

Islamic personal branding strategies in the 2024 local election in Central Aceh

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Abstract This study investigates the application of Islamic personal branding tactics by politicians competing in the 2024 Central Aceh local elections. This research, rooted in the theoretical framework of personal branding and political communication, examines how politicians in this primarily Muslim region leverage diverse media channels to shape their public image and engage the local population. The study employs a qualitative technique, including text analysis, observations, and document inspection, to evaluate the personal branding tactics of a sample of ten politicians across various media platforms that include the internet, social media, and print media. The data collection period spans six months before the 2024 Central Aceh local election. The findings show that politicians make substantial use of Islamic rhetoric, symbolism, and the involvement of religious authority to boost their personal brands. They use a consistent media strategy, carefully incorporating these Islamic personal branding elements across several interconnected mediums. Nonetheless, the study emphasises the difficulties of guaranteeing consistency between the leaders' crafted image and their actual behaviour and policies. This study enhances the limited academic understanding of the influence of religion on personal branding and political communication, specifically regarding local elections in predominantly Muslim areas. The insights acquired can guide the formulation of more effective and ethical personal branding strategies for politicians aiming to engage with their people.

Keywords: Islamic personal branding; politicians; 2024 local election

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 Simultaneous Local Head Elections (Pilkada) phases have commenced. The Independent Election Commission (KIP) has recently accepted registrations for five pairs of Regent and Deputy Regent of Central Aceh 2024 candidates. Despite the Pilkada stages not commencing the campaign season, the ambience is already palpable and observable in Central Aceh. Since early 2024, politicians have utilised online media for campaigns. Billboards and social media have been utilised since June. The 2024 Central Aceh Pilkada is a significant event in local political dynamics, characterised by the strategic diversity of regional head candidate representations (Lay, 2017).

Central Aceh, an area in Aceh Province with dominantly Muslim population has a distinct social and cultural background (Wijatmoko et al., 2023; Zulfan et al., 2023). This circumstance influences how politicians construct their public persona. In this context, studies of political communication indicate that Islamic personal branding, which incorporates Islamic ideas with political iconography, is highly relevant and worthy of examination (Echchaibi, 2018; Hasan, 2012; Hefner, 2019).

Research on the personal branding of politicians or officials has previously been widely studied. (FAI-Qurthubi, 1964; Al-Jauziynulloh, 2019; Hendrayana, 2019; Farhan et al., 2020; Nugraha & Budiwaspada, 2022; Haris et al., 2022; Purwanti et al., 2023; Hanevi et al., 2023; Yasa, 2024). However, this Islamic personal branding study provides a new perspective on the position

of religion in the process of image-building carried out by politicians. In this case, religion is not positioned as a tool to gain support, which is called the politicisation of religion or identity politics. (Yunus et al., 2023). Islamic personal branding refers to an image strategy that emphasises Islamic values and teachings as a basis for building and managing personal image.

Personal branding is actually an effort to manage your image by highlighting and maintaining your own strengths in order to give a positive impression or image in the eyes of others. (Gomez et al., 2018; Mustafa et al., 2023; Mashiah, 2024). In Islam, there is an explanation that allows a Muslim to engage in self-presentation imaging. This means that a person may present himself by promoting their positive qualities such as knowledge abilities, such as his knowledge and capacity. (Al-Mawardi, n.d.; Nashr & Al-Karmani, n.d.; Al-Qurthubi, 1964; Al-Jauziy, 2002).

In a homogeneous society that highly upholds religious values such as Central Aceh, the Islamic personal branding approach has never been questioned as the politicisation of religion, let alone as identity politics (Sutrisno et al., 2024). In fact, religion is the basic benchmark that determines the eligibility of candidates in the Pilkada contest. As stated in Aceh Qanun (Aceh Islamic Special Law) Number 12 of 2016, one of the requirements for candidates in the Pilkada in Aceh, both at the provincial and district/city levels, is reading the Quran. This implies that religion is the primary capital that candidates must have in order to gain trust and emotional connections with voters. Regional head candidates who succeed in aligning their public image with Islamic principles can gain strong support from the community (Rozaki, 2024).

