Religious issues as a message in political communications during local elections

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Abstract This research focuses on religious issues used as messages in political communication. A campaign is a form of political communication by one of the candidates for local leader dan vice local leader of Gresik regency Sambari Qosim (SQ) in the 2015 regional election. This study employed a qualitative approach; therefore, the researcher used observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation to collect data. The study found that the SQ candidate pair used religious issues as a message in their political campaign because the local vice leader of Gersik Regency, Mohammad Qosim, was the son of a Kyai. Thus, such a strategy made it easier for him to gain sympathy from the voters, who would ultimately determine his choice of the pair. This strategy was implemented due to the socio-cultural community of Gresik Regency, a religious society that considers religion to be sacred, including the figure of a Kyai. As a religious figure, the Kyai must be obeyed and become an example in attitude and behaviour. This condition prompted the SQ candidate to take advantage of religious issues to gain as many votes as possible to win the 2015 regional elections.

Keywords: religious issue; political communication; local election

INTRODUCTION

The local election has become a national political consensus and is one of the essential governance instruments after introducing regional autonomy in Indonesia (Alfirdaus & Nugroho, 2019). Indonesia has conducted local elections since enacting the Law of the Republic of Indonesia number 32 of 2004 concerning Regional Government. From a decentralisation perspective, the local election is a significant breakthrough in consolidating democracy at the local level. The local election will open up a more expansive space for public participation in the democratic process to determine political leadership at the local level (Budiyanti et al., 2020; Zulaikha & Paribrata, 2017).

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This system also allows the public to exercise their political rights without being reduced by the interests of the political elite, such as in the representative democratic system (Chalik, 2017). Local elections in Indonesia have been going on for a long time, starting in 2005. The 2015 local elections differ from the previous local elections because the Governor and Vice Governor elections, Regent/Mayor and Vice-Regent/Mayor, were held simultaneously. Law of the Republic of Indonesia No.1 of 2015 (Amendment Law) mandates that local elections be held simultaneously in Indonesia, with no less than 245 regions holding elections or 53% of Indonesia's total number of regions (Chalik, 2017a).

At that time, the governor of East Java, Sukarwo, had appointed the Regent and Mayor in the East Java region on 17 February 2016. Those elected then carried out their duties until 16 February 2021. The incumbent's victory in several districts and cities could be considered attractive. On the other hand, the victory was caused by the involvement of a very dominant local elite. They managed to control the candidate's victory in their area. In Indonesia, reformation has given birth to new expectations in political life. Political faucets are widely open, and everyone can realise their dreams of becoming candidates in political contestations in the regions. This opportunity was seized by local leaders and political elites, especially religious elites who had not had the opportunity to contest for a long time.

Studies on local politics have also begun to bloom, including those who expressed pessimism about decentralisation as reflected in democracy in various regions. Local political elites and bureaucrats dominate decentralisation, initially intended for independent regional development. This condition potentially leads to a powerful oligarchy. Cases of new oligarchy and authoritarianism resulting from political autonomy are shared worldwide. For example, in the Philippines, especially in Cebu and Cavite, suburban areas are filled with industrial facilities, golf courses, residential complexes and luxury tourism (Arguelles, 2019). Local economic bosses become politicians in these areas and use their discretionary power to determine development allocations. Not only that, but the determination of the development of the territory is also under their control. They often use all means to defend their economic interests (Leo Agustino, 2010a).

The same thing happened in Thailand, namely in the case of local bosses Chaopho (protectors or strong people). These protectors can be identified by the monopolistic nature of almost all economic activities. They are also known for their control over the network of political elites at the city level and are respected for their ability to control their local communities through their coercive apparatus (Leo Agustino, 2010b). According to Siti Zuhro from LIPI, a researcher who is intense in researching the development of local political elites, there has been a fundamental change in the reform regime with a decentralised system. One of the changes was the people's political movement, which began

to vary in each region. Since the implementation of decentralisation, the development of local politics has led to the rise of local politics (Zuhro, 2009).

Meanwhile, Leo Agustinus dan M Yusroff (2010) examine the local political elite from a historical perspective. In Indonesia, local political elites are the legacy of the new order or those who have received privileges and then rose in the next period. They work together or build synergies with new political forces to open access to the role of the political elite so that their power is broader and more open. The relationship between actors and structures is an important study in this study. In local politics, agency and structure have a duality relationship: a reciprocal relationship that requires each other.

In Indonesia, one group has a decisive influence on people's lives in local politics, although the changes in society are not entirely dependent on the role they play. This group of individuals is called the elite (Kartodirdjo, 1992). In Laswell's terms, elites own and get more than what others have and get. Meanwhile, according to Pareto, elites have and get more than what other people have and get. Elites are divided into two groups, namely those who hold power (governing elite) and those who are outside of power (non-governing elite) (Varma, 2007).

In political power, stratification describes the level of influence of a person in power. Putnam describes this concept in a pyramid where the top stratification is the group of decision-makers (proximate decision-makers). This layer consists partly of people who occupy official positions. The second layer is the influential (influential) individuals with strong indirect or implicit influence. Decision-makers usually consult them. This second layer consists of bureaucrats, landlords, industrialists, bankers, interest group leaders, and official and unofficial consultants. The third layer consists of citizens who participate in political and governmental life, for example, party members, mid-level bureaucrats, newspaper editors, or writers. This layer is called activists, more numerous than the influential group (Mohtar Mas'oed, 2006).

Another factor that is very influential in the success of candidates in political contestation is how candidates communicate politically with the voting community. In political communication, the candidate pair and the campaign team must convey the message well so the communicant can capture the intent to be conveyed. After both parties understand the message well, then the communicant responds. This is where the actual process of political communication takes place. This process is described through a communication model proposed by Harold Laswell, namely who, say what (message), in what channel (medium), to whom, and with what effect (feedback). So, it can be interpreted that in conducting negotiations, the ability to understand the message conveyed by each negotiator is very important (Mulyana, 2000). The Lasswell paradigm also shows that political communication includes five components in response to the questions posed.

