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Islamic Personal Political Branding: Taking the Muslim Community Votes on Local Government Election

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Abstract. The use of Islamic symbols and taglines during the campaign was found in Indonesia. Unfortunately, that does not guarantee a majority Muslim vote. However, we see different results when the candidates for regional head compete long before the election. This study discusses Islamic personal political branding focused on the case of Helmi Hasan's victory in the election for mayor of Bengkulu in 2013. Qualitative methods through observation, interviews, and media clippings have been used. Data analysis starts from the transcript stage, keywords, alignment of keywords between sources or field findings, making sub-themes. We found that the personalization of Islamic symbols works best when used over a long period of time. The density of the use of symbols in public will help accelerate the construct. It is important to use symbols that are rarely used, such as robe shirt, beard, white cap, stick, and turban. Finally, the personalization of a politician's Islam can be accelerated when accompanied by akhlakul karimah.

Keywords: Personal Political Branding; Islam; Muslim Community Votes; Political Symbol

1 Introduction

Following the downfall of the Soeharto regime in May 1998 caused the political system in Indonesia to develop very rapidly and dynamically. All practices of the state are aimed at supporting the democratic process. In turn, opened up unprecedented insights for regional leader candidates to compare themselves freely. All attributes attached or intentionally attached as long as they do not violate the general election rules are allowed. Given that the majority of Indonesian voters are Muslim candidates, the use of Islamic campaign strategies, slogans, attributes, and symbols does not escape the candidate's personal attention.

Personal politics branding is increasingly being recognized as an effort to follow voters' thinking[1]. The political education which is getting better on the one hand and the uncovering of the lies of the elite through the media of information dissemination in Indonesia has had a very significant effect. There is a trend of decreasing voter trust in political parties. Mujani et

al present findings of 79% public trust in political parties in 2001, decreased to 57% in 2005, then fell again in 2009 to 39%[2]. Instead of trusting political parties, seeing and understanding individual figures seems to be an attractive option in developing democracies. Haroen noted that 50% of the victories of regional leaders are determined by figures, followed by the vision, mission offered, and campaign management[3]. Nursal and Pradhanawati assess that voter behavior in Indonesia tends to be based on personal observations of candidates who have long been formed[4].

In developing countries, individual figures are more dominant than parties. Unlike the United States where two major parties are trusted from generation to generation at home[5][6][7], in Indonesia recently this can be seen clearly through the Jokowi phenomenon. Tapsell assessed that Jokowi as a newcomer and not part of the political establishment succeeded in manipulating the power of the media in Indonesia and citizens and community groups[8]. His work was read by the media when he led the city of Solo through local methods [9][10]. It didn't take long, the Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP – Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan) appointed Jokowi as a candidate for governor of Jakarta. The interesting thing is that even though DKI Jakarta was not the basis for the PDIP era, Jokowi-Ahok won. After serving for two years, Jokowi has occupied the Presidential Palace for two terms.

The study of personal branding for political contexts is starting to be of interest to academics. This indicates that political marketing practices are increasingly being recognized as an alternative strategy[11][12]. Although this concept seems odd[13], Henneberg ensures that marketing is increasingly broadening political horizons in the future[14]. There are six elements inherent in political marketing, one of which is a cultural phenomenon[15]. Local culture or something that is considered strong in society is generally the target of building a brand. Unfortunately, the existing articles have not explained personal political branding using Islamic attributes and symbols.

This study will fill the literature gap by explaining Islamic personal political branding. This area is very important to explain considering the use of Islam as a campaign attribute does not guarantee the electability of candidates even though they have been supported by Islamic parties and are in Muslim voter circles. The sudden of becoming a religious or spiritual human seems easy for voters to read. However, we see different results when the candidates for regional head have strong Islamic branding long before the candidacy. We argue that personal political branding for an Islamic context will work if candidates have an earlier personal appearance and there is recognition from the community long before the desire for contestation. This argument was proven by the winning case of Bengkulu mayor Helmi Hasan in the 2018 mayoral election.

