

## Visual Rhetoric of 'Gus' as Political Image: Islam-Nationalist or Commodifying Islam

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### ABSTRACT

The rise of Islam-nationalist ideology in Indonesia's political contestation brings various Muslim figures to be involved. One of the most popular in the 2024 General Election is the appearance of 'Gus' as a representation of youth and religious politicians. This research focused on the construction of 'Gus' as a political image, and explored how their public relations team used visuals as an essential channel for storytelling, persuading, and image building. Adopting the agenda-setting theories and Burke's dramatist pentad, this research draws the visual framing, answering 'what is shown' to the public and 'how it is characterized' as a presentation in social media. This research conducts the qualitative data analysis of four figures: Gus Muhaimin Iskandar, Gus Saifullah Yusuf, Gus Taj Yasin Maimoen, and Gus Ahmad Mudlor Ali. As a result, this research validates that the PR team used socially mediated images to build images based on "Islamic idealism", the power of a local strongman, the leadership, and the point of view to legitimize their political position. To understand the political visual rhetoric, this research adopted the pentadic reading by looking at the element of social media post. It identifies the commodification goals of every figure, and shows where messaging priorities lies.



## INTRODUCTION

Islamist political wings illustrate an important development in the political ideology landscape in Indonesia. The rise of the Islamist-nationalism side as the convergence of religious and nationalist produced a new “brand” of religious nationalism representation in Indonesia’s political circumstances. The Islamist nationalists occupy the center ground in Indonesian politics, especially for the last decades (Argenti et al., 2022; Jubba et al., 2022; Romli, 2020). It also brings the involvement of Islamic groups, Islamic organizations, and Islamic figures to Indonesian political practice. The entry of the Islamic representation brought them as political entities that actively sought to influence and persuade the target public.

Several pieces of literature focus on the phenomenon of political image construction in Indonesia, especially the involvement of religious figures. Research found that there are multi-layer Muslim figures have risen as a representation of “Islamist politicians” for the last decade. It comes from the group of Kyai (Jannah, 2015; Nofiaturrahmah, 2014) in Java, Tengku in Aceh and North Sumatera (Fakhri, 2019; Sarumpaet & Nababan, 2014), also Tuan Guru in West Nusa Tenggara (Amrillah, 2021; Oktara, 2015). Research highlights this phenomenon that is linked with the political legacy in the middle of Indonesian society. The royal

descent group, religious figures/prominent family, and Pesantren family still become determinant factors for the society in the election (Aspinall et al., 2011; Azizah et al., 2021; Buehler & Tan, 2007; Hamayotsu, 2011; Soenjoto, 2022). Islamic political practices in Indonesia are closely related to politic communalism implemented by Pesantren, Islamic Organization, also Santri as the representation of the Islamic community (Anam & Latief, 1985).

Toward 2024 General Election in Indonesia, the appearance of ‘Gus’ became a political phenomenon that is interesting to be seen. ‘Gus’ is a social title in the middle of Indonesian Society that represent of ‘young Kyai’ or a youth Islamic figure, especially as a son of a Kyai or Ulema. Clifford Gertz and Horikoshi (in Faridl, 2007) highlighted that Kyai have a central role in Society, based on their cultural power, also to determine the political views of the community. This political bargaining power also has been seen by political party nowadays in the appearance of Gus. Political figures are openly for bringing the ‘Gus’ title as their political branding, especially in public sphere and social media.

Figure 1. The branding of Gus Imin and Gus Ipul in public sphere and social media



Source: Research Documentation, July 2023

The figure of 'Gus' maximizes the exposure on social media, especially to spread their political message more broadly. It also affects their political branding, as social media could maintain direct communication with the public (Williams & Gulati, 2013; Zhang et al., 2010). Social media, especially Instagram, bring the various political message in the practice of contemporary politics. It is utilized by the political contestant to construct and put a specific impression in the community. This research focused on the utilization of Instagram by the figure of 'Gus' and their political strategy. It based on the assumption that Instagram has the strength of the visual post to create a great impact in political message dissemination (Parmelee & Roman, 2019; Peng, 2021; Vraga et al., 2020).