Some scientists see political communication as an approach to political development. Therefore, political communication has a special function because it lays the basis for analysing problems that arise and develop in a nation's overall process and political change (Mulyana, 2007). Political communication is also one of the functions of political parties, where political parties discuss and disseminate government plans and policies. Thus, there is a flow of information and dialogue from top to bottom and from bottom to top, where political parties play their role as liaisons between those who govern and those who are governed, namely between the government and citizens (Meriam Budiardjo, 1985).

Local elections are an important moment in the struggle of political parties to prove themselves as a party with the trust and support of the wider community. Through candidates for regent/mayor and their representatives, political parties become a bet and a battle for self-esteem, so every effort in any form must be made. In elections, there is only one goal: to be the winner in a competition that always runs tough and full of drama (Hasse J, 2017a). Among the existing political communication strategies, the strategy considered effective for political elites is to use religious issues (Buehler et al., 2021). Religion is one of the strategic instruments in election contestation in Indonesia, especially in the election of regional heads (local elections) as part of shaping voting behaviour. In the political marketing strategy, there are two types of content: an invitation to choose a leader of the same religion or a prohibition to choose a leader of a different religion and a black campaign (Ramadan, 2018).

There are several reasons why religious symbols are used in every local election in Indonesia. The first reason is that Indonesians are religious, marked by their choice of religious affiliation listed on their identity cards. Almost all Indonesians have a religion expressly recognised through official documents such as Identity Cards (KTP). As many as 87% (some say 82%) of Indonesian people embrace Islam(Alamsyah & Hadiz, 2017; Bayat, 2013; Hasan, 2009; Hefner, 2019). This condition encourages party elites to use religious issues to attract the sympathy of the masses of voters. Second, religion is considered to have become a magnet to attract attention and sympathy. This condition, for example, can be seen in the sensitivity of religious communities when raising religious issues and the community's rapid response. The third is the lack of creativity among political party elites in determining methods or ways to attract voter sympathy. Religion, in this case, Islam, is increasingly being forced to be used as a tool for political communication (campaigns) in its various models. Islam is also considered limited to tools and tends to ignore its sacredness (Arifianto, 2018; Sakai & Fauzia, 2016; van Bruinessen, 2002). Fourth, the critical attitude of the people began to fade. For the political elite, any means may be used to realise the interests of the party or group. Various ways have been done to approach voters (constituents). They (the elites) do

not even care about irregularities in campaigning. Money politics, for example, is an example of duping by the political elite (Hasse J, 2017b).

Religious and political relations in the campaign also occur in several countries. Religion has become a political commodity. In the United States, the strategy of politicising religion uses religious discussions or metaphors as a basis for describing political decision-making or justifying certain political actions. This condition is demonstrated in three ways. First, religion builds credibility for a candidate. The second is how candidates demonstrate their personal beliefs. Third, candidates use political language to connect religious and cultural traditions (Campbell et al., 2018).

In Sri Lanka, the issue of organised religion often plays an important role in the country's political affairs, as political actors carefully employ them to pursue power (ARM Imtiyaz, 2014). Meanwhile, (LilyKong, 2001) states that religious practices outside religious rituals are geographically different and affect their perspective in various aspects of life, including politics. Increasing religious (Muslim) political representation in India improves performance outcomes in the districts from which legislators are elected (Sonia R. Bhalotra, 2013).

In the reformation era, local political rulers in Indonesia were controlled by three groups. The first group is bureaucrats from noble backgrounds, the second is bureaucrats from ordinary people, and the third is local strongmen. There are times when the three of them operate separately, but sometimes they are allied depending on interests. Local strongmen also refer to religious elites active in the political sphere. The religious elite has the same vital role as other political elites in the Indonesian context. Furthermore, in modern Indonesian history, religious elites may have been involved in founding parties or even joining, whether nationally or religiously oriented. Nationalist political parties always identify their ideology with religious nationalists as their political party's religious legitimacy (Chalik, 2017b).

Religious elites and local political elites based on religion pointed to the involvement of Kyai, Ustadz, and Santri. Politically, Kyai's position is very strong and is always taken into account in the political space, especially in local politics. Two main factors support Kyai's strong position. First, Kyai is a person with broad religious knowledge, so he has many followers. Second, Kyai usually comes from affluent families, although some also have modest economic backgrounds (Turmudzi, 2004). In the history of Indonesian politics, Kyai is always included in the references that are always discussed. Furthermore, Kyai cannot be separated from politics to implement religious values and ensure a government system according to Islamic values (Syamsuddin, 2013).

In the context of political contestation at the local level, the role of local figures and leaders is very decisive. In this study, the leader is known as the local political elite. They are leaders with certain authority to determine the region's fate (Chalik, 2017b). On the other hand, changes in the regional head election system directly impact the

candidate winning strategy and the party's victory. Through local agents, parties observe voter preferences before determining the target for vote acquisition. This situation results from intense competition between parties, so parties use personal networks for party effectiveness (Schneider, 2019).

Another impact of direct elections is that parties no longer determine the election of candidates. It is the individual candidate who will determine the outcome of the election. The candidate's background can affect the electability or popularity in society, apart from the characteristics that are also part of the reflection of a candidate. Several factors must be considered to build a political image: family, past life, and education (Sheafer, 2011). So came the concept of personalisation. Political personalisation is when individual political actors have a more primary and important role than political parties or other collective identities. These actors are political leaders, party leaders, or politicians. In party personalisation, Renwick and Pilet state that the actor in personalisation is the political party leader (Alan Renwick dan Jean-Benoit Pilet, 2016).

Starting from the situation above, it is not surprising that the candidates for regional heads try to maximise their victory in the contestation by identifying themselves with an image that follows the life of the local community. This includes political communication styles and campaign strategies that are considered effective, including using religious issues in campaign messages to attract voter sympathy. Moreover, if the candidate is a religious figure, then the modality of religion is the choice to launch a political strategy.

