

### INTRODUCTION

The transformation of government communication in the digital age has shifted public communication patterns from a one-way, bureaucratic model toward a more interactive, participatory, and personalized form of communication. The rise of social media has enabled government officials to convey policy information directly to the public without relying entirely on conventional mass media (Wellman, 2024). This situation indicates that

government communication is no longer understood solely as institutional communication, but also as communication personified through public officials who are active in the digital space. In this context, social media serves not only as a channel for conveying information, but also as an arena for shaping public perceptions regarding the legitimacy of policies and the credibility of government institutions (Hossain et al., 2024).

These changes have led to the phenomenon of *the mediatization of governance*, in which public officials no longer function solely as *policymakers*, but also as *policy communicators* and symbolic representatives of the state. Previous research indicates that the personalization of political communication through social media can enhance the visibility of leaders, strengthen emotional bonds with the audience, and influence public trust and acceptance of policy messages (Shi et al., 2025). Consequently, the public evaluates not only the substance of policies but also who is delivering them, their communication style, and the personal image presented in the digital public sphere (Wang & Kruk, 2024).

This phenomenon reflects a shift from *institutional trust* toward *personalized trust* a condition in which public trust in government policies is increasingly influenced by perceptions of individual public officials (Karampournioti & Wiedmann, 2022). In the context of complex and technical economic and fiscal policies, the public tends to use a figure-based heuristic approach (*source-based evaluation*) to assess the credibility of the information received. Therefore, public officials who possess competence, integrity, and strong communication skills have the potential to enhance the legitimacy of government policies and public trust in state institutions (Svenningsson et al., 2022).

In the Indonesian context, the Minister of Finance holds a strategic position because the role is directly linked to the management of fiscal policy, national economic stability, the state budget, taxation, and the country's economic credibility. The Minister of Finance's high public visibility means that every policy communication has the potential to shape the public's perception of the government as a whole. Public scrutiny of the Finance Minister has intensified in the digital age, as economic policy communication has become part of a public discourse that is constantly debated on social media and digital platforms.

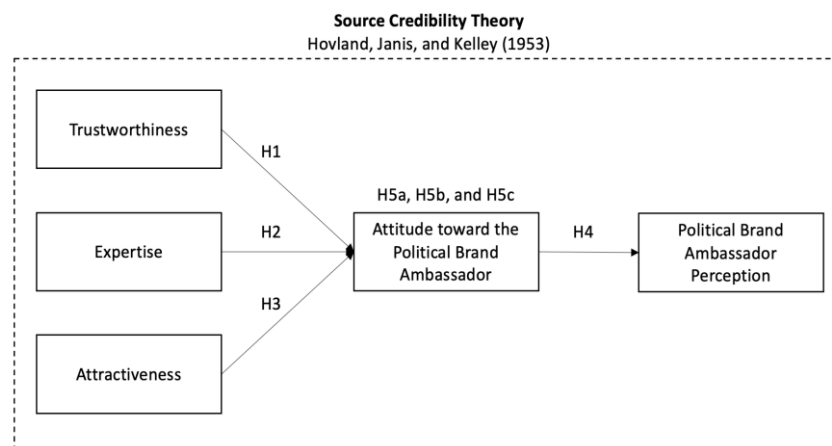
This phenomenon is evident in the figure of Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa, who is known as an economist and technocrat with strong professional credibility. Purbaya has garnered public attention because he is perceived as possessing technocratic competence, integrity, and a clear economic policy orientation. These characteristics indicate the dominance of the dimensions of *expertise* and *trustworthiness* as the primary foundations for shaping public perception of public officials in policy communication (Leite et al., 2024). From a *political marketing* perspective, this situation positions public officials as *political brand ambassadors*—symbolic representations of state institutions that convey values, credibility, and legitimacy in every policy communication they deliver (Simon & Cambefort, 2025; Alam et al., 2024).