The use of visual media become an influential factor in the construction of political 'image'. Research found that visuals bypass cognitive function and

affect the community emotionally and physiologically, also amplify the effect of the political message (Geise & Baden, 2015; Pratiwi, 2018). Visual media also reduce the complexity of issues or situation to be a simple and memorable frame (Edwards, 2012). Today, modern political communication creating the the ideal visual framing to influence public affairs.

The visual communication of 'Gus' become the highlight on this research. It picturized the political maneuver related to Islamic figure toward 2024 election. This research examines the visual communication strategy of the 'Gus' and compare its message with the political message. To analyze the visual and political message, this research relies on Kenneth Burke's rhetorical work dramatic pentad and the concept of commodification. According to

Burke (in Rountree & Rountree, 2015; Van Beveren et al., 2023) rhetoric analysis is grounded in the act of allying someone with people or things. The notion of identification will reflect someone's activities, beliefs, and values. All the uniting in Burke's analysis classified the entities through shared ideas or attitudes consubstantiality. His Instagram posts serve as political public relations tools to set the tone, transition the campaign mode, and influence the public to support the candidate.

This research explores the visual framing that was presented to the public via social media toward the 2024 election. It conducts a qualitative data analysis on the Instagram profiles of four figures: Gus Muhaimin Iskandar, Gus Saifullah Yusuf, Gus Taj Yasin Maimoen, and Gus Ahmad Mudlor Ali. These four figures have reason for representing the image of 'Gus' in political practice. Gus Muhaimin Iskandar has an image as one of the presidential candidates. Gus Saifullah Yusuf is a senior Islamic politician and the Mayor of Pasuruan Regency. Gus Taj Yasin Maimoen is the vice governor of Central Java. Then, Gus Ahmad Mudlor Ali is a young politician who sits as the Mayor of Sidoarjo Regency. All of the figures are consistently using Gus as their political image.

The result of the research answered the question of 'what is shown' and 'how it is characterized'. The basis of the analysis using the systematic taxonomic approach that uploaded on their official account, to examine how the 'Gus' figure visual themes and how these narratives compare to other political figures campaign rhetoric

## METHODOLOGY

This research uses qualitative data analysis, using an iterative open-coding process to identify the recurring concepts and categories in both image data sets. It explores only for the photograph post of Gus Muhaimin Iskandar, Gus Saifullah Yusuf, Gus Taj Yasin Maimoen, and Gus Ahmad Mudlor Ali. The open coding approach that implemented in this research are adopted from Holiday et al., (2015) that applied to code image-based social media like those in this study.

Using the paradigm of Foucauldian social constructivism, this research explores the role of visual arguments in maintaining the political image. The analysis focused on elucidating the argumentative structure of a graphic, also to interpret the visual arguments. This analysis also bought two assumptions: 1) that political visual of Gus never displayed in a vacuum, always displayed by particular groups in service of particular politics such as securing the reputation, and also 2) assumed that political visual is normative.

To examine the images, Burke's dramatic pentad became the indicator that was adopted in the theoretical framework. Burke's pentad provided the theoretical framework that organized into tags (Rountree & Rountree, 2015). Three tags implemented on this research: 1)

Agent, the tags that included primary subject of the photography from the Gus himself, the other politicians, his family, and public; 2) Act, indicated a scene that occurred in formal or ceremonial event, and non-formal (recreational) event; 3) Agency, which indicated a posed photograph with purposed information on motive. This research organized the emerging concepts into several tags, examined each image, caption, and tags from 1 January 2023 to 31 July 2023.

In the second part of the research, the commodification assumption was examined and compared the initial images of the Gus political visual.

Commodification in digital platform could affect the public perception (Gilardi et al., 2022). This research will be noted on several photos that related to particular and significant image, such as the photo with the President or other specific image. Recognizing the impact of the initial image in every Gus' account, this analysis made a qualitative comparison to analyze the design and content of the post, describing the interaction of every pentadic elements that contain Agent, Act, and Agency element. This analysis is conducting a formal design critique.

