

Political Communication Strategy of the Democratic Party in Winning the Kharisma Pair in the 2024 Pamekasan Regency Election

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Abstract. This research focuses on the political communication strategy applied by the DPC of the Pamekasan Democratic Party to win the KHARISMA (KH. Kholilurrahman and Sukriyanto) pair in the 2024 Pilkada. The purpose of this study is to analyze the communication strategies used by the Democratic Party in building voter support amid the dominance of religious parties and strong cultural influences in Pamekasan Regency, as well as identifying factors that support and hinder the implementation of these strategies. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative with a case study approach. The results showed that the communication strategy implemented by the DPC of the Democratic Party was personal, cultural, and figure-based. The main supporting factors include legitimacy from charismatic pesantren figures, local social networks, and strong religious narratives. Meanwhile, the obstacles faced included the low initial popularity of the candidate pairs and legal disputes at the Constitutional Court. This study concludes that the success of the Democratic Party's political communication is strongly influenced by its ability to adjust its strategy to the socio-cultural structure of Pamekasan society and build inclusive and adaptive political communication.

Keywords: Political Communication Strategy; Democratic Party; Pilkada 2024; Pamekasan; Socio-Cultural Influence

1. Introduction

Pamekasan Regency, which is located in East Java Province, has a unique political dynamic because the candidate is a figure from a large Islamic boarding school in the area, which is influenced by the religious and cultural character of the community. Political communication carried out by political parties must be in line with local values to create a good effect on society (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2020; De Bruycker & Rooduijn, 2021; Jandevi, 2019; Tameryan et al., 2019). The 2024 Pamekasan regional election was followed by three pairs of candidates. Pair number 01, Fattah Yasin and Mujahid Ansori (TAUHID), is supported by a coalition of the Star Moon Party (PBB), Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), Gerindra, Golkar Party, PSI, Garuda, and the National Awakening Party (PKB). Pair number 02, K.H. Kholilurrahman and Sukriyanto (KHARISMA), is supported by the

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Democratic Party, Gelora Party, National Mandate Party (PAN), and NasDem Party. Meanwhile, pair number 03, Muhammad Baqir Aminatullah and Taufadi (BERBAKTI), is supported by the United Development Party (PPP), the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), the Hanura Party, and Perindo.

Political communication is one of the essential elements in the quest for victory in political contestation. This communication not only involves conveying information from candidates to voters, but also includes strategies to shape public opinion, influence voter behavior, and build a solid political image. In the context of regional head elections (Pilkada), political communication acts as a liaison between candidates and the public to convey their vision, mission, and work programs in an effective way. According to Fitra (2019) in the context of competition between political parties, there are three main objectives in political campaigns. First, is to arouse the natural loyalty of a party's supporters to keep voting according to that loyalty. Second, to invite voters who are not bound to a particular party, or create new supporters from among independents. Third, to convince voters from other parties that the situation will be better if they vote for candidates from that party (Tamim & Zamzamy, 2023).

In E Rizky Wulandari's (2021) in political communication, the preparation of communication strategies requires attention to a number of important factors. First, understanding the segment or target audience is the first step for communicators to create effective communication. This is important because in the campaign process, the audience is not passive but active, so that there is mutual interaction between communicators and communicants who influence each other. Secondly, message development includes determining themes and materials that are key elements to influence the audience. Appropriately designed messages can attract attention and arouse voter interest (Wibisono et al., 2023).

Today, political communication is not only done directly and openly, but also online. Using the dominance of internet-based media such as social media is considered more effective and can reach the public widely and quickly. As stated by Tamim and Zamzamy (2023) social media is a platform that allows individuals to connect with others, share information, and communicate online. Most Indonesians, both urban and rural, are now using social media. Some of the most popular social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, Path, YouTube, Instagram, Kaskus, LINE, MySpace, WhatsApp, and BlackBerry Messenger. In addition, there are also social media in the form of blogs and online media, both private and managed by media companies (Ekman & Widholm, 2023; Meifilina, 2021; Schäfer, 2023).