The concept of *the political brand ambassador* has become increasingly relevant in the era of digital communication because the public evaluates not only the content of policies but also the figures who communicate them. Previous research indicates that the credibility of authority figures has a significant influence on the formation of public trust, policy acceptance, and the public's evaluation of the institutions they represent (Ucar et al., 2024). Thus, perceptions of public officials not only affect individual image but also the legitimacy of government policies and institutions more broadly.

This phenomenon can be explained by the *Source Credibility Theory* introduced by Carl Hovland, Irving Janis, and Harold Kelley. This theory explains that the effectiveness of communication is influenced by the audience's perception of the credibility of the message source, which consists of three main dimensions: *trustworthiness*, *expertise*, and *attractiveness*. *Trustworthiness* relates to the perceived honesty and integrity of the communicator; *expertise* refers to professional competence and ability; while *attractiveness* encompasses personal

appeal, communicative charisma, and emotional closeness to the audience (Ohanian, 1990; Alam et al., 2024; Shi et al., 2025). In the context of public policy communication, these three dimensions are important because the public often evaluates policy information based on the credibility of the figure conveying it (Bi & Gu, 2024).

Although research on *source credibility* has expanded in the contexts of commercial marketing, influencers, and electoral political communication, studies that position government technocrats as *political brand ambassadors* in fiscal policy communication remain relatively limited, particularly in Indonesia. However, in the context of a developing country with a high level of public sensitivity to economic issues, the credibility of public officials plays a crucial role in shaping policy legitimacy and public trust in the government. Therefore, this study is relevant for analyzing how the dimensions of *trustworthiness*, *expertise*, and *attractiveness* influence public attitudes toward public officials and shape *perceptions of political brand ambassadors* in the context of fiscal policy communication in Indonesia.



**Figure 1. Research Model**  
(Adapted from Hosain et al., 2025; and Kant et al., 2025)

## METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory *research design* to analyze the influence of *trustworthiness*, *expertise*, and *attractiveness* on *perceptions of political brand ambassadors*, using *attitude toward the political brand ambassador* as a mediating variable. A quantitative approach was chosen because this study aims to test the causal relationship between variables based on the framework of *Source Credibility Theory*. The population in this study consists of the Indonesian public who are familiar with Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa as a public figure in economic and fiscal policy communication. The sampling technique used *non-probability sampling* with a *purposive sampling* approach. The criteria for respondents in this study include: (1) being at least 17 years old, (2) being familiar with the figure of Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa, and (3) having seen or received information related to economic policy communication through digital media or social media. Based on the data collection process, this study obtained 310 respondents who met the research criteria. Data collection was conducted using an *online questionnaire* distributed via social media and digital communication platforms. All statement items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The constructs of *trustworthiness*, *expertise*, and *attractiveness* were adapted from the *Source Credibility Theory* developed by Ohanian (1990), while the constructs of *attitude toward the political brand ambassador* and *political brand ambassador perception* were adapted from prior research in the context of *political marketing* and persuasive communication. Data analysis was conducted using a *Partial Least Squares-based Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)* approach. The PLS-

SEM method was chosen because it is capable of analyzing simultaneous relationships among latent variables, including testing for mediation effects, and is suitable for use in predictive and complex research models. The analysis stages included testing *the outer model* to assess the validity and reliability of the constructs, as well as testing *the inner model* to test the hypothesized relationships between the research variables. In addition, mediation effect testing was performed using the *bootstrapping* procedure to determine the significance of indirect effects in the research model (Hai & Alamer, 2022).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1. Respondent Characteristics**