Political communication studies provide critical insights into how politicians deliberately employ diverse media outlets to construct and propagate their public persona (Hjorth & Arnold, 2011; Lünenborg & Maier, 2015; Roets & Van Hiel, 2009; Susilo et al., 2019; Üstündağ, 2019). Incorporating Islamic values and rhetoric into personal branding is essential for political communication in a primarily Muslim area such as Central Aceh (Ahmed, 2009; Azra, 2004; Hildebrandt, 2015; Katjasungkana & Wieringa, 2003; Mecham, 2017; Rinaldo, 2010). Researchers in this domain have examined how the strategic use of religious symbolism, language, and affiliations with religious personalities might augment a politician's appeal and legitimacy among the local public. Aceh studies enhance understanding of the region's distinctive social, cultural, and political environment. Central Aceh, an area in Aceh Province with a mostly Muslim population, possesses unique norms, attitudes, and expectations that influence how politicians develop and portray their public identities (Mohd Nor & Inayatillah, 2011; Nurrahmi & Putra, 2019; Zulfan et al., 2023). Scholars in this field have examined the crucial influence of religion, customs, and regional identity on the area's inhabitants' political dynamics and decision-making processes. The convergence of these two domains with branding studies offers a thorough framework for analysing the Islamic personal branding techniques utilised by politicians in Central Aceh. Branding experts have investigated how individuals, such as political candidates, may intentionally develop and oversee their public persona to distinguish themselves, establish trust, and attract their intended audience (Zulaikha et al., 2024). In the context of the 2024 Central Aceh local elections, the inclusion of Islamic branding aspects into the candidates' personal branding strategies is essential for achieving political success. This research integrates political communication studies, Aceh studies, and branding studies to recontextualise Islamic personal branding within the 2024 local elections in Central Aceh.

A significant study focus is the utilisation of Islamic personal branding strategies by politicians competing in the 2024 Central Aceh local elections. In a primarily Muslim area such as Central Aceh, the purposeful integration of Islamic concepts, beliefs, and images into a politician's public persona may profoundly influence their electability and trustworthiness with local people. The successful execution of Islamic personal branding faces several hurdles. Ensuring alignment between the projected image and the politician's genuine conduct and political stance is essential for sustaining public confidence and support. Discrepancies between the envisioned Islamic persona and the politician's actual conduct may foster distrust and uncertainty among the public.

This study examines the media usage and techniques adopted by politicians in Central Aceh to establish Islamic personal branding in anticipation of the 2024 local elections. This study will enhance scholarly understanding of how Central Aceh politicians utilise Islamic

values, symbolism, and rhetoric to construct their public personas, particularly in personal branding and political communication during local elections in predominantly Muslim areas (Azra, 2004; Carney et al., 2020; Heryanto, 2014; Lee, 2017; Mohamad & Aljunied, 2011; Rinaldo, 2010; Schneider et al., 2016; Setijadi, 2016) . The results can help guide the formulation of more effective and ethical personal branding strategies for politicians aiming to engage with their people.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method that focuses on the Islamic personal branding of Politicians ahead of the 2024 local election in Central Aceh. Islamic personal branding in this study encompasses the overall strategies employed by politicians, whether in the form of activities, messages, or symbols, to shape an Islamic image ahead of the local elections in Central Aceh.

Data collection took place from June to August 2024. Data were collected through content analysis, observation, and documentation studies of politicians' publication documents, both in the form of news in online media, social media content, billboards, and politicians' public activities. The data analysis technique used in this study is the interactive model from Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). In its implementation, there are three general stages carried out in this model data analysis technique, such as data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. All of these stages are cyclical (back and forth) and interactive along with data collection. Thus, data analysis takes place simultaneously from the data collection process to the conclusion and verification process.