Apart from that, political communication is generally carried out using visual billboard media mobility which is used to reach people who do not use electronic media or social media. In the view of the concept of political communication, the rise of billboards and support on social media is a natural thing as long as it is in accordance with the provisions of the election law and still respects the right to freedom of politics in Indonesia. The phenomenon of political communication with persuasive strategies reflects the essence of politics itself, which is an interaction process that contains elements of persuasion to achieve internal interests (Yanuartha et al., 2022). One example of political communication carried out by the party is as revealed in the results of research Tamim and Zamzamy (2023), in the 2024 Election contestation Gerindra Party implemented a strategy by utilizing social media, especially Twitter, to interact with its main audience, namely young people. In this communication, Gerindra uses contemporary



language and millennial nuances, so that the younger generation feels no distance from the party as a political entity.

Furthermore, in the results of research conducted by Gani et al. (2023) in order to face the 2024 Legislative Election (Pileg), the political communication strategy implemented includes four main components, namely situational knowledge, goal setting, communication competence, and anxiety management. On the other hand, the findings of research conducted by Gunawan et al. (2024) show that the political communication strategy of the PKB Party is in line with Philip Lesly's communication model, which is characterized by the implementation of organizational activities in a directed manner, with the community as the main target of each activity.

This research fills the void of the studies that have been mentioned by focusing on the activities of the Democratic Party in the 2024 Pilkada in Pamekasan Regency. The purpose of the research is to comprehensively examine the winning strategy of the Democratic party, both direct strategies (field) or indirect strategies carried out online and identify supporting and inhibiting factors in the 2024 Pamekasan Regional Election.

2. Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method aimed at exploring and understanding social phenomena in depth through qualitative data (Busetto et al., 2020; Gill, 2020). The method is considered appropriate because it allows researchers to capture the complexity of political communication strategies that cannot be fully explained by quantitative measurement. In this context, the descriptive qualitative approach is applied to analyze how the Democratic Party formulated and implemented its political communication strategy to support the KHARISMA pair in the 2024 Pilkada of Pamekasan Regency.

To collect relevant data, the researcher used three techniques: interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with party officials, campaign team members, and community leaders to obtain firsthand information about strategic planning and implementation. Observations were carried out to capture the actual dynamics of campaign activities in the field, while documentation analysis included party archives, campaign materials, and relevant media coverage. These combined techniques provided a more comprehensive and contextual understanding of the studied phenomenon (Bhangu et al., 2023; Machado-da-Silva, 2003).

The research design is structured as a case study. This design was selected because the object of analysis focuses on a single case, namely the Democratic Party's political communication strategy in the 2024 Pilkada of Pamekasan Regency. By using a case study, the research can offer an in-depth examination of the dynamics of strategy formulation, the socio-cultural factors that shaped its effectiveness, and the challenges faced during implementation. This approach ensures that the findings are not only descriptive but also provide a critical analysis of the specific political communication practices in a localized electoral context.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Political Communication Strategy in the Field

Political communication strategy is a crucial instrument in achieving success in political contestation, particularly in regional head elections. Referring to Schlipphak et al. (2022) theory on political communication, the essential dimensions include leadership



and institutions, the formation of togetherness, consensus building, and media selection (Kamaludin et al., 2024). The Democratic Party Branch Leadership Council (DPC) of Pamekasan applied these dimensions in a systematic and culturally responsive way to win the KHARISMA pair (KH. Kholilurrahman and Sukriyanto) in the 2024 Pilkada.

The Democratic Party’s strategy emphasized direct, field-based persuasive communication. This was carried out through *sowan* or personal visits to religious leaders, community figures, and political elites, reflecting the cultural values of Pamekasan society (Firdaus & Anam, 2020; Lubis & Rohmatillah, 2019). Candidate selection was also directed toward individuals with pesantren and rural backgrounds to reinforce the narrative of representation. Interpersonal communication through *blusukan* visits allowed the KHARISMA pair to build emotional closeness with voters. This approach aligns with persuasive communication theory, which highlights symbolic processes in influencing public attitudes (Dillard & Shen, 2005; Fisher, 1984; Payne, 2001).