Respondent Characteristics	Number	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	199	64.2%
Female	111	35.8%
<b>Age</b>		
18–24 years	68	21.9%
25–34 years	137	44.2%
35–44 years	83	26.8%
45–50 years	16	5.1%
50 years and older	6	1.9%
<b>Education</b>		
Elementary/Junior High School	22	7.1%
High School/Vocational School	19	6.2%
Diploma (D1–D4)	64	20.6%
Bachelor's Degree (S1)	152	49%
Graduate (Master's–Ph.D.)	53	17.1%
<b>Residence</b>		
Jakarta	79	25.5%
West Java	42	13.5%
Central Java	55	17.7%
East Java	48	15.5%
Special Region of Yogyakarta	52	16.8%
Sumatra	13	4.2%
Kalimantan	12	3.9%
Bali, West Nusa Tenggara, and East Nusa Tenggara	4	1.3%
Sulawesi, Maluku, and Irian Jaya	5	1.6%
<b>Employment</b>		
Students	22	7.1%
Entrepreneurs	54	17.4%
Managerial Employees	73	23.5%
Operational Staff	32	10.3%
Educators	47	15.1%
Others	82	26.5%
<b>Platforms used to obtain information from the Minister of Finance</b>		
Instagram	106	34.2%
Twitter (X)	59	19%
TikTok	122	39.4%
WhatsApp	10	3.2%
Telegram	4	1.3%
Others	9	2.9%

Source: Processed by Researchers (2026)

Based on Table 1, this study involved 310 respondents with diverse demographic characteristics and digital media usage patterns. In terms of gender, the majority of respondents were male, totaling 199 people (64.2%), while female respondents numbered 111 (35.8%).

This composition indicates that male participation in the study was dominant, suggesting a high level of interest among this group in issues related to economic policy communication and the figure of the Minister of Finance. By age group, respondents were dominated by those aged 25–34 years (137 people, 44.2%), followed by those aged 35–44 years (83 people, 26.8%), and those aged 18–24 years (68 people, 21.9%). Meanwhile, the 45–50 age group and those over 50 had relatively small proportions, at 5.1% and 1.9%, respectively. These findings indicate that the majority of respondents come from the productive age group, who tend to actively access digital information and follow developments in economic issues and public policy through social media. In terms of education, the majority of respondents held a Bachelor’s degree (S1), totaling 152 people (49%), followed by Diploma (D1–D4) holders at 64 people (20.6%) and postgraduate (S2–S3) degree holders at 53 people (17.1%).

Meanwhile, respondents with elementary/junior high school and senior high school/vocational school education accounted for 7.1% and 6.2%, respectively. This composition indicates that the majority of respondents have a high level of education, suggesting they possess better capabilities in understanding complex economic policy and public communication issues. Based on residence, the largest number of respondents came from DKI Jakarta, totaling 79 people (25.5%), followed by Central Java with 55 people (17.7%), Yogyakarta Special Region with 52 people (16.8%), and East Java with 48 people (15.5%). There were 42 respondents (13.5%) from West Java, while other regions such as Sumatra, Kalimantan, Bali–Nusa Tenggara, and Sulawesi–Maluku–Irian Jaya had smaller proportions.

This distribution indicates that the study was dominated by respondents from the island of Java, which serves as the center of economic activity, government, and digital information access in Indonesia. In terms of occupation, the largest category of respondents came from the “other occupations” group, totaling 82 people (26.5%), followed by managerial staff at 73 people (23.5%), business owners at 54 people (17.4%), and educators at 47 people (15.1%). Additionally, there were 32 respondents (10.3%) working as operational staff and 22 respondents (7.1%) who were students. These findings indicate that the majority of respondents come from professional and active working groups who are likely to have a greater interest in economic issues and government fiscal policies.

Based on the digital platforms used to obtain information related to the Minister of Finance, the majority of respondents used TikTok (122 people, 39.4%), followed by Instagram (106 people, 34.2%) and Twitter/X (59 people, 19%). Meanwhile, the use of WhatsApp, Telegram, and other platforms was relatively low. These results indicate that social media platforms centered on visual content and short videos have become the primary channels through which the public accesses information about public figures and government policy communications in the digital age. This finding also underscores the importance of social media as a key arena for shaping public perception of government officials as political brand ambassadors.