As described above, changing the national political climate allows anyone to appear in a campaign team or even become a candidate for the regional head. This condition encourages the Kyai to appear to the public. The Kyai, who have a strong influence on society, feel obliged to improve the socio-political order that is in decline. Several previous studies on the local election have highlighted the negative side of the direct local elections (Sri Nuryanti, 2015), which discusses various violations due to the strong influence of money politics. Therefore, there are many terms related to the practice of money politics, such as the "*Serangan Fajar*" (dawn attack), NPWP or "*Nomor Piro Wani Piro*" (which number dares to pay more), "*Bitingan*" (individual), "*Ombyokan*" group, and others (Rapika Wulandari, 2013). Other research includes religious affiliation in local elections in DKI Jakarta (Muhamad Ridwan Effendi, Iqbal Syafrudin Tahun, 2017) and the role of religious leaders in increasing political participation (Demianus aya, 2010), and the relationship between Kyai and politics (Endik Hidayat, 2014).

This article examines how political communication is carried out by one pair of candidates in political contestation at the regional level, specifically in the regional head election in Gresik Regency in 2015. The election was attended by three pairs of candidates, namely candidate number 1 (Sambari Halim Rudianto – Moh Qosim or SQ) supported by

PKB and Democrat parties, number 2 (Husnul Khuluq - Ahmad Rubaie or BERKAH) supported by PDIP, PAN and Gerindra, and number 3 (Ahmad Nurhamim - Junaidi or ARJUNA) supported by Golkar. The local election in the Gresik district was held on 9 December 2015 and was won by pair number 1, the Sambari - Qosim (SQ) pair, with 447,751 votes (70.64%). Meanwhile, pair number 2, namely Khuluq - Robai (BERKAH), received 179,449 votes (27.68%), and the third pair, Nurhamim - Junaidi (ARJUNA), received 10,626 votes (1.68%) (Https://www.antaranews.com/, 2015).

Although the local election was held several years ago, something was interesting about the local election in Gresik. One candidate, pair number 2, namely BERKAH (Khusnul Kuluq - Rubai), won the previous election in 2010. However, another candidate, namely SQ, sued the Constitutional Court. Finally, the Constitutional Court decided to conduct re-election in several sub-districts that declared the SQ pair winners. The 2015 election seemed to be the second episode in the contest between BERKAH and SQ, even though Khusnul Huluq ran for the 2015 local election with a different partner.

In 2015, the Election Commission (KPU) determined the SQ pair that won the contest. However, a lawsuit was filed against the Constitutional Court by the BERKAH candidate. The lawsuit was filed for alleged violations involving state apparatus in the campaign. However, because there was a delay in submitting the lawsuit, which was 7 minutes after the deadline for filing the lawsuit (the lawsuit must have been submitted to the Constitutional Court on Thursday, 12 December 2015, by 17.30), the Court rejected the lawsuit and determined SQ as the winner of the election (Yunus, N. R., Rezki, 2020).

To win this local election contestation, pair number 1 (SQ) has a different strategy in carrying out political communication than the other two candidates: religious sentiments in various activities to attract voter sympathy. This strategy was carried out because the political communication carried out in the form of campaigns was very close to the community's religious activities so that it could gain high sympathy. The community feels no distance and already considers SQ part of them.

To analyse this phenomenon, the researcher uses the theory of Empathy and Homophily. Empathy Theory is a theory developed by Berlo and Daniel Marner in 1960. In simple terms, empathy is the ability to put oneself in the situation and condition of others. Empathy is a person's ability to project himself into the role. Berlo (1960) introduced a theory known as the influent theory of empathy. In the context of communication, the communicator assumes what if he is in the position of the communicant. In this case, the individual has an imaginary personality so that interacting individuals can find and identify the similarities and differences of each, which then becomes the basis for making adjustments (Arifin, 2011).

Meanwhile, Homophile Theory is about efforts to do empathy in communication events. Roger dan Shoemaker (1978) introduced

homophily as an individual's ability to create togetherness, both physically and mentally. With homophily, intensive and effective social relationships and communication can be created. The term homophile comes from the Greek word meaning equal. So, homophily means communication with people who are similar in some way. The similarity can be in togetherness in age, language, knowledge, interests, organisation, party, religion, ethnicity, and clothing.

Politicians and world leaders are well acquainted with the homophilic or similar communication that has become so popular. Political and government actors use homophile communication to succeed in their political careers (Maoz, 2012). Differences in social class between fellow political actors and the community can be bridged with homophily. Homophily, in terms of culture, can unite individuals from different social classes (Basov, 2019). In this context, the SQ pair always uses the same religious issues as the socio-cultural of a religious community. In this case, fellow Nahdlatul Ulama or NU, the similarity of religious identity makes it easier for these candidates to gain sympathy from the community.

METHODOLOGY
This study uses a qualitative method because the theoretical findings to be built are more concerned with the perspective of understanding and subjective meaning. According to (Taylor, 1975), qualitative methodology refers to research procedures that produce descriptive data, words written or spoken by the person being studied and their observed behaviour. This method is intended to holistically cover the background and the people in that setting. As research subjects, they (associations or individuals) are not reduced to an isolated variable or a hypothesis but are seen as part of a single entity (Taylor, 1975). Informants used as sources of information in this study were determined strictly.

Informants of this research include several types, such as key informants, namely those who know and have the various basic information needed in research; key informants, namely those who are directly involved in the social interactions studied; additional informants, namely those who provide information even though they are not directly involved in the social interactions studied (B. Suyanto, 2007; Susilo, 2021, 2022). In this study, the researcher used a purposive sampling technique and a non-probability sample. Purposive samples are people selected based on certain criteria based on research objectives (Kriyantono, 2006). The criteria for the informants are as follows: 1) SQ candidate pair, 2) SQ candidate pair campaign team, 3) religious leaders, Kyai, community leaders, village heads, and PKK heads, 4) NU and Fatayat religious organisations chairman, and 5) several communities who directly participated in the SQ partner campaign process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gresik is one of the coastal regency thick with Islamic traditions and culture. This situation cannot be separated from the legendary history of Gresik. From the Majapahit Kingdom until the arrival of Islam, Gresik has been known as a port city and a buffer city of Surabaya. The majority of Gresik people are Muslim. Community Life, in general, is friendly and mutual respect. They use Java as the main language. Because of its location on the north coast, the people of Gresik seem to be loud in speaking. The high religiosity of the community causes the number of Islamic boarding schools and mosques in this area. Kyai is a highly respected figure. The behaviour of a Kyai is used as an example for the community, including in determining the choice of regional heads.