The researcher's role in data collection and analysis involved remaining reflexive throughout the study to mitigate personal biases. Reflexivity allowed the researchers to acknowledge their influence on the research process and interpret the data in a balanced manner. Detailed field notes and an audit trail were maintained to enhance transparency, providing a record of decision-making processes and analytical steps taken during the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Politician Profiles in the 2024 Local Election in Central Aceh

There is an interesting phenomenon in the 2024 Central Aceh local election such as the emergence of veteran Tanoh Gayo political figures who are running as prospective regional head candidates in Central Aceh Regency. At the end of the registration period, August 29, 2024, the Central Aceh Independent Election Commission (KIP) released that there were five pairs who registered as candidates for regent and deputy regent of Central Aceh for the 2024-2029 period. The five candidate pairs, if sorted by the time of registration at the KIP office, the five candidate pairs are as follows (Binsar, 2024b) in Table 1.

Table 1. Names of Candidate Pairs for Regent-Deputy Regent of Central Aceh in the 2024 Local Elections

No	Name of Candidate	Bearer Party	Supporting Party	Number of support seats/Identity Card
1	Bardan Sahidi-Karimansyah	PKS, PKB	PNA, Gabthat	6 Seats
2	Alhduri-Alaidin Abu Abbas	PDI Perjuangan, Demokrat, PAN, Partai UMMAT, Hanura	PSI, Garuda, Gelora, Partai Adil Sejahtera, Partai Buruh	7 Seats
3	Shabela Abu Bakar-Eka Saputra	Gerindra, PBB	PA, SIRA	5 Seats
4	Irmansyah- Azza Aprisaufa	Independen (Non-Party)	Independen (Non-Party)	6955 KTP
5	Halil Yoga-Muchsin Hasan	Golkar, Nasdem, PPP		12 Seats

Source: Compiled from various sources (Darmawan, 2024a; 2024b; 2024c; Tanara, 2024b; Mustawalad, 2024; Sanusi, 2024)

Table 1 shows that politicians who are running as regent candidates in the 2024

Central Aceh Pilkada are important figures in the Gayo Highlands who have experience as regional officials in the previous era. The first pair, Bardan Sahidi and Karimansyah. Bardan Sahidi is a cadre of the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) who has served as a member of the DPRA for two terms (2014-2019, 2019-2024). Unfortunately, in the 2024 legislative election (pileg), Bardan Sahidi failed to regain the position (Tanara, 2024a). In the 2024 local elections, Sahidi is running with Karimansyah. Karimansyah is a bureaucrat who served as regional secretary (Sekda) in Central Aceh from 2015-2020 (Romadani, 2024a).

Second, the pair Haili Yoga and Muchsin Hasan. Haili Yoga also has a background as a bureaucrat. He also served as regional secretary, specifically the Regional Secretary of Bener Meriah Regency from 2019-2022. Then, Yoga was inaugurated as Acting Regent of Bener Meriah. The term of office of Acting Regent ends on July 14, 2024 (Bustami, 2024a), namun ia lebih dulu mengundurkan diri pada tanggal 12 Juli 2024 (Tanara, 2024b). While Muchsin Hasan is a genuine politician, he has been the Chairman of the Central Aceh Golkar Party DPD since 2020. In addition, Hasan also served as a member of the Central Aceh DPRK for the 2014-2019 period. In the 2017 Central Aceh local elections, Muchsin Hasan ran as a candidate for regent but did not win. (Lintasgayo.co, 2016b). In the 2024 local elections, he was also predicted to run again as a candidate for regent (Lintasgayo.co, 2024a), until finally paired with Haili Yoga as a candidate for deputy regent.

The third pair, Shabela Abu Bakar and Eka Saputra. Shabela Abu Bakar can be said to be the incumbent. He was the regent of Central Aceh for the 2017-2022 period. After his term of office ended, Central Aceh was led by an acting regent until a new regent was elected as a result of the 2024 simultaneous local elections. Before becoming a regent, Shabela was a bureaucrat, his last position was assistant regent for administration and finance in Bener Meriah Regency. (Lintasgayo.co, 2016a). In the 2017 local elections, Shabela ran as a candidate for regent paired with Firdaus who then created the jargon 'Shafda'. This pair won with 32,548 votes or 30.52 percent. (Komisi Independen Pemilihan Aceh Tengah, 2017). In the 2024 local elections, Shabela is paired with Eka Saputra. Eka Saputra is a politician from the Gerindra Party. He is a member of the Gerindra Party DPD Central Aceh. Finally, Eka Saputra's position as a member of the Central Aceh DPRK for the 2019-2024 period (Sekretariat DPRK Aceh Tengah, 2024).