**Table 2. Data Distribution**

Variable	Indicator	Factor Loading > 0.7	AVE > 0.5	Cronbach's Alpha > 0.7	CR > 0.7
<i>Reliability</i>	TR1	0.962	0.900	0.972	0.976
	TR2	0.953			
	TR3	0.931			
	TR4	0.957			
	TR5	0.939			
<i>Expertise</i>	EXP1	0.958	0.873	0.963	0.972
	EXP2	0.958			
	EXP3	0.958			
	EXP4	0.958			

	EXP5	0.833			
<i>Attractiveness</i>	AT1	0.977	0.901	0.963	0.973
	AT2	0.969			
	AT3	0.964			
	AT4	0.883			
	ATP1	0.955			
<i>Attitude toward the political brand ambassador</i>	ATP2	0.938	0.861	0.959	0.969
	ATP3	0.954			
	ATP4	0.913			
	ATP5	0.878			
	PBA1	0.945			
<i>Perception of Political Brand Ambassadors</i>	PBA2	0.940	0.893	0.970	0.976
	PBA3	0.949			
	PBA4	0.946			
	PBA5	0.944			

Source: Processed by Researchers (2026)

Based on Table 2, the results of the *outer model* test show that all indicators for each variable have *factor loadings* above 0.70. These values indicate that each indicator is able to reflect the latent construct being measured well, thereby meeting the criteria for *convergent validity*. For the *Trustworthiness* variable, *factor loadings* range from 0.931 to 0.962. The *Expertise* variable has *factor loadings* ranging from 0.833 to 0.958, while the *Attractiveness* variable shows *factor loadings* ranging from 0.883 to 0.977. Furthermore, the *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador* variable has *factor loadings* ranging from 0.878 to 0.955, and the *Political Brand Ambassador Perception* variable has *factor loadings* ranging from 0.940 to 0.949. Thus, all indicators are deemed valid in measuring the research constructs. The results of the *Average Variance Extracted* (AVE) test also indicate that all variables have AVE values above 0.50, thus meeting the criteria for convergent validity. The *Trustworthiness* variable has an AVE of 0.900, *Expertise* of 0.873, *Attractiveness* of 0.901, *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador* of 0.861, and *Political Brand Ambassador Perception* of 0.893.

These values indicate that each construct explains more than 50% of the variance in its respective indicators. Furthermore, the reliability test results show that all variables have *Cronbach's Alpha* and *Composite Reliability* (CR) values above 0.70. The *Trustworthiness* variable has a *Cronbach's Alpha* value of 0.972 and a CR of 0.976. The *Expertise* variable has a *Cronbach's Alpha* value of 0.963 and a CR of 0.972. The *Attractiveness* variable has a *Cronbach's Alpha* value of 0.963 and a CR of 0.973. Furthermore, the *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador* variable shows a *Cronbach's Alpha* value of 0.959 and a CR of 0.969, while the *Political Brand Ambassador Perception* variable has a *Cronbach's Alpha* value of 0.970 and a CR of 0.976. Overall, the results of the validity and reliability tests indicate that all constructs in this study meet the criteria for good measurement. Thus, the research instrument is deemed valid and reliable and is suitable for further analysis in the structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis.

**Table 3. Discriminant Validity: Fornell and Larcker Criterion**

	ATP	AT	EXP	PBA	TR
Attitude toward the political brand ambassador	0.981				
Attractiveness	0.686	0.945			
Expertise	0.730	0.948	0.966		
Perception of Political Brand Ambassadors	0.796	0.894	0.891	0.946	
Trustworthiness	0.688	0.960	0.919	0.921	0.927

Source: Processed by the researcher (2026)