This is because the people of Gresik are still in a participant political culture. As Gabriel Albert Almound in the typology of political culture, there are three kinds of political culture. Parochial political culture is a political culture of ignorance, indifference, or even apathy. People who adhere to a parochial political culture do not realise or ignore the existence of government and politics. They may be illiterate, live in remote villages, or perhaps because of the pressure of socio-economic factors that make their orientation only on how to find food. In the end, the level of education is also a determinant for measuring community political participation—the lower the knowledge or level of education, the less involvement and politics. Subject political culture is a passive political culture.

The level is already higher than the parochial political culture. In political culture, people obey the law and government but have not yet participated in politics or have not consciously voted in elections. Meanwhile, the political culture of the participants is the highest level of political culture, where the community has been involved in various political activities, at least in voting activities and obtaining sufficient information about political life and government (Mochtar Mas'oed dan Colin MacAndrews, 2000). The social life of society is indeed quite dynamic for teenagers. Apart from attending school, they also participate in village organisations such as IPNU/IPPNU (what is this?), Youth Mosque (REMAS), and youth organisations. There is also a village community group working abroad called ROTOR. These groups can become nodes in the acquisition of votes for candidate pairs.

Campaign as Political Communication

Political communication is a method of political analysis that only developed in the 1990s (Rauf & Nasrun, 1993). Political communication can be understood in several definitions. McQuail states political communication as "all processes of information (including facts, opinions, beliefs, etc.) transmission, exchange and search engaged in by participants in the course of institutionalised political activities (Mc Quail, 2002a). Meanwhile, according to Almon, political communication is "all of the functions performed in the political system, political

socialisation and recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation, rulemaking, rule application, and rule adjudication, are performed by means of communication" (Gabriel Almont, 1960). Furthermore, Meadow emphasised that the term communication refers to "any exchange of symbols or messages that to a significant extent have been shaped by or have consequences for the political system." That is any form of exchange of symbols or messages that, to some extent, is influenced or affects the functioning of the political system (Robert G. Meadow, 1980).

From some of the definitions above, it can be said that political communication is the delivery of political messages (verbal and non-verbal), which can influence the people or power holders in a political system. In another sense, political communication is a bridge to convey messages that can function in the political system by using meaningful symbols to achieve political goals. In simple terms, political communication involves political messages and actors related to power, government, and government policies. However, political communication cannot be understood without connecting the political dimension with all its aspects and problems (Asep Saeful Muhtadi, 2008).

Among the existing forms of political communication, the most commonly used is the campaign. According to (Rice, R.E & Paisley, 1981) campaign is a desire to influence the beliefs and behaviour of others with a communicative appeal. A campaign is a form of political communication carried out by a group of people, a person or a political organisation at a certain time to obtain political support from the community. Referring to political communication theory (Dan Nimmo, 2011), candidates' programs, messages, and promises in local elections are forms of political communication packaged in campaigns. There are candidates and campaign teams in the campaign as communicators, political messages, persuasion to support the intended wishes, delivery media, masses, and the effects of political communication. The delivery process is carried out intentionally by the candidates and their campaign teams as communicators. Meanwhile, campaign material is a constructed political message.

Based on Indonesian Law Number 1 of 2015 concerning General Elections for Members of the People's Representative Council, Regional Representative Council, and Regional People's Representative Council in article 1 number 26, elections are defined as "the activities of Election Contestants to convince voters by offering the vision, mission, and programs of Election Contestants." Meanwhile, the provisions regarding the guidelines for the implementation of the campaign nationally, regarding the time, procedure and place of the campaign at the centre, are regulated by KPU regulations. Meanwhile, the provisions regarding the timing and implementation of campaigns at the provincial level are regulated by a Provincial KPU decision. Furthermore, the timing and implementation of campaigns at the Regency/City level will be regulated

by a Regency/City KPU decision. In political campaigning, it is also necessary to discuss political participation. Political participation is defined as activities carried out by the perpetrators to influence government decision-making and activities carried out by people other than actors to influence government decision-making.

In this research, the campaign in the General Election is the election of the Regent of Gresik, which is carried out with the principle of shared learning and responsibility. Elected by campaign participants, election campaigns are carried out, supported by campaign officers, and participated by campaign participants. Campaign implementers consist of political party administrators, candidates for Regent and Vice-Regent, DPD, Provincial DPRD and Regency/Municipal DPRD, and campaigners and task force. Campaign participants are citizens of the voting community. Meanwhile, campaign officers are all officers who facilitate the implementation of the campaign. According to their level, the campaign implementation must be registered with KPU, Provincial KPU, Regency/Municipal KPU, PPK, PPS, and PPLN.

Campaign registrations are copied to Bawaslu, Provincial Panwaslu, and Regency/City Panwaslu, covering the vision and mission and their respective Political Parties. Campaign methods implemented by election participants may be in the form of a) Limited meetings, b) Face-to-face meetings, c) Broadcasting through print and electronic media, d) Dissemination of campaign materials to the public, e) Installation of props, f) General meetings, g) and other activities that do not violate the laws and regulations. Limited meetings, face-to-face meetings, dissemination through print and electronic media, broadcasting via radio and television, and dissemination of campaign materials to the public can be carried out from three working days after the candidate is determined as an election participant until the start of the quiet period. In comparison, the general meeting is held 21 working days before the day and date of voting.

During this time, we often hear the term 'negative campaign,' which shows the weaknesses and mistakes of political opponents but is still in accordance with the existing reality. There is also the term 'black campaign,' i.e. accusing the opponent with false or unproven accusations or through things irrelevant to his capacity as a leader. According to the researcher, the SQ pair's campaign strategy using religious issues in their campaign messages is a soft campaign because the SQ candidate pair does not indicate the first or second type of campaign. They give something but not explicitly for the electorate. Unlike the candidate pair stickers or money politics, the SQ candidate pair provides religious facilities to prospective voters. Even before the campaign period, the candidate pairs had already carried out similar activities, such as the wali lima pilgrimage, donations to orphans, praying together, etc. Religion is one way to gain public sympathy. The winning team for the Sambari-Qosim pair deliberately carried out a subtle campaign through religion because they saw the candidate's

background for Vice-Regent, who was the son of a Kyai and was good at preaching. Thus, the campaign process does involve not only religious organisations such as Muslimat and Fatayat but also uses religious activities.