Table 1. Burke's dramatisitic pentad in Gus Political Image

Tag	Burke's Pentad	Definition
Only Gus figures	Agent	The present of Gus as political figures
Islamic figures	Agent	The present of Islamic representative: such as Kyai or other Gus.
Politicians	Agent	The present of political representative: such as State and Local Government official.
Family	Agent	The present of family member of the 'Gus'
Public	Agent	The present of public
Ceremony and Event	Act	Action of the 'Gus' in formal event or staged agenda that attended by public/press
Recreation	Act	The image that framed the action of the 'Gus' in non-formal agenda
Posed	Agency	Gus directed at the camera or physically arranged for the camera.

Source: Author's Theoretical Framework (2023)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

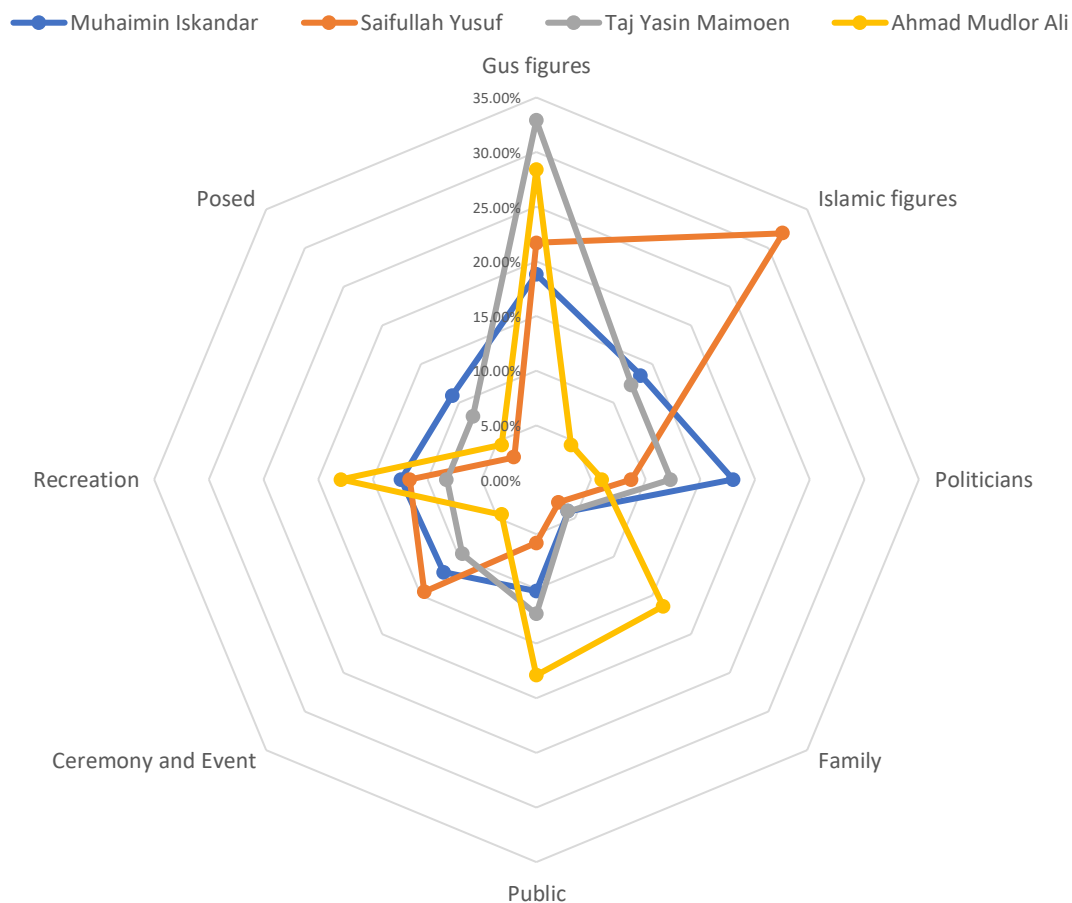
The result of the categorization of Gus visual politics are presented in Table 2, with the tags listed in order of the

greatest relative difference in the proportion of Instagram posts. The proportional differences between all the tags are visualized as a radar chart in Figure 1. The radar chart showed the percentage of every tag using radial axes. Every color of pattern represents every sample: Gus Muhaimin Iskandar (GM), Gus Saifullah Yusuf (GS), Gus Taj Yasin

