



## Political Communication Strategy "Nyantri" in the 2024 Regional Election Campaign in Rembang Regency from the Perspective of Dramaturgy Theory

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### A B S T R A C T

*This study aims to explain and provide a comprehensive overview of the strategies employed by the two candidate pairs for Regent and Deputy Regent in the 2024 Pilkada campaign in Rembang Regency, using Erving Goffman's Dramaturgy Theory approach. This research adopts a qualitative method, utilizing both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through observations of five posts on the Instagram accounts of both candidates. The author observed these accounts over two months, from the beginning of the campaign period on Wednesday, September 25, 2024, to Saturday, November 23, 2024. Secondary data were gathered through literature studies, including journal articles, e-proceedings, and books, which served as additional sources. The collected data were then analyzed using the Dramaturgy Theory framework. The analysis reveals that both candidate pairs actively construct their public image on social media, particularly on Instagram. Their primary objective is to highlight their religious identity to gain public sympathy in Rembang Regency. Their campaign strategy involves engaging with local Kiai and Ulama—positions they adopt as Santri within the Dramaturgy framework—and showcasing these interactions on Instagram, a key political communication platform. This approach aims to strengthen their positive reputation in a predominantly religious society, thereby enhancing their public image among the people of Rembang Regency.*

### INTRODUCTION

The 2024 simultaneous regional elections (Pilkada) is one of the major political contestations in Indonesia, where people will elect governors, regents, and mayors simultaneously in all regions. The 2024 simultaneous regional elections are part of the harmonization of the general election schedule in Indonesia, which was previously run in different years for each region. A total of 37 provinces and 508 regencies/cities in Indonesia will participate in simultaneous elections in 2024, according to data released by the KPU. Pilkada itself is held every 5 years in every regency or city in Indonesia. In an effort to get a positive image, political actors who are contesting such as Regents are competing to do political communication well. One of the political communications is through campaigns. This can also affect the planned strategy.

Technological developments supported by the internet have created a variety of social media that can be used for political communication and campaign media (Alhasbi et al., 2023). So, by having a good political communication strategy, of course, it can attract people's attention to choose it. With the intention of winning the contestation, each candidate must consider a good strategy. Generally, they are willing to do various ways in order to win the election contestation. By campaigning, people can get to know the candidates they will vote for. In addition, through political campaigns, political actors or candidates can express themselves further and can offer their visions and missions. For this reason, political campaigns in a political contestation are crucial.

Rembang Regency is one of the regencies in Central Java. Rembang Regency itself is famous for its religious community.

This is shown by the large number of Islamic boarding schools in Rembang Regency. In addition, no less important is the presence of great scholars who came from Rembang. These include KH Maemoen Zubair, KH Ahmad Mustofa Bisri or Gus Mus and KH Bahaudin Nur Salim or Gus Baha and many more (Arravi, 2019). Kiai is one of the figures who has a strategic and central position in society (Dhuha et al., 1994). By being an educator or disseminator of religious knowledge in particular, Kiai plays a dominant role in society.

The relationship between kiai and local political dynamics is an interesting study in the landscape of Islamic political research in Indonesia (Haris & Dardum, 2021). It is inevitable that a Kiai must be involved in the regional head election process, especially in Rembang Regency. Kiai with his own charisma, in fact, is able to mobilize the awareness of the surrounding community in making choices. This is one of the causes of political dynamics or something that affects politics in Rembang Regency. Not surprisingly, if the political actors, especially here are the candidates for the Regent and Deputy Regent pairs, they use a strategy, one of which is through "Nyantri" political communication in campaigning in the 2024 regional elections to hook more votes. They are competing to approach the Kiai or Ulama in order to get support and prayers. Because according to him, that way later the people in Rembang Regency, especially the Santri, will follow what is chosen or what is recommended by the Kiai. So that the candidates hope to win the 2024 elections in Rembang Regency by using this strategy.