Religious Symbols as a Message in Political Communication

The symbolic contestation at the local level of Gresik Regency has started since the pre-nomination of the candidate pair. Before the SQ pair (incumbents) officially declared their candidacy, there were steps taken to determine the public's response to their nomination. In mid-2014, or at the end of the reign of the SQ pair, the political temperature in the Gresik district began to rise. Some issues and opinions develop in society. Among them was the opinion that several political parties had invited Moh Qosim (at that time as Vice-Regent) as a candidate for Regent. As the issue got stronger, it came to the area of support for the charismatic Kyai. Likewise, the local mass media exposed the issue massively.

Meanwhile, Active Regent, Sambari, on various occasions and official government events and Golkar party meetings, said he would run with Moh Qosim. The statement was also made during the Golkar party's anniversary. On the other hand, Moh Qosim never made any statement about his candidacy because he was in a position to be invited or as a partner.

The Freedom Center for Research and Consultant (FCRC), a local survey agency, released the results of a survey on the popularity and electability of various figures in Gresik. The survey was conducted in September 2014 with very surprising results. Moh Qosim's popularity is 36%, while Sambari's is only 35%. Furthermore, the electability of the two also shows a slight difference, namely Qosim 36% and Sambari 35%. If both run as candidate pairs, the electability can reach 65%. (Chalik, 2017). Looking at these political conditions, there was an idea to unite the two incumbent figures to run again as candidates for the 2015 local election.

The agreement contained in the MoU was implemented on 10 November 2014. 10 November was chosen to symbolise the big day, namely National Hero's Day. This agreement was attended by senior figures and Gresik city, including H. Saifullah, H. Sumitro, and KH. Abdullah Thoha. They are ulama and Kyai figures who are not affiliated with any particular political party. Through this activity, the SQ pair began to show the public that they were not only supported by the campaign team, but there were neutral Kyai and ulama groups. This religious symbol is important for candidate pairs to convince prospective voters to be more determined in choosing SQ. This event became an important milestone in SQ's candidacy for the second time. Interestingly, until a few months later, no one knew about this important event. Opinion and local media coverage remain focused on the

possibility that Sambari will partner with another candidate. Meanwhile, it is believed that Moh Qosim will go forward on his own.

The campaign team set up a joint office at Ruko Green Garden Housing to facilitate coordination and expedite the campaign process to win the SQ pair in the election. The official opening ceremony was held on 1 February 2015 with remarks, prayer readings, and giving donations to orphans. Through this activity, SQ began to launch its strategy as an approach to religious circles. Since the office's opening, the publication of SQ's candidacy has slowly begun to be seen clearly in the public eye.

On 28 July 2015, the three pairs of candidates registered with the Gresik Regency KPUD. The first registrants were the BERKAH pair, who came at 09.00 WIB, followed by the SQ pair at 11.00 WIB, and the ARJUNA pair at 14.00 WIB. Their respective supporters escort all three. The BERKAH pair were escorted by the leadership of the bearer party, as was the ARJUNA pair. Unlike the other two pairs, the registration of the SQ pair was accompanied by a supporting party and several local elites, Kyai, Ustadz and religious leaders. Before registration, the ceremony began with the reading of prayers by the SQ pair and supporting elements at the Grand Mosque adjacent to the KPUD. From this step, it is again seen how the SQ pair shows the strength of the support of the religious elite. In fact, on that day, Kyai Alif Ma'shum, the younger brother of KH Robah Ma'shum (former Regent), will later support the BERKAH pair. H. Nadhir, the chairman of the Surabaya congress version of PPP, was also present, even though PPP formally supported the BERKAH pair (Chalik, 2017b).

Judging from the map of political party support, the SQ pair is quite confident because two parties support it with sufficient seats in the DPR, namely PKB (8 seats) and Democrats (6 seats). Even in the era of autonomy and direct local election, party votes are often not directly proportional to candidate votes

Table 1. Map of Political Parties Support in the 2015 Gresik Local election

No	Pair	Supporting Parties	Number of Chairs in the local House of Representative	Votes
1	SQ	PKB	8 chair	124.200 votes
		Democrat	6 Chair	54.173 votes
Total		2 Party	14 Chair	181.373 votes
2	BERKAH	Gerindra	6 Chair	76.539 votes
		PDIP	6 Chair	72.168 votes
		PAN	5 Chair	49.535 votes
Total		3 Party	17 Chair	198.242 votes
3	ARJUNA	Party Golkar	11 Chair	149.320 votes
Total		1 Party	11 Chair	149.320 votes

Source: (Chalik, 2017b)

Based on the table 1, based on the number of party votes, the BERKAH pair has the majority of votes, 17 chairs, compared to the SQ pair (14 chairs) and the ARJUNA pair (11 chairs). However, the direct

election system allows prospective voters to determine themselves autonomously and not always in parallel with aspirations in choosing a political party.

Table 2. Background of the Candidates for Regent and Vice-Regent of Gresik Regency in the 2015 Local election.

	Pair	Party	Community organisations/OKP/NGO	Bureaucracy/Legislative
1	Sambari Halim Ruadianto	Head of Golkar	Founders in various community organisations	Vice-Regent Gresik 2000-2005
2	Moh Qosim	---	Founders in various community organisations	Vice-Regent Gresik 2010-2015
3	Husnul Khuluq	---	Head of PCNU Gresik	Head of DPPKAD Secretary of Gresik Regency Head of the Bojonegoro Regency Education Office
4	Ahmad Rubai	Former head PAN Jatim		Member of DPRD East Java (2004-2009) Member of Indonesian House of Representatives 2009-2014
5	Ahmad Nur Hamim	General Secretary of Golkar in Gresik	Founders in various community organisations	Vice Head of DPRD in Gresik Regency 2009-2014
6	Junaedi	Golkar	---	---

Source:(Chalik, 2017b)

The BERKAH pair tried to repeat the success of Suyoto (Table 2), the Bojonegoro regent from the PAN politician. Before running for the district head, Suyoto spent time in Gresik, and suddenly he ran for the district head. Meanwhile, in Bojonegoro, there is competition for candidates from fellow Nahdliyyin. One candidate was supported by the Langitan (KH Faqih) camp, while the other was supported by the KH Hasyim Muzadi camp, which served as chairman of PBNU. This split of Nahdliyyin votes was used by Suyoto, who has a Muhammadiyah background, to finally win the local election contestation in Bojonegoro. The nominations of Husnul Khuluq and Rubai cannot be separated from their efforts to repeat Suyoto's successful political strategy in the Bojonegoro local election. After losing in the 2010 local election, Husnul Khuluq, a civil servant, moved to Bojonegoro to become an expert staff of the Bojonegoro Regent and was later appointed as Head of the Education Office. Then, because he was nominating Gresik regent, he resigned. As for his running mate, Rubai, not much is known about his background because he appeared suddenly at the last second of his candidacy.