Maimoen (GT), and Gus Ahmad Mudlor Ali (GA). The findings of the research described in greater detail below.

Figure 2. Categorization of images tags, ordered by largest percentage difference (1 January 2023-31 July 2023)

Tag	GM (n=266)	%	GS (n=69)	%	GT (n=73)	%	GA (n=67)	%
Only Gus figures	50	18,8%	15	21,7%	24	32,9%	19	28,4%
Islamic figures	36	13,5%	22	31,9%	9	12,3%	3	4,5%
Politicians	48	18,0%	6	8,7%	9	12,3%	4	6,0%
Family	11	4,1%	2	2,9%	3	4,1%	11	16,4%
Public	27	10,2%	4	5,8%	9	12,3%	12	17,9%
Ceremony and Event	32	12,0%	10	14,5%	7	9,6%	3	4,5%
Recreation	33	12,4%	8	11,6%	6	8,2%	12	17,9%
Posed	29	10,9%	2	2,9%	6	8,2%	3	4,5%



Source: Research Data Processing (2023)

### **The figure of Gus**

The figure of Gus himself become main focused as political images. Research portrayed that personal image become the main symbol of political campaign in Indonesia, especially in social media platform (Firmansyah et al., 2018; Verian & Situmeang, 2019). The consideration of Gus figure for this research is important as their public profile distinguishes sharply from other political and religious figure. As indicated by Gus's Public relation team in Instagram during the year following the 2024 general election, their personal Instagram account served as an important channel for constituent outreach.

The four Gus image upload 60-260 Image post from January to July 2023, with average of 6-7 images every month. Informal review of Gus Muhaimin Iskandar (Gus Muhaimin), Gus Saifullah Yusuf (Gus Ipul), Gus Taj Yasin Maimoen (Gus Yasin), and Gus Ahmad Mudlor Ali (Gus Mudlor) reveals noteworthy trends. Every Gus figure uses Instagram more intense throughout the election as he was reaching out the public, introduce his vision and try to secure their support ahead of election date.

The figure of Gus Muhaimin Iskandar is a national Islamist political figure, the leader of Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB, National Awakening Party). Gus Muhaimin also sits as the Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Council (DPR RI). Beside his political position in legislative board, Gus Muhaimin also appeared as one of president (also the vice president) candidate for 2024 general election. In his first appearance as a political figure on 2003-2004, Muhaimin Iskandar introduced his image as 'Cak Imin.' It was related on his positioning as a figure from East Java province, with 'Cak' as an *epithet* for a young figure in east java dialect. But since 2023, especially when his name become a favorite to be on

presidential candidate, he and his supporters change the image by using 'Gus Muhaimin' in public.

Gus Saifullah Yusuf, or commonly known as Gus Ipul, comes with the similar political image with Gus Muhaimin Iskandar. His name getting reputation since sat as the Deputy Governor of East Java on 2009-2019. Till 2024, Gus Ipul served as the Mayor of Pasuruan Regency. Saifullah Yusuf brought the brand of 'Gus' since became a candidate of governor election, and won it twice beside Soekarwo. Among East Java province, the figure of Saifullah Yusuf are broadly respected. Born in Pesantren family, same as Muhaimin Iskandar who related with Pondok Denanyar, Saifullah Yusuf also representing the Islam-Nationalist figure in Indonesian political circumstances.