**Table 4. Discriminant Validity of the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)**

	ATP	AT	EXP	PBA	TR
Attitude toward the political brand ambassador					
Attractiveness	0.698				
Expertise	0.747	0.777			
Perception of Political Brand Ambassadors	0.818	0.822	0.825		
Trustworthiness	0.699	0.789	0.841	0.843	

Source: Processed by Researchers (2026)

Based on Table 3, the results of the *discriminant validity* test using the Fornell & Larcker criteria indicate that all constructs in this study meet the criteria for discriminant validity. The root mean square of the *Average Variance Extracted (AVE)* for each construct is higher than the correlation coefficients between the other constructs. *The Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador* variable has a value of 0.981, *Attractiveness* 0.945, *Expertise* 0.966, *Political Brand Ambassador Perception* 0.946, and *Trustworthiness* 0.927. These values are higher than the correlations between variables in the research model, indicating that each construct has a strong ability to distinguish itself from the others. These results suggest that the indicators used for each variable better represent their own construct rather than other constructs in the model.

Thus, there is no overlap among the research constructs, so discriminant validity based on the Fornell & Larcker criteria can be deemed met. Furthermore, based on Table 4, the *discriminant validity* test using the *Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)* approach shows that all HTMT values are below the tolerance threshold of 0.90. The highest HTMT value was found in the relationship between *Trustworthiness* and *Political Brand Ambassador Perception* at 0.843, while the other values ranged from 0.698 to 0.841. These results indicate that all constructs exhibit good levels of discrimination and do not suffer from conceptual multicollinearity among variables. Overall, the results of the *discriminant validity* test using both the Fornell & Larcker and HTMT criteria show that all research constructs have met the requirements for discriminant validity. Therefore, *the measurement model* in this study is deemed sound and suitable for proceeding to *the structural model* testing.

**Table 5. Multicollinearity Test**

Variable	VIF	Description
TR -> ATP	1.227	No Multicollinearity
EXP -> ATP	2.140	No Multicollinearity
AT -> ATP	2.039	No Multicollinearity
ATP -> PBA	1,000	No Multicollinearity

Source: Processed by the researcher (2026)

**Table 6. R-Square Test**

Endogenous Variable	R-Square	Q-Square
Attitude Toward the Political Brand Ambassador	0.782	0.392
Perception of the Political Brand Ambassador	0.805	0.412

Source: Processed by Researchers (2026)

The results of the structural model evaluation indicate that the research model constructed meets the criteria for statistical validity and demonstrates good predictive power in explaining the relationships among the research constructs. Based on the results of the multicollinearity test, all relationships among the variables in the model show a *Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)* value below the critical threshold of 5.00. The variable *Trustworthiness* in relation to *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador* has a VIF value of 1.227, while the relationships between *Expertise* and *Attractiveness* and *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador* show values of 2.140 and 2.039, respectively. Additionally, the relationship between *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador* and *Political Brand Ambassador*

*Perception* has a VIF value of 1.000. These values indicate that there are no signs of multicollinearity among the independent variables in the research model. In other words, each exogenous construct has a good ability to explain the endogenous variable without causing excessively high correlations among the constructs. This condition indicates that the structural model is free from the problem of variable redundancy and meets the statistical assumptions required to proceed with testing the causal relationships among the variables.

Furthermore, the *R-Square* test results show that the variable “*Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador*” has a value of 0.782. These results indicate that 78.2% of the variation in public attitudes toward the Minister of Finance as a *political brand ambassador* can be explained by the variables *Trustworthiness*, *Expertise*, and *Attractiveness*. Meanwhile, the remaining 21.8% is explained by other factors outside the research model. This finding suggests that the source credibility dimension has a very strong influence on shaping public attitudes toward government officials. Furthermore, the *Political Brand Ambassador Perception* variable has an *R-Square* value of 0.805, meaning that 80.5% of the variation in public perception of the *political brand ambassador* figure can be explained by *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador*, while the remaining 19.5% is influenced by other variables outside the study. Based on Hair et al.’s criteria, an *R-Square* value above 0.75 falls into the “*substantial*” category; thus, the results of this study indicate that the model possesses a high explanatory power in predicting the endogenous variable.