This paper contains material on how the "Nyantri" political communication strategy applied by the two candidates for Regent and Deputy Regent in the 2024 regional election

campaign in Rembang Regency in the view of Dramaturgy Theory. Tracing studies on the political communication strategy of “Nyantri”, there is actually literature that has studied the study of it. However, there are certainly differences between this paper and the existing writings. The existing paper is entitled “Prabowo Subianto's ‘Nyantri’ Political Communication Strategy in Winning the 2024 Presidential Election”, by Hafid, Siti Raudlotul Jannah and Minan Jauhari.

The difference lies in the theory used and the results of the research. The theory used in this paper is Erving Goffman's Dramaturgy analysis, while the theory used by the previous paper is Robert M. Framing analysis. Then, the result of this study is that the two candidates for the Regent and his deputy candidate do imaging (In Dramaturgy, they act as students) on social media, namely through their Instagram accounts. This is one of the political communication strategies they do so that they get a good reputation from the community, so that it can also add to their positive image among the people of Rembang Regency. Meanwhile, the results of the previous paper, namely the political communication strategy used by Prabowo in gaining the support of Kiai and Santri, used three image patterns, namely Pure Publicity, Free Ride Publicity and Paid Publicity (Raudhatul Jannah & Jauhari, 2024).

Furthermore, there are also writings that discuss political communication strategies such as “Political Communication Strategy of the National Awakening Party (PKB) of Jember Regency Towards the 2018 East Java Election” written by Muhammad Farhan. In addition, there is also an article entitled “Political Communication Strategy for Winning Regional Heads”, by Adi Nugroho. But in this paper, the discussion is more general when compared to this paper.

There are several main reasons why this paper is important and worthy of discussion and reflection. First, this research will provide deep insight into how this unique political communication strategy is applied at the local level, especially in Rembang district. This is important because many previous studies have focused more on the national or regional context, while local dynamics can be very different. Second, by using Dramaturgy Theory, this research offers a new framework for analyzing political communication strategies. This theory helps to understand how candidates for Regent and Vice Regent play their roles within a broader social context, which can be a useful tool for practitioners and academics. This paper combines two different fields, namely political communication with Dramaturgy Theory. The Dramaturgy Theory will be analyzed and explained how it relates to political communication. This is interesting, because it can provide new knowledge about how politicians campaign in the view of Dramaturgy Theory. The reason for choosing the theory is because it is the most suitable or the most appropriate in relation to the theme raised compared to other social science theories. Based on the above arguments, it is very natural for the author to raise the issue.

With several reasons for the importance of this research, the author tries to fill the GAP of previous writings. Furthermore, in this study, the author raises several questions, namely: (1) How is the concept of “Nyantri” political communication strategy applied by the candidate pairs in the 2024 regional election campaign in Rembang Regency, (2) How is this strategy from the perspective of Dramaturgy Theory, and (3) How is the role of social media, especially Instagram, in the dissemination of this strategy?

This study aims to explain and describe how the “Nyantri” political communication strategy applied by the candidate pairs in the 2024 regional election campaign in Rembang Regency. After that, it will also be analyzed and explained about how the correlation between the strategies carried out by the two candidates with Dramaturgy Theory. With this research, it is hoped that a better understanding of how political communication strategies can be applied in the 2024 regional election campaign in Rembang Regency can be obtained and how Instagram social media plays a role.

## METHOD

Descriptive qualitative research method. The sources of information used in this research are primary and secondary data sources. Primary data sources are obtained through data collection by observation. The author observes the movement of candidates for Regent and Deputy Regent candidates through social media, namely Instagram. The objects used are 5 posts on the two candidates' Instagram accounts. Through these posts, the question arises that whether the candidate is imaging or not. The author observed the two candidates' Instagram accounts for 2 months. Starting from the beginning of the campaign period on Wednesday, September 25, 2024 to Saturday, November 23, 2024. Researchers make Instagram social media the object of research which is one of the bridges or political communication tools in campaigning.

Meanwhile, secondary data sources are news articles on the website of the best and most trusted online news portal in Indonesia. This source of information was chosen because it was considered to provide relevant information. These secondary data sources are supporting data from primary data. In addition, data collection techniques from secondary data sources through literature studies. Journal articles, proceedings, and books were also used as additional data sources. The data is then analyzed using the analysis model of Erving Goffman's Dramaturgy Theory, one of the most influential sociologists in the 20th century (Tika Mutia et al., 2017). Data from one source will be processed along with data from other sources in order to get accurate results and analysis.