Taj Yasin Maimoen, who broadly known as Gus Yasin, is the son of Islamic figure, K.H. Maimoen Zubair, from Pesantren Al Anwar Rembang, Central Java. He starts his political career on Regional Legislative Council (DPRD) of Central Java in 2014-2019 period. Gus Yasin appeared as one of the most famous politician figures that comes from Pesantren family, especially when he accompanies Ganjar Pranowo as a 'Islamist Nationalist Duo' on 2019 Central Java Governor Election. Gus Yasin represent the Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP, United Development Party), which also brought his dad, K.H. Maimoen Zubair, as the central figure of the party.

The last figure is Ahmad Mudlor Ali, or well known as Gus Mudlor. Among the four figures, Gus Mudlor is the youngest 'Gus' that gain his popularity in political circumstances. Gus Mudlor now is the mayor of Sidoarjo Regency.

Before that, Gus Mudlor gained popularity as one of the representatives of GP Ansor (the Youth Movement of NU).

**Gus with Islamic Figures vs Politician**

The disparities of tags based on the Gus image are portrayed, but the most interesting is the appearance of Islamic figures and politicians. The proportion of images that noted on a 'Islamic Figures' and 'Politician' tags are counted on 13,5% vs 18% (Muhaimin), 31,9% vs 8,7% (Saifullah), 12,3% vs 12,3% (Yasin), and 4,5% vs 6% (Mudlor). All of the number also represented the brand that has been constructed by every figures.

Gus Muhaimin Iskandar appeared more with politicians than Islamic figures. Even the disparity is not that big, but there is a shifting of figure priority that associated by Gus Muhaimin since early 2023. At the first three month of 2023, Gus Muhaimin appeared more with Islamic Figure, such as Syaichona Kyai Tuan Guru Turmudzi (31 January 2023), Gus Azmi (1 February 2023) Habib Ali Zainal Abidin (21 February 2023), K.H. Nurul Huda Jazuli (23 February 2023), Gus Kautsar (24 February 2023), K.H. Ahmad Fuad Nur Hasan and K.H Agoes Ali Mashuri (12 March 2023). But, the most Islamic figures that appeared in Gus

Muhaimin's post on the period is K.H Said Aqil Siradj (8 posts) and vice-President of Indonesia, K.H Ma'ruf Amin (3 posts). These two people are close-related with the political preference of Gus Muhaimin as the chairman of Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa.

But the shifting of figure appearance in Gus Muhaimin's post came on May till the last of July 2023. The appears of politician are often seen since 29 April 2023, the meeting of *Koalisi Kebangkitan Indonesia Raya (KKIR)* towards 2024 Election become the stepping stone of this appearance. Gus Muhaimin appeared with Prabowo Subianto in 11 posts since May to July 2023, more than the appearance on January to April 2023 (8 posts). It is related to the political vision that brought by Gus Muhaimin to face the 2024 Election, as the favorite candidate of vice-president, accompanying Prabowo Subianto who stands to be the president candidate. Beside the Prabowo Subianto figure, President Joko Widodo and Airlangga Hartarto become two figures that also often appeared in Gus Muhaimin post (6 posts).

Figure 3. Coding and Noting of images of Gus Muhaimin Iskandar's Instagram



Source: Research Data Processing (2023)





The representation of Islamic figures and politicians on Gus Saifullah has appeared in different way. Gus Ipul has a close relationship with Islamic figures since his chair in the government. Now, he holds the position of General Secretary of Nahdlatul Ulama. The picture of Islamic figures in Gus Ipul's Instagram post are dominant. Several Islamic figures who often appeared are Habib Syech bin Abdul Qodir Assegaf and Yahya Cholil Staquf (8 posts). Both are famous Islamic figure in Nahdlatul Ulama community. Habib Syech is the leader of Majelis Ta'lim Ahbaabul Musthofa, getting many supporters that gathers as The Syechermania. Also, Yahya Cholil Staquf is the Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama. Gus Ipul also portrayed his close relationship on the figure of Khofifah Indar Parawansa, the Governor of East Java.