The campaign for mass mobilisation and the struggle for support was carried out on 27 August 2015. Several issues at that time included the chairman of the PKB, Dr KH Robah Ma'shum, supporting the BERKAH

pair. This fact is different from the PKB party's decision to support SQ. This change is an important issue because Dr KH Robah Ma'shum symbolises a charismatic Kyai, leader and Ahlal PP. Ihyaul Ulum Dukun Gresik, mass organisation and political figure before and after the new order, former Head of PCNU Gresik, founder and chairman of PKB Gresik during reform, chairman of DPRD in 2000-2005, Regent of Gresik in 2005-2010, and until 2015 still served as council PKB shura. Kubu BERKAH has shown symbolically that one of the charismatic figures, a Kyai, has sided with him. It is hoped that the voters will follow this Gresik figure.

This change phenomenon in KH Robah's circle became a polemic and political issue during the local election. His name appears on banners, leaflets, pamphlets, and several campaign materials. He also expressed support on behalf of the chairman of the PKB Shura Council. The SQ pair protested to the KPUD and Panwas but could not prevent Kyai Robah's involvement in supporting the BERKAH pair until voting day. Meanwhile, the BERKAH pair protested to the KPUD and Panwaslu when the SQ pair held the Wali Limo pilgrimage. However, the protest stopped midway because there were no strong elements to activities that led to election violations. Pilgrimage activity is the right of everyone that cannot be processed as an election violation.

The next issue is the defeat of the candidate pair Khusnul Huluk in the 2010 local election. The campaign team believes money politics caused this defeat. So, in the 2015 local election, the BERKAH team held a competition for the residents of Gresik. Those who can find the practice of money politics will be rewarded with a cow. Even so, de facto, the SQ pair are widely supported by Kyai, religious leaders, and Muslim scholars who are members of the Friends of SQ association. This association is outside the formal team structure of PKB and Democrats. The Friends of SQ office often looks more crowded than the office of the SQ winning team and is often visited by religious leaders, Kyai, Ustadz and Muslim scholars to discuss strategic issues. This situation sends a message to the voting public that the SQ pair is truly a partner who is approved and in accordance with the religious community.

The BERKAH Pair is also not much different. The main posts are quite quiet, while the posts at the sub-district and village levels are busier. Khusnul Huluq, a non-active PCNU background, mostly uses the mass base through the MWC network and branches. Likewise, the candidate for the Rubai representative chose to come directly to the voters through a network of parties or mass organisations. The difference in this campaign activity is the presence of KH Robah Ma'shum in various campaign activities. Suyoto, the Regent of Bojonegoro, always appears in public forums in close coordination and mass mobilisation. Meanwhile, the ARJUNA pair did not do many actions. His involvement in local elections was only administratively full, so he did not carry out many campaigns and mass mobilisation activities. The activities carried

out were only giving brochures and sticking them in place to publish their candidacy.

The role of pesantren, in general, is not too dominant. They tend to be more passive and seek safety. Except, some pesantren support one of the candidate pairs, although not formally, but leaning towards one of the candidates. KH Mahfud Ma'shum and KH. Robakh Ma'shum is the mouthpiece of the BERKAH pair. Meanwhile, Kyai Alif Ma'shum is ambiguous. On the one hand, he was present at the registration of the SQ pair, but on the other hand, he gave moral support to the BERKAH pair. Likewise, the Darut Taqwa Islamic boarding school provides massive support to BERKAH, even though the pesantren has declared it neutral. Meanwhile, SQ received much support from small pesantren and Kyai without a boarding school. What was quite dominant was the support from Kyai Syaiful Munir from the Nurul Qur'an Al-Istiqomah Bungah Islamic Boarding School and Kyai Fikri from Duduk Sampeyan. They are always present at important SQ pair events, which the masses attend.

The same role also occurs in NU. Formally, PCNU and MWC NU and the branch declared neutrality in local elections. Khusnul Huluq, the chairman of PCNU, stated that he was not active as chairman of Tanfidziyah because he was bound by AD/ART, where the Chairman of PCNU became a candidate for Regent or Vice-Regent had to be inactive. Because he is not active, the chairman of PCNU is temporarily delegated to the task executor. Thus, the relationship between MWC and the branch is more personal than the NU autonomous body. Several administrators of PCNU, MWC, branches and institutions personally became the BERKAH pair campaign team at the district, sub-district, and village levels.

Meanwhile, the SQ pair built a network with PC Muslimat and Fatayat at all levels and with elite Ansor administrators. SQ's relationship is also personal because Muslimat and Fatayat support Moh Qosim as a lecturer who has a special attraction for them. Long before the campaign, Moh Qosim had become the main Kyai of Muslimat and Fatayat, who always accompanied him at recitations or social activities.

Contents of Messages in the Campaign

An idea can arise for reasons that will be constructed as a message that can be communicated to the public or audience. This message will be responded to and subsequently accepted or even rejected by the community. The campaign delivers political messages in various forms, ranging from posters, discussions, and advertisements to leaflets. Whatever the form, messages always use verbal symbols expected to attract a wide audience.