For data analysis techniques, it begins with the data reduction process, then continues with data display and ends with drawing conclusions. First, in the data reduction process, this stage involves reducing the volume of unnecessary data so that it focuses on the most important data to simplify further analysis. After the data has been reduced, the next step is the data display process. Data is displayed in a more structured and understandable form such as presentation in tables and visual images. Finally, interpret the results of the data display to draw relevant conclusions and provide recommendations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Social Conditions of the People of Rembang

One of the regencies in Central Java that borders directly with East Java is Rembang. Rembang Regency is located at the northeastern tip of Central Java Province. It is located at the coordinates 111000' - 111030' East Longitude and 6030' - 706' South Latitude, and is reached by the Java North Coast Road or Pantura Line. The Java Sea is to the north, with the land mostly low-lying and the highest elevation of approximately 70 meters above sea level. Rembang Regency itself is a Regency where the majority of the people are Muslims.

Table 1. Population of Rembang Regency by Religion (population) in 2019.

Islam	Protestan	Catholic	Hindu	Budhist	Beliefs
630.820	3.124	2.411	49	517	168

Source: Website of the Central Bureau of Statistics of Rembang Regency

From the data listed in the table, it is evident that the people in Rembang Regency are generally Muslims. With a predominantly Muslim population, Rembang Regency is also said to be a regency whose people are Regilius or Religious. Rembang Regency is one of the areas that is very thick with pesantren culture (Ahmad Choirul Furqon & Nurul Nurhandjati, 2023). This is evidenced by the number of Islamic boarding schools established in Rembang Regency. There are around 121 Islamic boarding schools in Rembang Regency in 2023. (Source from the website of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Rembang Regency).

In addition to the large number of Islamic boarding schools, Rembang Regency itself in fact gave birth to many famous charismatic Ulama-Ulama or Kiai in Indonesia. In this case, Ulama or Kiai play a role for mass mobilization in influencing people's political choices, because this is considered quite effective (Susi & Rahayu, 2010). The characteristic of Kiai Rembang in playing an important role in local politics is the power or symbol of religion. Because Kiai are considered public figures who have linuih knowledge (especially religious knowledge), the power of religion dominates their characteristics. As a result, people entrust their political choices to what Kiai say (Dhuha et al., 1994).

The Santri paradigm supports this condition, where the Santri, as obedient students to the Kiai, submit to the Kiai as their teacher. Please note, in this case Santri is not only someone who is studying or an alumnus at an Islamic Boarding School, but also someone who is or has been to school, which in fact is an Islamic school (Madrasah). With such a background or social condition of the community in Rembang Regency, it is not surprising that the candidates for the 2024 regional elections in Rembang Regency are competing to hook votes through one of these strategies, namely by approaching the Ulama and acting as Santri (Nyantri) to add to their positive image among the people of Rembang, so that they can also increase their vote acquisition.

### Regional Head Election 2024 in Rembang Regency

Pilkada is a democratic process that must be carried out with hope in order to elect regional heads who are in accordance with the people's choice (Farhan, 2021). In Rembang Regency, the upcoming elections are certainly welcomed by the citizens. In this 2024 election, Rembang Regency was followed by two candidates for Regent and Deputy, namely candidate number 01 Mbak Vivit and Gus Umam, then candidate number 02, Mr. Harno and Gus Hanies.

Tabel 2. Candidates pair number 01

Name	Candidate	Political and Organizational Career
Vivit Dinarini Atnasari, S.farm.,Apt.	Regent Candidate	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Head of KONI Rembang Regency</li> <li>Vice chairperson of the PKK driving team of Rembang Regency</li> </ol>

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deputy chairperson of the PKK driving team of Rembang Regency</li> </ol>
Zaimul Umam Nur Salim	Candidate for Vice Regent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secretary of the PPP faction in the DPRD of Rembang Regency (2014-2019),</li> <li>Chairman of DPC PPP Rembang Regency (2021-2026),</li> <li>Head of the winning team for the 2020 Rembang Regional Election for Abdul hafidz dan Guz Hanies,</li> <li>Chairman of the Al-Anwar Alumni Association of Rembang Regency, and</li> <li>Chairman of Santri Gayeng Nusantara Rembang</li> </ol>

Source: Posts on the @vivitumam.official Instagram account. The data is then made into a table by the researcher.