The fourth pair, Alhudri and Alaidin Abu Abbas. Almost the same as Shabela, Alhudri is also a bureaucrat. He has a series of positions at the level of head of service or agency in the Aceh Provincial government. In fact, in 2016, leading up to the 2017 election period, Alhudri was appointed as the acting (Plt.) Regent of Central Aceh. Finally, in March 2023, Alhudri was inaugurated and held the position of Acting Regent of Gayo Lues until finally advancing as a prospective candidate for regent in the 2024 Central Aceh local elections (Masroni, 2023). As for his partner, Alaidin Abu Abbas is a politician from the Democratic Party. He is a member of the DPRA for two terms (2014-2019, 2019-2024) for the electoral districts of Central Aceh and Bener Meriah. (Baga, 2024a).

The last pair is Irmansyah and Azza Aprisaufa. The figures of Irmansyah and Azza are new 'players' in the political contestation scene in Central Aceh. Irmansyah, his name has only been popular in Central Aceh since the issue of the 2024 local elections. Previously, Irmansyah had a career outside the region, precisely in Jakarta. He once served as Deputy Mayor of South Jakarta (2015-2017), even as Regent of the Seribu Islands in 2017-2018 (Fikar W Eda, 2024). Meanwhile, his partner, Azza, is a young figure in Central Aceh. He is known as a motivator and CEO of an educational institution, SAUFA Center. (Arinos, 2024; ARS, 2024).

The emergence of five pairs of prospective regent and deputy regent candidates in the 2024 Central Aceh local elections shows that political enthusiasm in Central Aceh is quite high. Although not like the 2012 Pilkada which consisted of 11 candidate pairs (Tim Lintas Gayo, 2012), at least the number of candidate pairs in the 2024 Pilkada is the same as the number of candidate pairs in the 2017 Pilkada (Bakesbangpol Aceh Tengah, 2016). In addition, the participation of figures and politicians who have been active outside the region implies that Central Aceh is the central political stage in the Gayo Highlands. (Bustami, 2024b). The figures and politicians in question are such as Haili Yoga, Alhudri, and Irmansyah.

In addition, the relatively large number of candidate pairs and the almost even potential of political power can create a climate of tight competition among the candidates. Thus, the ability and personal appeal of each candidate are part of an important

communication strategy to gain sympathy and support from the people of Central Aceh.

Islamic Personal Branding Strategies of Politicians in Central Aceh Using Integrated-Media

Based on a study of online media documents, the discourse on the Central Aceh Pilkada emerged a year ago, precisely on January 18, 2023. *Tribun Gayo* media was the one that brought up the discourse at that time, through a YouTube channel account with a video titled '8 Figures Chosen by Residents Who Are Worthy of Becoming the Head of the Central Aceh Region in the 2024 Election' (*Tribun Gayo*, 2023). So, this media only introduces videos from 2024 (*Lintasgayo.co*, 2024; *Karmiadi*, 2024; *Samsuddin*, 2024; *Samalanga*, 2024). At this time, discourse began to emerge from individuals as figures and politicians. The first time, in February, Muchsin Hasan appeared with the news that he received support from the Golkar Party to advance as a Candidate for Regent of Central Aceh 2024 (*Lintasgayo.co*, 2024a). After that, followed by Alaidin Abu Abbas who declared himself ready to advance in the Central Aceh Pilkada contest. (*Samsuddin*, 2024). Next, Irmansyah-Azza from the non-party (independent) route (*Brasnews.net*, 2024), then Bardan Sahidi who in April began seeking support from parties other than PKS (*Romadani*, 2024b). Until May, the media reported that there were only two politicians or figures who had declared their candidacy as a pair, namely Irmansyah-Azza and Bardan Sahidi-Karimansyah. (*Darmawan*, 2024a). Meanwhile, Haili Yoga and Alhudri only made a firm statement to run in July, before or after the end of their term of office as acting regent. (*Tanara*, 2024c; *Bustami*, 2024b).