Figure 4. Coding and Noting of images of Gus Saifullah Yusuf's Instagram



Source: Research Data Processing (2023)

On the other hand, the representation of Islamic figures and politician are not dominant in Gus Taj Yasin Maimoen and Gus Ahmad Mudlor Ali. The two figures have similar pattern of representation that represent 'self' as political figures. Gus Yasin and Gus Mudlor post his everyday agenda, even it is not related to their political program. That makes the representation of Gus Yasin and Gus Mudlor bring the same space on Islamic figure, the public, and their recreational post.

Gus Yasin maximize his 'self' figure as a politician in social media, picturized as a populist figure with his everyday life. The image of Islamic figures and politician are not dominant on the post. The feed also represents the political image of Governor of Central Java, Ganjar Pranowo, who also brought the image of political populist (Zuhdi et al., 2023). Gus Yasin capture his image as the deputy of Governor, as the representation of his families Pesantren, and as an ordinary people equally.

The same pattern has also showed in the profile of Ahmad Mudlor Ali. As the major of Sidoarjo Regency, Gus Mudlor captured himself as a politically populist image. His post does not always portray his position as a major, but also as a representation of an Islamic figure and as an ordinary person. Gus Mudlor brought more 'millennial' approach to brand himself as a politician, and choose not to represent his closeness with Islamic figures and politician as the dominant image in his Instagram feeds.

The more interesting fact is these two figures do not 'exploitated' their position as a young figure of Nahdlatul Ulama. Different with Gus Muhaimin and Gus Ipul, the image of Gus Yasin and Gus Mudlor does not strengthen their image as Nahdlatul Ulama representation, as the two figures are the leader of GP Ansor.

## Being Populist: Family and Recreational

Political image in Indonesia has been coloured by the “polite and technocratic” populist branding by politician. President Joko Widodo become a figure who portraying himself as “the man of the people” with a pro-poor reformer vision and down-to-earth image. Beside the implementation of pro-poor policies, the populist image of politician also picturized by the appearance of the family and recreational agenda (Rakhmani & Saraswati, 2021).

The narrative of committed family-man also adopted on how ‘Gus’ construct their political image. Gus Muhaimin, Gus Ipul, Gus Yasin, and Gus Mudlor brought their wife figure in several agenda. The wife figure is close-related with political position in Indonesia, especially in the level of city mayor and governor. The wives are bounded in socio-political position, such as the chief of Family Welfare Programs, or other regional program.

Figure 5. The appearance of Gus Mudlor’s wife as the Ambassador of Family Planning



Source: Instagram (2023)

The four figures also brought their recreational image in their political

branding. The multitude of posts in every gus’ posts related to recreational setting are supposedly natural, daily setting. For example, how Gus Muhaimin tries to grab the sympathy with riding motorcycle or bicycle. Also, how was Gus Ipul attending the *Shalawatan forum*? This type of content tries to catch the attention of netizens by showing that the politician figure also has a life beyond their governmental or legislative position.

## Islam-Nationalist or Commodifying Islam?

The ‘Gus’ political branding evokes the image of Islam through the selection and presentation of every photo of them, especially that has been posted in Instagram. The attachment of Islamic figures, Islamic ceremony, and Islamic culture make up a substantial proportion of the Gus’ political branding. The position of Gus in controlled setting— posing with Islamic figure, attending the Islamic ceremonies, or speak in front of ‘Jamaah’ while wearing the Islamic clothes are acts that bring special narrative in every figure (Widian et al., 2023).

Trying to brand themselves as Islam-Nationalist, the phenomenon of Gus’ political image showed as the new Islamic commodification, offering the self-picture of “spiritual populism” to public. The spiritual image becomes a commodity as a part of their political effort, and as the media (social media and mainstream media) promote the Gus’ political image, it also reflects the juncture of image and substance in the Indonesian political landscape. These political images also reflect critiques that the branding of ‘pious’ politics is an exercise in mere image-making. This research views that the commodification of Islam in political image is the perverse transformation of piety into the product of politic, which it also assumed as an inappropriate form of a commercial material object.