Tabel 3. Candidates pair number 02

Name	Candidate	Political and Organizational Career
H. Harno, S.E.	Candidate for Regent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Member of DPRD Democratic Party of Rembang Regency (2009-2024),</li> <li>Chairman of DPAC Pamotan Sub-district (2013),</li> <li>Chairman of DPC Rembang Regency (2014).</li> </ol>
H. M. Hanies Cholil Barro'	Candidate for Vice Regent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vice chairman of PC. Anshor Youth Movement of Rembang Regency (2010-2015),</li> <li>Chairman of PC. Anshor Youth Movement Rembang Regency (2015-2019),</li> <li>Chairman of the Advisory Board of PC. Anshor Youth Movement of Rembang Regency (2019-2023),</li> <li>Chairman of the Honorary Board of PMI Rembang Regency (2022-2027)</li> <li>Chairman of PP Anshor Youth Movement (2021-2025).</li> </ol>

Source: Posts on the @harmonis center Instagram account. The data was then made into a table by the researcher.

The two candidates certainly have their own backgrounds, the most prominent of which is that each of their representatives is a cleric or "Gus", as the sons of Kiai in Central and East Java are called. They are Gus Umam and Gus Hanies who certainly have high electability in Rembang Regency. Gus Umam, who is the younger brother of Gus Baha', certainly has his own added value among the people of Rembang. Meanwhile, Gus Hanies, who is the younger brother of the General Chairman of PBNU and is also the younger brother of the Indonesian Minister of Religion in the "Advanced Cabinet", of course, also has its own positive image. Then of these candidates, each of the Regent candidates is a well-known businessman in Rembang Regency. The Vivit-Gus Umam pair (candidate number 01) is supported by 10 political parties, including four parliamentary parties such as Nasdem, PPP, PDI-



The first reason is that the majority of the population in Rembang Regency is Muslim. This is in accordance with the evidence presented in table 01 above. Therefore, given the condition of the community in Rembang Regency, the candidates are interested in using this strategy. The second reason is due to the number of Islamic boarding schools and religious-based schools (Madrasahs) in Rembang Regency. With the many boarding schools available, both candidates have a large target audience. They hope that by getting closer to religious leaders or kiais, they can also gain the sympathy of the students in those boarding schools. The authority and power of kiais in society create the assumption that their influence is not limited to social relationships but can also be applied in the political field (Nuha, 2009). For this reason, the central role of a Kiai in Rembang Regency is very dominant, leading the majority of the santri community to follow or comply with what the Kiai does, including in choosing leaders.

The last point is the emergence of a sense of equality or brotherhood within the Rembang community; if they are santri, they will also choose someone who is a santri. Based on a shared fate and a strong emotional bond as fellow santri or alumni of the pesantren, they feel that they have a closeness or similarity in identity with the candidate they will choose (Ariandi et al., 2018). These reasons are what lead the candidates to employ this political communication strategy in their campaigns.

**Analysis of Dramaturgy Theory**

This research conducts an in-depth analysis based on the Dramaturgy Theory proposed by Erving Goffman in his book "The Presentation of Everyday Life" published in 1959. Dramaturgy by Erving Goffman can be described as a theatrical stage, where individuals exhibit different characters when on the front stage and back stage (Ainail Fitri, 2014). Like a performance, Erving Goffman divides social interactions into three areas: frontstage, backstage, and offstage. Frontstage is the area where actors interact with the public. Backstage is akin to actors preparing themselves and contemplating what actions to take to influence and attract the audience's attention, as well as what should not be displayed in front of the general public. Meanwhile, offstage refers to events and parties that are not on stage but support the performance, from pre-production to the time the show takes place (Risky Pamungkas, 2023).