The use of social media and print media by figures and politicians in the context of personal branding began to be seen in June, and became more massive in July. The social media used included Instagram, Facebook, YouTube. While the print media used consisted of billboards and posters. This study's theoretical implications emphasise the dynamic characteristics of political discourse and personal branding in the internet era, especially regarding municipal elections in culturally distinct areas such as Central Aceh. The gradual growth of political speech, as noted in the research, demonstrates the deliberate timing employed by prospective candidates to sway public opinion. These continuous dynamics underscore the significance of comprehending temporality and cyclical patterns in political communication, wherein language may remain inactive until it is strategically reintroduced, thereby influencing its effect on the voter.

The situation in Central Aceh highlights the transition to hybrid media techniques, wherein conventional print media and new digital channels converge, enabling political actors to present their brand in diverse manners. This tendency illustrates a significant theoretical transition in which personal branding transcends conventional media to incorporate digital narratives, facilitating a more profound and potentially more influential connection with the electorate. This integration is essential for constructing narratives that appeal to various voter groups, coinciding with the rise of digital literacy and social media usage in regional settings.

Social Media

Although the local election stages when the research was conducted had not yet entered the campaign period (September 25-November 23, 2024), the use of media to carry out political image building has been widely found on social media. Based on observations and documentation studies, there are politicians or candidate pairs who actively use social media. The social media recorded here are social media that are directly affiliated with politicians, either as individuals or with their partners, and contain contents related to their candidacy in the 2024 Pilkada. The keywords used to conduct the search follow three patterns: first using the name of the politician/candidate pair, second the name of the politician/candidate pair plus other keywords related to the Pilkada such as 'friends/volunteers', 'pilkada', and 'Aceh Tengah regent candidate', and third using words that have become jargon such as the word 'Pong Sede' used by the Shabela Abu Bakar-Eka Saputra candidate pair. The following are the findings of the study related to the use of social media for personal branding of politicians in Central Aceh (See Table 2).

Based on Table 2, it can be seen that only the Bardan Sahidi-Karimansyah pair used three social media platforms to carry out personal branding or political image building ahead of the 2024 Central Aceh Pilkada. It could be that the other candidate pairs will maximise the use of these media during the campaign period, or at least after the official determination of the regent

and deputy regent candidates by the Central Aceh KIP on September 22, 2024.

Table 2. Utilisation of social media for personal branding of politicians ahead of the 2024 Local Election in Central Aceh

Politician	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube
Bardan Sahidi-Karimansyah	Bardan Sahidi; Bardan Karimansyah; Shbt Bardan Sahidi; Milenial Bardan Kariman.	bardansahidi; bardankariman; sahabatbardankarimansyah.	Sahabat Bardan Kariman; BERIMAN TV;@bardansahidi5496.
Haili Yoga-Muchsin Hasan	Haili Yoga; Sehebet Drs Haili Yoga; Muchsin Hasan; SahabatHamas AT.	haili.yoga; sahabat_hailiyoga; terhamashamas; sahabathamas2024; muchsin.hasan.	-
Shabela Abu Bakar-Eka Saputra	Pong Sede; Shabela Abubakar; Pong Sede Gayo; Sede Shabela Eka	shabelaabubakar; ekasaputra_st	-
Alhudri-Alaidin Abu Abbas	Barisan Alhudri Alaidin; AlaidinAabbas Amoda	drs_alhudri_mm;relawan_alhudri_alaidin;g1millenialalhudri; alhudri_alaidinabuabbas.	-
Irmansyah-Azza Aprisaufa	-	Irmansyahazza; azzaaprisaufa	-

Source: Processed from Research Data (2024)