Gus should be reflecting the true religious value, as their high position in the middle of society. But the label of Islamic representation just shifted become the commodities which are promoted through the circulation of images of pious figure. Pious images in politics could be constructed as something that reflect 'good image' but it might lead public as political 'consumer' to less positive destinations than would true religious values. When public seem to suggest that a pious persona might simultaneously be both virtuous and valuable, the anxiety among public this generates can be likened to the accusations of fetishism that Webb Keane, in analysing Protestant conversion on Sumba, has called 'scandal' (Moderns, 2007). Keane uses the term of 'scandal' to describe his findings related to the violation of modernist boundaries between people and things. This boundary crossed whenever humans appear as a subject to have been commodified.

This research found that the sense of 'scandal', cited from what Keane found on his research, is also amplified when the thing element that involved is marked as 'religious' and also the human element that involved is politician. The scandal of religion and political landscape are comingling crumble under the figure of Gus as the representation of Islamic icon, and popular and elite Indonesian anxieties about 'to be pious' as the political market of Indonesia want to choose the pious figure of politician. Yet that very 'sales' success strategy coexists with anxiety about whether or no one can believe the proclamations of faith which people who choose as a political choice such commodities seem to be making.

This research explore two basic principles that become the main assumption in political commodification: 1) what is the conveyed by the political PR team to the audience does not reflect the facts, there has been a gatekeeping process and the construction of issue, and 2) the social

media as a political channel only chooses a few issue that considered important. Based on the analysis, campaign advertising assumes a greater role Indonesian election Multi-candidate identity competing for the electorate attention. And the PR politics role behind the Gus figure was influenced by the political agenda, especially from the political party.

The Gus figures introduce another persona of political populist. The Gus political image is not just popularize the issue of welfare or other pro-people, but also embedding the religious issues in the campaign. The construction of political identity that close with religiosity element are considered capable of gaining the sympathy and support of voters in the future election.

The tight contestation among Gus figure toward the 2024 election are reflected on the appearance of the four Gus figures: Gus Muhaimin, Gus Ipul, Gus Yasin, and Gus Mudlor. This research analyzed various campaign methods that used, especially in Instagram. The information that presented by the personal account in social media seem to go to the screening stage. The setting of commodification, using the assumption to set or cut an issue, has appeared in the public space. The political message that appeared in Gus' social media accounts are mature arranged. It shifting for not to spread negative campaign but positive campaign, and also keep the Instagram post out of hoaxes.

Unlike the 2019 election which was highlighted with the spread of hoaxes or misinformation (Anam & Nurhayati, 2020; Aspinall et al., 2011; Fadillah et al., 2019; Mujani & Kuipers, 2020). The highlight of issue in every Instagram page concerning the identity politics. Promulgation of issues of political identity are packaged and framed to lead community (potential voters), gain empathy, and form the public opinion. The image that has been introduced by Gus figure in Instagram

participate in spreading propaganda and identity politics campaign.

To analysing the phenomena, we use the coding that adopt the framework of Ninian Smart which is developed by Barker (in Santoso, 2015). The concept in Ninian Smart's framework breakdown the value indicator and religious commodification

that appeared in the middle of society. The second column explains the meaning of the concept and its relation to the people's culture, so it becomes the gate to identifying the commodification. The third column explain the connection between the indicators and the concept of issue.

Table 1. The Setting of Piety (Islamic Commodification) behind Gus Political Image in Instagram Account

Figure	Issue (Piety)	Commodification
Gus Muhaimin	PKB as a part of Nahdlatul Ulama	- Representing NU culture, i.e <i>Istighasah</i> , <i>Shalawat</i> , etc. - Representing the Pesantren as setting in visual image.
Gus Muhaimin	KKIR coalition is supported by Kyai	- His figure with Prabowo Subianto always be picturized with the figure of Kyai
Gus Ipul	Having a close relationship with Kyai	- Gus Ipul appeared with several figures of Kyai, as a city mayor and also as a general secretary of NU.
Gus Yasin	To build capabilities as a Muslim politician	- Constructing the image of habitus that represented the 'pro-people' image and reflecting the Islamic value.
Gus Mudlor	To build capabilities as a Muslim politician	- Constructing the image of habitus that represented the 'pro-people' image and reflecting the Islamic value.