Tabel 4. Dramaturgi Erving Goffman Theory (Alvin, 2022)

No	Stage	Action	Factor	Case Study
1	Frontstage (On Stage)	Interaction with the public through chosen media	Actions, speaking style, word choice, gestures, attributes, etc.	Both candidates present themselves as figures close to Ulama or Kiai and uphold the culture of Santri or Pesantren
2	Backstage	The process of preparing oneself based on events from the surrounding environment	What issues will be presented, and what should not be disclosed	actors such as political background, career, and organizational networks also support their electability.
3	Offstage	Events, teams, support from	Campaign team,	The success team of the candidate

		others, social capital owned by the actors.	closeness to political figures and the community.	for Regent and Deputy prepares the campaign thoroughly, especially having conducted research and planned political communication involving local religious figures.
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Source: Researcher's analysis results

Based on the researcher's analysis in the table, it is evident that Dramaturgical Theory is highly relevant for use in this study. With this Dramaturgical Theory, this research attempts to analyze the political communication strategy "Nyantri" in the Rembang regency election campaign into three points: frontstage, backstage, and offstage.

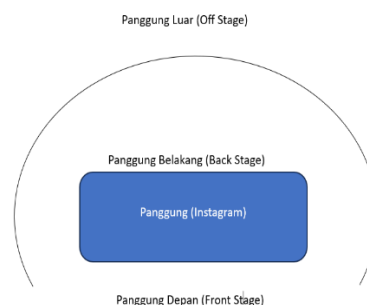


Figure 3. Implementation model of the dramaturgy of candidate pairs

Source: Researcher's analysis results

In Figure 3, the researcher attempts to simply visualize the implementation model carried out by both candidates based on the Theory of Dramaturgy. Based on the image, it can be seen that in the Theory of Dramaturgy, the social media platform Instagram serves as a stage. Social media acts as a means or medium of performance conducted by both candidates. Furthermore, equally important is the existence of the Frontstage, which is the part of the front stage. Here, the front stage represents the process of self-presentation, the process of playing a role, or the process of displaying oneself. Through Instagram, the people of Rembang Regency can see how the candidates position themselves as religious prospective leaders. Next is the backstage (the back part of the stage) and Offstage (the outside part of the stage, a process that is not visible at all on stage during the performance). To clarify further, the researcher will discuss this one by one.

**1. Frontstage**

Frontstage refers to the area where actors interact with the public, both directly and through social media. In playing their roles, political actors must truly embody them. Actions, gestures, and speaking styles must align with the roles they portray, which is as santri (students of Islamic boarding schools). In images 1 and 2, it is evident that both candidates are performing on stage (Instagram). Instagram, as a social network, serves as a personal stage that only showcases aspects deemed positive (Aisyah et al.,

2024). They present themselves, showing themselves as individuals close to scholars through social media, namely Instagram. They act as if they are santri; in this context, the focus is primarily on the candidates for the regent position, as both are entrepreneurs without a santri background.

Another aspect of dramaturgy in the front stage is that actors often try to convey the impression that they have a special relationship or a closer social distance with the audience than the actual social distance (Arif, 2014). This is what causes both candidates to act as santri, so that the people of Rembang Regency feel a sense of similarity with their prospective leaders. On their Instagram account, they posted a photo and video showing certain activities that could support their reputation as someone close to the Ulama, such as holding study sessions, visiting the homes of the Ulama, and so on. This aligns with Goffman's assumption that when people interact, they want to present a self-image that will be accepted by others (Nabila Shabiriani & Kadeer Bachmid, 2021). This is part of the front stage that they engage in to truly capture the audience's attention (the public) in order to increase their electability. Additionally, they must also wear attributes to maximize their performance, such as wearing a peci and a sarung when visiting the homes of the Kiai.

## 2. Backstage

The candidate pair for the Regent and Vice Regent, when backstage, organizes their planning for what they will do before they go on stage. In addition, the actors prepare themselves and think about the steps they will take to influence and attract the audience's attention, as well as what should not be displayed in front of the public. It is here, backstage, that all preparations are made thoroughly so that the performance can run successfully (Saidah et al., 2023). One of the most important aspects of the dramaturgical approach is that actors generally want to present themselves in an ideal form. Therefore, actors tend to feel the need to hide certain aspects of themselves from the audience during the performance (Indrananto, 2017).