2 Method

The research results were obtained through three stages. First, pre-research was conducted by interviewing the campaign team and Helmi Hasan's closest people. Purposive technique was used to obtain preliminary data, so that there were four people (1 close person and 3 campaign teams) who were willing to provide initial information. This is considered sufficient to problematize problems supported by past observations and online media. The second stage is fieldwork in the form of data collection through in-depth interviews. Researchers interviewed various parties who were in direct contact with and were in the atmosphere of the 2018 campaign: Helmi Hasan, the closest person, the campaign team, ustadz, community

leaders, and the general public. Finally, the presentation of data through a series of mechanisms: data transcription, keyword discovery, connection between keywords into categorization, and meaning [16], [17]. Transcribed the entire recorded interview, then looked for keywords for each answer. We read carefully, so it is not uncommon for us to raise new questions as an in-depth study. Each keyword is connected to another, so that it becomes a sub-category. Each category is narrowed down in the form of a message which eventually appears as a sub-title in the findings section. These findings are then analyzed and met with theories, concepts, and previous articles on political marketing. The results of a complete analysis will produce a research thread and written in the form of a final conclusion.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Helmi Hasan: Young, Visionary, Religious

Helmi Hasan is not a native Bengkulu resident, but was born in South Lampung, Lampung, Indonesia in November 1979. After completing high school in Jakarta, Helmi was accepted into the Department of Economics, Bengkulu State University. Helmi is active in various student organizations, but what sets her sights on the world of politics is her dynamism in the Islamic Student Association (HMI – Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam). Helmi has launched many social actions and protests on the streets to protest against government policies. So that the National Mandate Party (PAN – Partai Amanat Nasional) proposed to him as a potential cadre in the future. However, there is an assumption that Helmi's political career and joining PAN was caused by the figure of his brother, the former head of the People's Consultative Assembly, Zulkifli Hasan.

Helmi Hasan has a smooth political career and it is easy to occupy a position. This is due to excellent adaptability, the ideas that are raised are often innovative, religious adherence, most importantly have financial strength above the average of other politicians. When asked about his career, Helmi Hasan briefly replied, *"everything I have belongs to Allah SWT. I take advantage of it for this people."* We found different views among informants.

"In the past, for example, he issued APBD jargon for the people. The APBD (Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget) comes from people's money and its use must be in the side of the people. He runs a program of 1000 smooth roads, pick up sick - go home healthy, Insya Allah." (Interview with DZ in August 2020)

"I think he does have a very strong political dynasty. In the central government, Kakanya (Zulkifli Hasan) was strong. Their family business is also strong. Helmi owns several large companies. Naturally, he could easily become Mayor. Imagine first, even the incumbent Ahmad Kenedi lost, even though he was still young, but his campaign finances were strong." (Interview with the US in June 2020)

A search through the website found that Helmi finished studying economics in 2002. It only took 2 years for this fresh graduate to become a member of the Bengkulu City DPRD (Regional People's Representative Council) in 2004. In 2005 he was appointed Secretary of PAN for Bengkulu Province, then in 2010 he was appointed become chairman. The 2009 Legislative Election provided an opportunity for Helmi to become a member of the Bengkulu Provincial DPRD [18]. In 2012, Helmi ran for the Mayor of Bengkulu election through the support of PAN, Golkar, Great Indonesia Movement (Gerindra – Gerakan Indonesia Raya), People's Fortress National Party (PNBK – Partai Nasional Banteng Kerakyatan Indonesia), and the Democratic Party. He was elected as Mayor after defeating incumbent Ahmad Kenedi

with a total of 51.46% of the votes[19]. Finally, Helmi confirmed his second position as Mayor on September 24, 2018.

Helmi Hasan's government vision is pro-people, especially Muslims. When obtaining the mandate as Mayor in 2009, there were many innovative programs: 1000 smooth roads program, Healthy Hospital Pickup, *In sya Allah*, One Billion One Village (Samisake), a 24-hour mosque, to private cars for the community, while Helmi only rides the Kijang Innova. There is even a Zuhr prayer program every Wednesday for 40 times without stopping at the Akbar at Taqwa Mosque, Bengkulu City and will get Umrah prizes, cars and motorbike.

3.2 Government Tagline: Religious and Happiness

We have seen that there are priority programs for Muslims such as policies on mosques, Heads of Services must ensure the lives of orphans and orphans, local government employees are urged to carry out khuruj (traveling for the syiar of Islam), congregational prayers at the office, the 1001 Widows movement, Friday meal blessings, BD 1 A and BD 2 A (car serial number) for the people, to the Bengkulu City of Hadith program. This program does not cause controversy in the community because the majority of 97% are Muslims. All informants agreed that this trend had emerged since Helmi joined the Jamaah Tabligh community.