Source: Data Analysis (2023)

The analysis validates that every PR team behind the Instagram account of Gus figures construct the image of 'ideal' Islamic politician that represent the value of piety in the figure. The image of Gus is chosen because the political role of Gus, as representing the Ulama figures, is strong and strategic among the Javanese community. Gus become one of the 'local elite' when we talk about the concept of local strongmen (Sidel, 2005). In the instrumentalist perspective, the image of Islamist-nationalist is strengthened by the social discourse that spread by the Gus figure, also how they mobilized the political and economic tools. The image of Gus is constructed to crystalized the 'selfness' image related on their position in the society.

Toward 2024 election, the political image of Gus in Instagram strengthens the

political relation of Kiai figure and the community. Gus as a part of Nahdlatul Ulama's culture appears as a magnet with political value, just like the figure of Kiai since the reformation era. The Gus figure were constructed and highlighted the leadership of the Gus figure. Also, the post of Gus figure is highlighted their political point of view. Using the caption, Gus Muhaimin, Gus Ipul, Gus Yaqut and Gus Mudlor spread their political position in several issue. Also, their appearance that attributes other Muslim figures highlighted the political message.

The Gus figure in Instagram also re-negotiated his political power and legitimation. Gus figure got the political accommodation and negotiated their interest with the national government. In the 2024



election issue, the Gus has a power to mobilize the 'selfness' issue to create the 'otherness' using the support of the local community, which it could be referred to the National Government.

## CONCLUSION

This study confirm that the Gus figure build their political image to face the 2024 election. The construction is validated using the utility of pentadic reading of image content in Instagram. Looking the proportion of image representation, it identified that Gus figure frame their personal as the main image in political visual. The four samples: Gus Muhaimin, Gus Ipul, Gus Yaqut, and Gus Mudlor has different political message that priorities lie, also different insight of political discourse.

The other thing that appeared is the attribution beside the Gus figure, which is dominant in four elements: the Islamic figures, the politician, the family, and recreational agenda. This four-attribution brought various political messages in visual rhetoric perspective. Visual narratives also could be analyzed for more complete picture of the communication from every PR team behind the Gus figure.

The 'Gus' political branding evokes the image of Islam through the selection and presentation of every photo of them in Instagram. This research views that the commodification of Islam in political image is the perverse transformation, in this case to elevate the image of piety on Gus figure in political circumstances. The construction of political identity behind Gus figures that close with religiosity element are considered capable of gaining the sympathy and support of voters in the future election.

The topic related on political image may be a complex phenomenon to be captured in one research. Each figure proceeds to release a visual image on their Instagram feed, and investigation may be extended to broader research field, examine whether the message

in political campaign remains reliable with the ones who this investigate recognized since the early of 2023. Researcher see future investigate potential in comparing broader visual talk over social media channel to decide in the event that there are any contrasts approach that appeared in particular social media stage for particular audience.

This study moreover recognized that there's restriction offer from each account, as Gus Muhaimin, Gus Ipul, Gus Yaqut, and Gus Mudlor has diverse devotees. Also, while identifying narrative within the visual surrounding, it does not talk to the genuine impact on the public. Prove for each Gus figure's political brand of visual talk may or may not be deciphered to an altered disposition in the audience, which future research merits to confirm any correlation.

## CREDIT AUTHORSHIP

### CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

**Aditya Fahmi Nurwahid:** Contributed to the data gathering and data analysis of this research. **Rahmatillah Dwi Putri:** Contributed to the data analysis and proofreader of this research.

## DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

We certify that there is no conflict of interest with any financial, personal, or other relationships with other people or organizations related to the material discussed in the manuscript.

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