They organize which issues should be showcased and which do not need to be displayed. In this case, they adopt from the background of the society in Rembang Regency, which is a religious community. Thus, when they are on the front stage, they must play the same role as the majority of the community in Rembang Regency. On the other hand, they understand that they must present a good side as religious leaders; these political actors do not reveal or showcase their true identity, which is someone who is not from the santri group.

In this backstage condition, factors such as political background, career, and organizational networks of the actors also play a supportive role. Their educational background, as well as past involvement in any organizations or communities, greatly supports the performance. In this case, candidates who have an educational background from Islamic boarding schools, or who have studied in schools that are predominantly "Islamic," certainly hold a unique value in the community of Rembang. Organizational networks or involvement in Islamic social activities can also enhance a positive image among the people of Rembang Regency. Lastly, they must prepare themselves to appear on stage, presenting themselves as the religious leaders desired by the majority of the community in Rembang Regency.

## 3. Offstage

In dramaturgy, offstage encompasses events and parties that are not present on stage or backstage, as illustrated in Figure 3. However, these parties still support the performance, from pre-production to the actual performance. In the 2024 regional election in Rembang Regency, the success teams or campaign teams of both candidates for the Regent and Vice Regent must thoroughly prepare their campaigns offstage. They conduct research, think about, and consider whether such campaign strategies can attract the attention of the Rembang community or not (Fatimah, 2018). In addition, they plan what political communication strategies will be employed until they arrive at the "Nyantri" strategy. By choosing this strategy, they involve other crucial actors in Rembang Regency, namely religious figures or scholars (Kiai). They seek information on which religious figures they can collaborate with in this political contest.

Furthermore, in this offstage area, the team or parties involved in the success of the performance are the media team. The media team manages the Instagram account that is the subject of this research. Through informative and engaging social media management, they can also support the electability of the candidates. This is very important considering that this Instagram social media serves as the stage for the performance. Therefore, how they craft words, edit photos or videos, or how they create posts on the candidates' Instagram account significantly influences this performance. As a result, the people of Rembang Regency can be attracted to the performance or image-building carried out by the candidates.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this research show that both candidates for the regent and their deputy engage in image building on social media, specifically through their Instagram accounts. This is done with the aim of highlighting positive aspects of themselves as religious individuals, so that this can garner sympathy from the public in Rembang Regency. The political communication strategies employed by each candidate in the Rembang Regency elections demonstrate a careful and structured approach to managing their image in front of the public. For instance, when appearing in public through Instagram (frontstage), both candidates present themselves as figures close to religious leaders or clerics and uphold the culture of students or Islamic boarding schools. Meanwhile, behind the scenes (backstage), factors such as political background, career, and organizational networks also support their electability. Outside of the stage (offstage), their teams prepare thoroughly, particularly by conducting research and planning campaigns that involve local religious figures, clerics, or scholars to gain unique value in the eyes of the community. All these elements, from planning and media appearances to supporting factors behind the scenes, play a crucial role in shaping and maintaining the desired political image of both candidates.

This research provides a real case analysis of a regional head election, which can serve as a useful example for other researchers and practitioners. Focusing on the cultural and social context in Rembang Regency, this study can reveal how local factors can influence political communication strategies. Since this research uses qualitative methods in the form of observation, it is clear that it does not provide a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of this "nyantri" strategy. From the limitations of this research, the

author suggests that future research should use quantitative methods. This aims to measure the extent to which the effectiveness of the "nyantri" political communication strategy can influence voters in Rembang Regency, such as conducting surveys or questionnaires that include questions about awareness of the campaign and public perception of the candidates. Additionally, future researchers can develop their studies through direct data observation or interviews. This way, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of whether the "Nyantri" political communication strategy is truly successful enough to secure victory in the upcoming local election contest, and which candidate is likely to garner more support from the people of Rembang.

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