In the success of every campaign, there are always sensitive and creative message designers (Snyder, 2002). These designers have the sensitivity to identify the audience and have creativity and design messages according to the general characteristics of the target

audience. The message or issue is crucial in increasing the candidate's 'selling point.' The candidate or candidate will try to maximise and convince the public with the message he conveys. Candidates in campaigns are always touting certain issues/topics. If understood, this is part of the campaign message form. The message/issue is usually in the form of a particular topic or phenomenon that develops in society. Another campaign message that candidates often carry is the issue of corruption, which is perhaps very common at any level. In the case of the 2015 Gresik election, the campaign message carried was an invitation to vote for a clean and religious candidate. The candidate will state that he is a better candidate, is free from the practice of KKN and comes from a religious background.

SQ pairs' campaign forms are quite varied. They carry out campaigns directly and indirectly. Directly, in this case, is the process of political campaigns carried out in the open field and involving many people at large. This fact was stated by Mr Tarjim, a community leader who stated in an interview: "The process of political campaigning in Gresik in the election of the Regent and Vice-Regent of Gresik in 2015 was extraordinary. In addition to carrying out political campaigns through charity activities for orphans and Muslimat and fatayat, the number one candidate pair "Sambari-Qosim" also carried out political campaigns by holding joint prayer events and religious lectures in various places. Some of the locations chosen include the Gresik Grand Mosque and the residence of Mr H. Asroin. The one who gave the religious lecture was the candidate for Vice-Regent of Gresik, namely Mr Moh Qosim. He is charismatic and always low-key, thus making people flock to come to these activities. The whole community wants to participate in supporting and winning Pak Sambari and Pak Qosim in the elections on 9 December 2015." Some of the religiously oriented SQ campaign messages can be classified as follows:

Donations to Orphans
On 2 July 2015, the SQ pair gave free necessities to orphans. This event was packed with ceremonial events that invited various elements of society, such as the yellow troops, the green troops, and several other community components. This activity was also wrapped in farewell because their term of service as regional leaders would soon be over. They apologised for shortcomings and mistakes during their leadership, as quoted by Gresik.go.id (Http://www.kabargresik.com, 2015a). The day before, on 1 July 2015, as quoted by Gresik.go.id., the Vice-Regent of Gresik, who is part of the SQ pair, donated funds to the Gresik National Amil Zakat Agency (Baznas Gresik) for 1050 orphans and the poor in Gresik. The event was attended by heads of SKPD, Baznas management, Kyai, community leaders, and representatives of several companies in Gresik and took place in the Hall of the Great Mosque of Gresik (https://lenteratoday.com/, 2020).

Donations and sharing activities with orphans, pedicab drivers, public transport drivers, and so on are part of the campaign strategy to gain political support from the community. Sharing activities in politics is a phenomenon that makes politicians get support from the community. This mutualistic relationship is a pattern of patronage relationships. According to Shefter, patronage is a profit-sharing among politicians to distribute something individually to voters, workers, or campaigners to get political support (Nadhir Salahuddin, 2015). Political patronage is central to most candidates' campaign strategies to engage voters and gain support. Patronage activities are not just a process of exchanging benefits in the form of financial/goods but also other mutualistic relationships that can bind voters to provide political support to politicians.

Mass Prayers

Mass prayer is usually done for the political interests of the candidate pair. The campaign team and their sympathisers performed prayer activities with the SQ pair. As quoted in Gresik news, Candidate Pair number 1, SQ, used the campaign schedule to hold mass prayers at the PKB Buderan field. The event was attended by tens of thousands of women who are members of the Fatayat congregation, Muslims, the supporting parties' ranks, and the campaign team. The event starts at 13.00 Gresik Time and aims to pray for the victory of the SQ pair in the 2016-2021 local election. In addition to the supporting parties and the congregation, the joint prayer activity was attended by KH Abdul Ghofur, the caretaker of the Sunan Drajat Islamic Boarding School Lamongan, and H. Agus Maksum (Gus Maksum), the son of the late KH. Abdullah Faqih from the Langitan Widang Islamic Boarding School in Tuban. Abdul Ghofur expressed his support for this candidate pair and advised the candidate pair and the Gresik community in his speech. In general, he hopes that the local elections will be peaceful. SQ is a perfect match because Sambari has advantages in world knowledge and Qosim in the afterlife, which can complement each other. Meanwhile, Abdul Halim Iskandar, chairman of the East Java PKB, was also present. In his speech, he invited the people of Gresik to come to the voting station and vote for candidate Number 1 on 9 December 2015. He also invited the entire community to pray before the 9th not to doubt their choice, namely candidate Number 1 (Http://www.kabargresik.com, 2015b).

Generally, the prayers offered at the introduction and closing are the same in terms of prayer. However, the content of the prayers recited by the Kyai in Arabic varies according to the goals and wishes of the prayer organisers. Indeed, prayer can be done by anyone. However, to lead a prayer in front of a large crowd, especially if there is an orientation of political interests, certainly cannot be done by just anyone. Only a cleric or Kyai is worthy of leading the prayer.

Wali Lima (Five Wali) Pilgrimage

The Wali Lima pilgrimage carried out by supporters of the SQ pair is claimed to be a religious activity that aims to get closer to Lord God. The activity was prepared by SQ supporters and sympathisers, which had taken place long before the local election. Meanwhile, the field operators were given to women from Muslimat and Fatayat NU Gresik, who deployed 800 buses to support this activity. The guardian's pilgrimage by mobilising the masses became a central issue in the local election. The BERKAH pair protested the activity. However, the protests stopped midway because there was no solid evidence that the activities led to election violations. Pilgrimage is the right of everyone and cannot be processed as an election violation. The community is of the view that even before the campaign, SQ often held activities that directly interacted with the community. Moreover, they are incumbents. People did not think negatively when they came to the community during the campaign. They welcomed the pair's activities.

Religious messages in Social Media

The widespread use of social media is nothing new in Indonesia. Since the boom in 2012, people's attachment to social media has increased. Initially only used as a medium to socialise with close friends and relatives, social media is now starting to penetrate communication between individuals and institutions. Seeing this phenomenon, political parties and candidates began to see social media as a tool to interact with constituents and promote their products. Ahead of the Legislative Elections, Political Parties began to create accounts to campaign against their parties and candidates aggressively. The power of social media to influence society is based exclusively on its social aspects. This is to increase citizens' interaction and political participation. Several different studies of citizens' voting habits - since the classic Lazarsfeld investigation in the 1940s - have shown that voting decisions are not usually based on a single communication step. More important is two-step communication, meaning conversations with opinion leaders, colleagues, friends and acquaintances who can either consolidate or undermine voters' opinions (Ari-Matti Auvinen, n.d.).