In addition, the *Q-Square* test results showed a value of 0.392 for the *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador* variable and 0.412 for the *Political Brand Ambassador Perception* variable. A *Q-Square* value greater than zero indicates that the research model has good *predictive relevance*. Thus, the structural model constructed not only has the ability to explain the relationships between constructs statistically but also has sufficient predictive relevance in explaining the phenomenon of public perception of public officials as *political brand ambassadors*. Overall, the results of the structural model evaluation indicate that the research model has a good level of validity, strong predictive power, and adequate theoretical relevance for explaining the relationship between source credibility, public attitudes, and political perceptions in the context of public policy communication in the digital era.

## Discussion

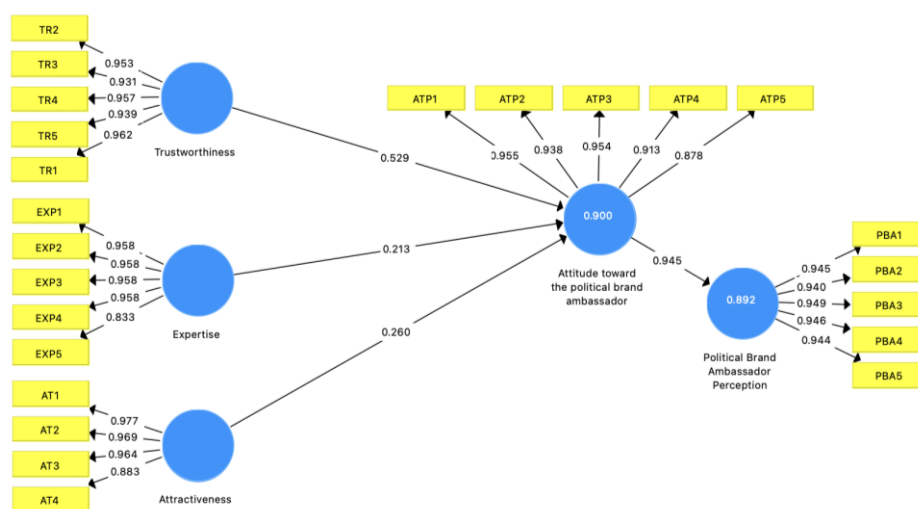


Figure 2. PLS Output Results

Table 7. Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis	Variable Relationship	$\beta$	T-Statistic	P-Value	Description
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Direct Relationship					
H1	<b>TR -&gt; ATP</b>	0.529	4.544	0.000	Significant
H2	<b>EXP -&gt; ATP</b>	0.213	1.321	0.187	Not Significant
H3	<b>AT -&gt; ATP</b>	0.260	2.821	0.005	Significant
H4	<b>ATP -&gt; PBA</b>	0.945	67.833	0.000	Significant
Mediation Relationship					
H5a	<b>TR -&gt; ATP -&gt; PBA</b>	0.500	4.548	0.000	Significant
H5b	<b>EXP -&gt; ATP -&gt; PBA</b>	0.201	1.307	0.192	Not Significant
H5c	<b>AT -&gt; ATP -&gt; PBA</b>	0.246	2.863	0.004	Significant

Source: Processed by Researcher (2025)

Based on the results of the hypothesis testing, the relationship between *Trustworthiness* and *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador* showed a path coefficient ( $\beta$ ) of 0.529, a *t-statistic* of 4.544, and a *p-value* of 0.000. These results indicate that *Trustworthiness* has a positive and significant effect on *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador*, thus H1 is accepted. This finding indicates that the higher the public’s perception of the Minister of Finance’s honesty, integrity, and reliability, the more positive the public’s attitude toward that figure as a *political brand ambassador*. These findings align with the research by Jiang et al. (2026) and Akram et al. (2023), which state that *trustworthiness* is a key determinant in the formation of positive attitudes toward public figures and institutional representations.