Billboard, Poster

There is something interesting related to the use of political billboards and posters ahead of the 2024 Central Aceh Pilkada. Although they have not been legally appointed as Candidates for Regent and Deputy Regent of Central Aceh, let alone during the campaign period, these politicians have put up many billboards and posters in open spaces. According to observations in the field, both in terms of quantity and quality, the use of billboards and posters is dominated by the Haili Yoga-Muchsin Hasan candidate pair. Although, in terms of time, the installation of this publication was preceded by Bardan Sahidi-Karimansyah. In terms of quantity, Haili Yoga-Muchsin Hasan billboards and posters are the most commonly found along the protocol roads of Takengon City. In terms of quality, their posters are also found in strategic places ranging from large to small sizes. Several large billboards can be seen along Yos Sudarso, Soekarno Hatta, and Lebe Kader roads.



Figure 1. Haili Yoga-Muchsin Hasan's Billboard on Jalan Yos Sudarso (left) and Jalan Lebe Kader (right)
Source: Processed from Research Data (2024)

After Haili Yoga-Muchsin Hasan (Figure 1), for large billboards especially around the city, the most dominant are Alhudri- Alaidin Abu Abbas. For Alhudri alone, on Jalan Yos Sudarso there are two large billboards (in Paya Ilang and Blang Kolak). While with the Alaidin pair, on Jalan Yos Sudarso and Lebe Keber there are two billboards (in Kemili and Blang Kolak). However, there are almost no posters for this pair around the city. While Bardan Sahidi-Karimansyah, there is only one large billboard in the city centre, particularly in front of the Takengon Art Building (GOS). However, many medium-sized billboards and posters were found that were pasted for this pair. So, the distribution of printed publication media for Bardan Sahidi- Karimansyah is more dominant than Alhudri-Alaidin (See Figure 2 and Figure 3).



Figure 2. Bardan Sahidi-Karimansyah's billboards on Jalan Yos Sudarso (left) and in Bebesen (right)
Source: Processed from Research Data (2024)



Figure 3. Alhudri-Alaidin billboards on Jalan Yos Sudarso (right) and on Lebe Kader (left)
Source: Processed from Research Data (2024)

Other candidate pairs, Shabela-Eka and Irmansyah-Azza, have not been found to be using political billboards or posters in the context of the 2024 Pilkada. This can be considered reasonable, because there has been no official announcement regarding the determination of candidates and the campaign period.

The above explanation indicates that each candidate pair has a different media usage strategy. However, all pairs seem to be aware of the importance of using social media such as Instagram which allows for interaction with the audience and is archived (Sazali & Mustafa, 2023). In addition, it can be seen that the Bardan Sahidi-Karimansyah pair uses a more integrated media utilisation strategy, namely online media, social media, and print media. This strategy serves to reach more audiences from various circles. They are also first in taking the starting point, so that the personal branding message conveyed seems authentic, consistent, not a sudden image-building before the election seconds.

Creating Islamic Jargon

In a society that is predominantly Muslim and religious, the ability of candidates to project Islamic values through their personality as politicians is an important part of gaining sympathy and support from the people of Central Aceh. If we look at the series of local elections in Central Aceh, Islamic jargon and branding seem to never be separated from the winning candidates.

In the 2012 Central Aceh Local election, the winning pair at that time, Nasaruddin-Khairul Asmara, could not be separated from their religious image. Nasaruddin is known as a religious figure where he is able to be a preacher and Friday prayer leader (Fauzie, 2015; Humas.acehprov.go.id, 2017). Furthermore, in the 2012 Pilkada, Nasaruddin was paired with

a religious figure, Tgk. Jauhar Ali, and this pair won the election at that time.

Likewise in the 2017 Central Aceh Pilkada which was won by the Shabela Abu Bakar-Firdaus pair. One of the jargons carried by this pair at that time was 'prosperous, intelligent, just, dignified, religious' (Lintasgayo.co, 2016a). In addition, the couple created an acronym of their names with a word that is pronounced similarly to a terminology in Islamic culture in Indonesia, namely 'Shafda'. For Muslims in Indonesia in general, the term 'sabda' is often used when citing hadith or sayings from the Prophet Muhammad SAW. The phenomenon of the use of Islamic jargon can also be observed in the 2024 Pilkada in Central Aceh. This can be found explicitly in the jargon created by politicians who are prospective candidates in the 2024 Central Aceh Pilkada. Through observation and content analysis of the publication media used by politicians, both print (posters, billboards), online news and social media, the following are Islamic jargons found ahead of the 2024 Central Aceh Pilkada.