"... That's an open secret, huh. With a glimpse of his figure, people will believe he is JT (Jamaah Tabligh). His clothes, beard, eyebrows, those traits people know." (Interview with MT in June 2020)

Bengkulu City's famous tagline "Religious and Happiness" was inspired by the Mudzakarah Book of Six Nature of Friends. Helmi explained

"... actually the happiness of this world is found in perfect religious deeds, therefore we must follow the way of life of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad SAW ... Allah does not put happiness in the position, Allah never puts happiness in property, cars, women. If God puts him in the position, surely the position will be happy. Even though the evidence is that many are miserable and go to prison. Allah only puts happiness in Islam ... even if people are obedient to Allah, they will be happy." (Interview by phone with HH in August 2020)

Even though Tagline seems to be Islamic, in its implementation, Helmi collaborates with FKUB (Forum for Religious Harmony) to translate this vision into each religion. The inspiration for activities comes from Islamic practices, but is also applied to other religions. For example, the mosque is asked to open 24 hours and get a free water payment reward. The church also gets the same enforcement. To ensure that all activities run, FKUB has formed a Religious and Happy Special Forces under the auspices of the Civil Service Police. The partisanship of the program generated sympathy, so that the tagline was accepted by the community.

3.3 Islamic Personalization

The personalization of Islam is Helmi's attempt to use symbols that are identical to Islam, then bring them to the public sphere as an important part of himself. The repeated use of symbols in public has an impact on the construct of Helmi in the public eye. To test the public's assumption of personalization, Helmi only needs to present the Islamic symbol that has always been attached to her. We found many billboards with a king's chair on them, on them a white cap next to a stick, and on the chairs written 'In sha Allah.' All people knew and agreed to say that it was Helmi Hasan. Here are the symbols of Islam and the arguments attached to Helmi.

- a. The robe shirt. Helmi knows that the robe is the clothing of the desert community. It's just that these clothes have become an inseparable identity of the Tablighi Jamaat, so there is no reason not to wear them. The most important reason according to Helmi is to want to be as close as possible to imitate the Prophet Muhammad.
- b. The Beard. Helmi follows the hadith of Prophet Muhammad SAW to always keep a beard. Another reason is that since joining Jamaah Tabligh, Helmi prefers to maintain a beard and shave his mustache.
- c. *Celak*. Helmi followed the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW to wear eye shadow or liner for eye health and hair growth. Helmi admits that celak is able to increase her confidence as a brave, dignified and respectful leader.
- d. The White cap. Covering his head for Helmi is a must for Muslim men, especially when praying. The head must be closed because it is a symbol of intelligence. He said the hair covering the forehead during prostration can reduce the value of prayer.
- e. Turban/*Imamah*. Helmi more often wears a turban during chaos, rather than in carrying out government duties. This is also referred to as the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad.
- f. The stick. Helmi said that Muslims who are 40 years old should use a stick to help their legs support the body. This is in accordance with the practice of the Prophet Muhammad SAW when he was 40 years old using a stick.

The personalized symbol is supported by Helmi's daily behavior that is polite, proactive, smiles, dignified, and respects parents. This behavior was formed based on the guidance of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Reference sources that are often read are the *Fadhilah Amal* and *Muntakab Hadith*. In addition, his character who likes to linger in the mosque is also considered to have played a role in shaping his religious personality. Even on certain days government administration affairs are held at Masjid At-Taqwa (mosque owned by the city government). We assess the use of symbols and behaviors that rely on the guidance of the Prophet Muhammad SAW to help Helmi Hasan to personalize Islam within himself.

4 Discussion

Personal branding that uses Islam as a guide to act is actually a new approach in the world of political marketing. The use of Islam as a medium is believed to further strengthen the thesis that politicians are a brand that can be commented on, liked, and as an option for others[20]. Omojola emphasized that politicians are seen by the audience based on the branding they show[1]. We depart from the assumption that politicians can be categorized as brands when they feature something specific for the purpose of being elected to a position. Some are sold, namely themselves politicians, then the public freely comments on positive or negative. In the end, buying means choosing politicians on the basis of whether you like it or not. This view is in line with Rein et al's that personal branding can become a brand on people when it is applied correctly[21].

Islam as a personalization medium seems to be successful when the use of symbols is accompanied by behavior in accordance with the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. We tried to read the personalization process carried out by politicians that it is important to use symbols that are rarely used by the public. The symbol should be used over a long and consistent period of time. The public's visibility is an important indicator of success. In time, the public will construct a person according to the nature that has been built.

5 Conclusion

Based on the findings in this study, we argue that religious symbols can be personalized to be presented in public as a personal identity. We found that Islamic instruments were closely attached to Helmi Hasan's persona such as: stick, white cap, robe shirt, celak, and beard. Interestingly, Helmi has a divine proposition for each symbol used. The use of symbols is accompanied by good behavior (*akhlakul kharimah*), thus increasing the weight of trust. In the end, this research answers our suspicion that the personalization of Islam which is very closely embraced by the community as a personal candidate for regional head has succeeded in attracting a number of Muslim votes.

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