Furthermore, the relationship between *Expertise* and *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador* yielded a  $\beta$  value of 0.213, a *t-statistic* of 1.321, and a *p-value* of 0.187. These results indicate that *Expertise* does not have a significant effect on *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador*; therefore, H2 is rejected. This finding indicates that the public’s perception of the Minister of Finance’s competence and expertise has not yet been able to directly shape a positive attitude toward the figure as a *political brand ambassador*. These results support the research by Schouten et al. (2021), which found that *expertise* does not always have a significant effect on audience attitudes, especially when emotional and symbolic factors are more dominant in public evaluation.

The relationship between *Attractiveness* and *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador* shows a  $\beta$  value of 0.260, a *t-statistic* of 2.821, and a *p-value* of 0.005. These results indicate that *Attractiveness* has a positive and significant effect on *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador*, thus H3 is accepted. These findings suggest that the attractiveness of public figures whether in terms of communication style, charisma, or symbolic closeness to the public can enhance the public’s positive attitude toward the Minister of Finance as a representative of the state institution. These research results are consistent with the findings of Yuen et al. (2023) and Joglekar and Tan (2022), who confirm that the attractiveness of public figures has a significant effect on the formation of positive audience attitudes in political communication and digital media.

The results of testing the relationship between *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador* and *Political Brand Ambassador Perception* show a  $\beta$  value of 0.945, a *t-statistic* of 67.833, and a *p-value* of 0.000. These results indicate that *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador* has a positive and significant effect on *Political Brand Ambassador Perception*, thus H4 is accepted. These findings indicate that the more positive the public’s attitude toward the Minister of Finance, the more positive the public’s perception of that figure as a *political brand ambassador*. These findings align with the research by De Cicco et al. (2024) and Gong et al. (2024), which show that a positive attitude toward a public figure or *brand ambassador* plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of the brand or institution they represent.

In the mediation analysis, the indirect relationship between *Trustworthiness* and *Perception of the Political Brand Ambassador* via *Attitude toward the Political Brand*

*Ambassador* yielded a  $\beta$  value of 0.500, a *t*-statistic of 4.548, and a *p*-value of 0.000. These results indicate that *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador* significantly mediates the effect of *Trustworthiness* on *Perception of the Political Brand Ambassador*; thus, H5a is accepted. This finding suggests that the public's perception of a public figure's honesty and integrity first shapes positive attitudes before ultimately influencing broader political perceptions. These results support the research by Sebastiao et al. (2021) and Wang and Weng (2024), which states that attitudes toward public figures mediate the influence of source credibility on institutional perceptions and political image.

Furthermore, the indirect relationship between *Expertise* and *Perception of the Political Brand Ambassador* via *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador* yielded a  $\beta$  value of 0.201, a *t*-statistic of 1.307, and a *p*-value of 0.192. These results indicate that *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador* does not mediate the effect of *Expertise* on *Perception of the Political Brand Ambassador*; therefore, H5b is rejected. This finding suggests that the competence and expertise of the Minister of Finance are not yet strong enough to shape political perceptions through the mechanism of audience attitudes. These results reinforce the research by Schouten et al. (2021), which shows that *expertise* is not always a dominant factor in the formation of public attitudes and perceptions, particularly in the context of communication influenced by emotional and symbolic dimensions.

Finally, the indirect relationship between *Attractiveness* and *Perception of the Political Brand Ambassador* via *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador* yielded a  $\beta$  value of 0.246, a *t*-statistic of 2.863, and a *p*-value of 0.004. These results indicate that *Attitude toward the Political Brand Ambassador* significantly mediates the effect of *Attractiveness* on *Perception of the Political Brand Ambassador*, thus supporting H5c. This finding indicates that the attractiveness of public figures can shape positive political perceptions by first fostering positive public attitudes. These findings are consistent with the research by Dhun and Dangi (2023) and Yuen et al. (2023), which showed that the attractiveness of public figures influences audience perceptions through mechanisms of affective evaluation and psychological attitudes.

## CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the influence of *trustworthiness*, *expertise*, and *attractiveness* on *attitudes toward the political brand ambassador* and its implications for *perceptions of the political brand ambassador* regarding the figure of the Minister of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia, Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa. Based on the analysis results, this study found that *trustworthiness* and *attractiveness* have a positive and significant influence on *attitudes toward the political brand ambassador*, while *expertise* does not show a significant influence. Furthermore, *attitude toward the political brand ambassador* was found to have a positive and significant effect on *the perception of the political brand ambassador*. The mediation results also indicate that *attitude toward the political brand ambassador* mediates the effects of *trustworthiness* and *attractiveness* on *the perception of the political brand ambassador* but does not mediate the effect of *expertise*.

Research findings indicate that in the context of public policy communication in the digital age, the public evaluates public officials not only based on their technocratic competence but also on their perceived integrity, sincerity, and communicative appeal. In the context of the Minister of Finance as a *political brand ambassador*, emotional and symbolic dimensions appear to play a more dominant role than technical competence in shaping public attitudes and perceptions. This suggests that modern policy communication is increasingly influenced by the personalization of public figures and the psychological closeness between public officials and the public.

Empirically, this study contributes to the development of *Source Credibility Theory* in the context of *political marketing* and public policy communication. This study extends the

application of source credibility theory—which has traditionally been used primarily in the context of commercial marketing—to the context of government communication and fiscal policy. Furthermore, this study underscores the importance of *attitudes toward the political brand ambassador* as a psychological mechanism that bridges the relationship between the credibility of public figures and the public’s political perceptions. These findings enrich the literature on digital political communication, particularly regarding the personalization of institutional legitimacy through government technocrats.

In practical terms, this study has implications for the government and public officials in designing more effective policy communication strategies. The government must not only emphasize the substantive aspects of policies but also build perceptions of integrity, honesty, and the communicative appeal of the public figures conveying those policies. In the context of complex fiscal communication, public officials must be able to establish emotional connections and symbolic closeness with the public so that policy messages are more readily accepted and trusted. Therefore, government communication strategies in the digital age need to integrate *political branding* and *public engagement* approaches in a more adaptive manner.

This study also offers a *novel* contribution in the development of the concept of the “*political brand ambassador*” in the context of government technocrats, particularly the Minister of Finance, a topic that has rarely been examined in the *political marketing* literature. Most previous studies have focused on electoral political figures, celebrities, or influencers, whereas this study positions technocratic officials as symbolic representations of state institutions in public policy communication. Furthermore, this study integrates *Source Credibility Theory* with the concept of *political brand ambassador perception* within the context of fiscal policy communication in the digital age, thereby offering a new perspective on the establishment of figure-based policy legitimacy.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. First, this study focuses only on a single public official the Minister of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia, so generalizing the findings to the context of other public officials should be done with caution. Second, this study employs a *cross-sectional* research design, so it is not yet able to capture dynamic changes in public perception over a specific period of time. Third, this study only examines three dimensions of source credibility based on *Source Credibility Theory*; therefore, there remains the possibility that other variables, such as *parasocial interaction*, *political trust*, or *digital engagement*, may influence public perception of public officials.

Given these limitations, future research is encouraged to expand the scope of study to include other public officials or to compare different government institutions in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of *political brand ambassadors* in public policy communication. Future research could also employ a longitudinal approach to examine the dynamics of public perception toward government figures over time. Additionally, developing a research model by incorporating psychological, social, and digital communication variables is expected to provide a deeper explanation of the mechanisms underlying the formation of legitimacy and public perception in the digital communication era.

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