Beriman For All

'Beriman' is a jargon created by the Bardan Sahidi- Karimansyah couple as an acronym for 'Together with Bardan-Kariman' (Lintasgayo.co, 2024d). Quoted on the Instagram page bardansahidi, the more complete jargon reads: 'Together with Bardan-Karimansyah we will realise a Better Central Aceh' or 'Belief For All', 'Belief for a Better Central Aceh'. (Sahidi, 2024)

This word is considered as an effort of Islamic personal branding (IPB) because it can create a perception of the religiosity of its users. In Islam, a believer is described as an ideal person who has a good relationship with Allah SWT and humans. (Hadi, 2023).

HAMAS: Harapan Masyarakat

The word 'hamas' is one of the jargons created by Haili Yoga-Muchsin Hasan. Apart from being an acronym for their names, this jargon is also an abbreviation of 'people's hope' (Mustawalad, 2024b). Refer to the Instagram pages haili.yoga and Sahabathamas2024 (Yoga, 2024), This jargon is also written with the sentence, "Hamas!!!, win, win, win". This candidate pair actually also has another jargon, namely "Development Acceleration for Advanced Central Aceh".

If we look at the global context of Muslims today, the word 'Hamas' is affiliated with the Palestinian militant group that controls Gaza. For some Muslims in the world, Hamas (Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya) are fighters and even heroes who defend the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Palestine from Israeli occupation. (Bbc.com, 2023). However, the use of the word 'Hamas' as a political jargon in the local elections can touch the psycho-religious feelings of the Central Aceh community who care about the Palestinian struggle. (Karmiadi, 2023).

Central Aceh Congregation

The prospective candidate pair Irmansyah-Azza Aprisaufa carried the slogan "Central Aceh Berjamaah" in the 2024 Central Aceh Pilkada. In his explanation, this jargon is interpreted as a spirit of togetherness in developing Central Aceh. Irmansyah said that being in congregation (collective) is a basic principle of development in Islam. (Arsadi, 2024).

In addition to the jargon above, there are still jargons carried by the Alhduri-Alaidin and Shabela-Eka candidate pairs. Their jargons also contain concepts that are in line with Islamic teachings. Based on the content of Alhduri-Alaidin's social media and billboards, four jargons can be identified, namely: 'The People of Central Aceh Progress Together, All In', 'Central Aceh Progresses with Dignity', 'Central Aceh Progresses, Real Work with Real Impact', and 'Together for the People'. Meanwhile, there are two jargons carried by the Shabela-Eka candidate pair: 'Winning for all, fighting together to build Central Aceh' and 'Quick Action for Central Aceh'

Religious Symbolism and Islamic Rhetoric

Another strategy of Islamic personal branding of politicians in Central Aceh can be seen from the use of Islamic religious symbols in the candidate's personal self. In terms of appearance, it can be seen that several politicians use Islamic attributes such as koko shirts, robes, peci or kopiah. There are two candidate pairs that quite a lot and consistently display symbols like this, namely the Haili Yoga-Muchsin Hasan (HAMAS) and Bardan Sahidi-Karimansyah (Beriman) pairs.