With the development of internet technology and the large number of people in Indonesia who use the internet, paired with social media such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and YouTube, it is clear that online media plays an important role in shaping public opinion and political agendas. Politicians, citizens and journalists are increasingly adopting new social media such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to support political causes, whether to engage with other stakeholders in the political public sphere, campaign, disseminate or retrieve information, or contribute to the rational debate – critical (Habermas, 2006). In the current political context, mastering public communication is one of the keys to winning the competition in the political world. Currently, one of

the effective channels is social media (Woolley, J.K., Limperos, A.M., and Oliver, 2010)

An informant from the SQ campaign team, Miftahul Huda, said, "we are working hard to win the political battle in Gresik district. We did many strategies in the political contestation then, ranging from direct campaigning, involving the wider community by giving speeches in front of thousands of people, mass prayer, to making sholawat videos with new song arrangements. We take all these steps considering that the people of Gresik have become a modern society that makes technology their daily companion. Praise to the Lord, in this way, many people have responded well to our candidate pair."

Based on this statement, it seems that the success that the SQ Regent candidate pairs can play cannot be separated from the important role of the campaign team who always supports the political campaign process, both through direct campaigns such as in the open field or through virtual media by uploading prayer videos. . The political campaign process carried out in 2015 also did not seem to involve only the public and political figures. Many religious figures, called Kyai, also participated in several Sambari-Qosim political activities. The involvement of religious leaders in this development is in the aspect of developing its spiritual element. This element is impossible to fill without the role of religious leaders.

Social media is an indirect campaign, namely a political campaign carried out through props such as banners and social media. This is where the pair (SQ) utilises the religious socio-cultural community of Gresik with a campaign strategy that is in accordance with the conditions of the community. Of course, this strategy received a warm and joyful welcome from the community, especially for the campaign packaged with the wali lima pilgrimage. Empathy and homophily are the main strategies used by candidate pair 1 (SQ) in carrying out political communication in the form of campaigns to reach the target voters and touch their hearts.

The above phenomenon can be analysed using the Empathy theory proposed by David Berlo, which explains that in carrying out political communication, the communicating parties must place themselves in the condition of the interlocutor so that a relationship is established that will make communication successful. Concerning political campaigns, it can be seen how the SQ pair has always been close to the electorate:

First, Religious lectures and joint prayers were held at Mr H. Asroin's house in front of the Great Mosque, one of the SQ pair's campaign teams. The event involved thousands of people. Religious leaders and local community leaders also attended the event to show that all Gresik community members want leaders who are wise, fair, and close to the people. The activity was also attended by Kyai, which indicated that the BERKAH of the Kyai as a religious figure was unanimous and determined to support SQ.

Second, charity events for orphans are held in various places, including activities with Baznas. Moh Qosim gave a lecture on the donation activity and invited orphans and their guardians to pray together. Then, towards the event's closing, Sambari, Moh Qosim and the campaign team gave parcels to the orphans. The SQ pair's message is that the responsibility to care for orphans is a shared task between the government and the community. They are the nation's next generation, so they should receive attention.

The next theory is homophily. Homophily is a similarity owned by the parties which carry out political communication. In the process of this political campaign, many similarities were built. These similarities affect the psychology of the voting community, who initially did not know and were less close, to feel that the SQ partner was close and understood the hopes and desires of the community. The forms of activities include providing free Wali Limo pilgrimage packages for Fatayat mothers and Muslimat. The five guardians are Sunan Ampel in Surabaya, Sunan Maulana Malik Ibrahim and Sunan Giri in Gresik, Sunan Drajat in Lamongan, and Sunan Bonang in Tuban. The campaign team provided four buses for pilgrimage. In this case, the SQ pair showed that NU's identity is shared because the above activities are ritual activities for the Nahdiyyin.

Besides face-to-face communication, homophily strategies are also widely used on social media. Homophily on the internet and social media by users (Farrell, 2012) can create a space that echoes the similarity of political choices (Arvidsson, 2014) so that it can gather mass groups of supporters virtually. Digital campaigns in today's modern era make SQ-winning teams participate in campaigns through social media such as YouTube, Facebook, television, and others. One of the things to do is make a prayer video containing the programs offered by SQ and an invitation to choose the number one partner. From this activity, the pair's team (SQ) is trying to get closer to millennials or novice voters who are synonymous with the digital world.

Modern society is a society that is aware of the importance of information, including religious information. Thus, the measure used in some aspects of life is based on information from outside, especially from the media. In addition to Facebook and YouTube media, television is still a reliable information producer, especially for segments of society who are not young anymore. In Indonesia, the dominant television stations are private television stations. Private television in Indonesia can be categorised as commercial television because, according to the commercial work system, it is looking for profit and its extraordinary dependence on advertisements or advertising (Mc Quail, 2002b). The media do not live in a vacuum. The media live in a social system in a society. The condition of the media in Indonesia after the new order, broadcasting media is described, lives in a system that tends to be market-based-power. This symptom can be seen, among others, in the tendency to commodify religion in the media. Although it seems vague,

for the commercial media, religion is mass culture. As an element of religious culture, it deserves to be converted into a profitable commodity. Media is a tool to convey messages from communicators to audiences (Cangara, 2009).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research and data analysis, it can be concluded that in the Gresik local election in 2015, religious issues became the main message in political communication directly or through social media. The strategy chosen by pair no. 1 Sambari Qosim (SQ) was very effective and attracted sympathy to win the political contestation. The forms of religious issues that are carried out include joint prayer activities, donations to orphans, free Wali Lima pilgrimages, and social media with religiously nuanced content. By using empathy and homophily, the SQ pair can carry out their campaign strategy with a soft campaign so that their messages reach the voting public. They firmly make their choice because they feel that the candidate is in a group with them, so they will later consistently fight for their aspirations.

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