Next, Islamic rhetoric is also the main strategy of Islamic personal branding. This can be seen when the candidate pairs deliver speeches in front of their supporters and when delivering a speech along with candidate registration at the KIP Aceh Tengah office on August 27-29, 2024. On that occasion, all candidate pairs used Islamic language and communication ethics such as saying basmalah, greetings, praising Allah and salawat, and some quoted verses from the Koran. This is certainly an inseparable part of the Islamic personal branding strategy. (KIP Aceh Tengah, 2024)

Meanwhile, if seen from the vision and mission, several candidate pairs explicitly create an Islamic narrative. Like Haili Yoga-Muchsin Hasan (HAMAS) who stated that their vision is to realise a Central Aceh that is faithful, serving, building, productive and innovative. (Baga, 2024b). Meanwhile, the candidate pair Bardan Sahidi-Karimansyah stated their vision of 'Realising an Advanced and Sustainable Islamic Central Aceh by 2029'. (Lintasgayo.co, 2024b). Meanwhile, the Irmansyah-Azza Aprisaufa candidate pair used an Islamic narrative when declaring themselves as running in the 2024 Central Aceh Pilkada contest. (Brasnews.net, 2024)

Publication of Social and Religious Activities

The next Islamic personal branding strategy is to publicise social and religious activities carried out by politicians. There are several activities that can be highlighted from the candidate pairs in line with the 2024 Pilkada in Central Aceh. First, the candidate pairs publicise religious activities. When the Quran reading test was completed, which is one of the requirements for candidates running for Regent and Deputy Regent in Central Aceh, almost all candidate pairs posted the activities on social media. Specifically, Haili Yoga was once a muezzin for Friday prayers at the Raudatul Jannah Blang Kolak I Mosque on July 19, 2024. Bardan Sahidi also often posts his activities as a khatib for Friday prayers at several mosques in Central Aceh (Sahidi, 2024).

Second, the candidate pair published the social activities they carried out ahead of the 2024 Pilkada in Central Aceh. Bardan Sahidi has shared several times the activities of providing social assistance such as to fire victims through social media and news reports (Lintasgayo.co, 2024c; Binsar, 2024b; Sahidi, 2024). Then, before registering with the KIP, the HAMAS couple (Yoga, 2024) and Shabela Abu Bakar-Eka Saputra (Sede) gave charity to orphans (S. Fauzi, 2024).

In addition to the above strategies, politicians in Central Aceh also carry out Islamic personal branding by uploading positive testimonials from several religious figures through the media. Bardan Sahidi on his Instagram page displays positive testimonials from religious figures, including from Tgk Jauhar Ali, Tgk Ridwan Qari, and Tgk Chaliludddin Kebayakan (Lintasgayo.co, 2024d; Sahidi, 2024). Haili Yoga did the same thing on his Instagram page, where he received support from several religious figures, including Tgk Nasaruddin. (Yoga, 2024)

CONCLUSION

In region with a significant Muslim population like Aceh, the utilisation of religious symbols—such as Islamic garb, Islamic speech, and engagement in religious activities—serves as a pivotal approach for politicians in cultivating an Islamic image. A primary problem for Islamic personal branding is ensuring consistency between the projected image and the politician's genuine conduct, since any inconsistencies may foster voter distrust. This study demonstrates that politicians mostly use internet media, social media, billboards, and posters to enhance their Islamic personal branding initiatives. The concurrent and synchronised utilisation of various channels presents a crucial notion in Islamic personal branding—an integrated media strategy. This strategy seeks to cultivate a uniform and integrated perception of the politician across many platforms. Candidates frequently utilise Islamic terminology such as 'Beriman', 'Hamas', and 'Berjamaah' to emphasise their adherence to Islamic principles. Furthermore, the deliberate dissemination of social and religious activities, along with endorsements from religious leaders, is a vital component of the Islamic personal branding strategy.

This research provides implications for personal branding theory where in religious Muslim voter areas, politicians need to portray themselves as Islamic politicians, referred to as Islamic Personal Branding. Islamic Personal Branding can be carried out by employing Islamic

rhetoric, using Islamic jargon and symbolism, engaging in Islamic social activities, and utilising testimonials from religious figures, disseminated through integrated media.

A constraint of this study is the lack of interviews as a data gathering method. Direct interaction with politicians may have yielded more profound and nuanced ideas. Future study may investigate the influence of Islamic personal branding on the electability of politicians in areas regulated by Islamic law, such as Central Aceh. Furthermore, examining public responses to Islamic personal branding techniques would be a valuable topic of research, providing profound insights into voter perceptions and behaviours in these circumstances.

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