The campaign also employed horizontal communication to strengthen trust and inclusivity. KH. Sukriyanto and KH. Kholil shared tasks in directly approaching communities, ensuring coverage of nearly all sub-districts. According to Social Judgment Theory (Bitektine, 2011; Doherty & Kurz, 1996; Hall & Oppenheimer, 2015), such direct engagement is crucial in shifting audiences from neutrality to acceptance. By dividing responsibilities and maintaining continuous interaction, the candidate pair was able to minimize resistance and reinforce acceptance across diverse voter groups.

Table 1 Field-Based Political Communication Strategy

No	Strategy/Approach	Implementation Example	Expected Impact
1	<i>Sowan</i> visits	Meeting kiai, community leaders, and elites	Cultural legitimacy and elite support
2	Candidate figure selection	Candidates with pesantren & rural backgrounds	Emotional closeness with grassroots
3	<i>Blusukan</i> /interpersonal visits	Directly meeting citizens in villages and sub-districts	Stronger trust and voter engagement
4	Horizontal field communication	Division of tasks between candidates in visiting regions	Broader coverage and inclusivity

Table 1 illustrates that the field-based political communication strategy carried out by the Democratic Party DPC of Pamekasan emphasized direct and cultural approaches. *Sowan* visits to kiai, community leaders, and local elites provided cultural legitimacy and moral support, which are crucial in an area with strong pesantren traditions. The selection of candidates with pesantren and rural backgrounds strengthened emotional closeness with grassroots communities, making people feel represented. The *blusukan* strategy (Naufal, 2022; Pestalozi et al., 2023), or direct visits to villages and sub-districts, created interpersonal interactions that built public trust. Meanwhile, the horizontal division of tasks between the candidate pair in visiting different regions ensured broader coverage and inclusivity, giving equal attention to all segments of society during the campaign process.

3.2. Supporting Networks and Media Optimization



Beyond field-based strategies, the Democratic Party strengthened internal party cohesion and built effective coalitions with local political actors. Interviews with coalition leaders such as PAN's Abdul Haq emphasized inclusivity and collaborative campaign design. This indicates that the Democratic Party not only maintained vertical communication with the community but also cultivated horizontal relationships with political elites. Such practices mirror patterns in the national political arena, where symbolic gestures of unity reinforce cooperative intent (Suprpto et al., 2024).

Media also became a vital tool for campaign dissemination. The Democratic Party optimized social media platforms to target young and novice voters, producing content that emphasized religiosity, humility, and community closeness. Local media such as radio and WhatsApp groups complemented these efforts by reaching areas inaccessible to direct campaigning. This strategy reflects Sampe's (2021) view that media is essential in broadening the reach of political communication.

The campaign ensured equal coverage across northern and southern regions of Pamekasan. Candidate pairing itself symbolized regional balance, KH. Kholil representing the north and Sukriyanto representing the south. By mapping electoral districts, engaging local figures, and arranging balanced campaign schedules, the Democratic Party demonstrated a comprehensive and well-planned approach that prevented regional bias.

Table 2 Supporting Networks and Media Optimization

No	Strategy/Approach	Implementation Example	Expected Impact
1	Internal & coalition building	Inclusive collaboration with PAN and other coalition parties	Stronger elite consensus and political unity
2	Social media optimization	Uploading content on activities, religious quotes, simple lifestyle	Engaging young and novice voters
3	Local media utilization	Use of radio, online portals, and WhatsApp groups	Reaching rural areas and wider audiences
4	Regional balance strategy	KH. Kholil (north) – Sukriyanto (south) ticket; equal visits	Equal mobilization across sub-regions

Table 2 highlights the importance of supporting networks and media optimization in strengthening the Democratic Party's political communication strategy. Internal consolidation and inclusive collaboration with coalition partners such as PAN created a stronger elite consensus and fostered political unity, which became a solid foundation for the campaign. Social media optimization (Sahai et al., 2018), through the dissemination of candidate activities, religious messages, and portrayals of a simple lifestyle, effectively targeted young and first-time voters. At the same time, the use of local media such as radio, online news portals, and WhatsApp groups extended the campaign's reach to rural communities and broader audiences. Finally, the regional balance strategy, represented by the pairing of KH. Kholil from the north and Sukriyanto from the south, ensured equal voter mobilization across different sub-regions, preventing regional bias and reinforcing inclusivity in campaign outreach.

3.3. Supporting Factors



One of the main supporting factors behind the Democratic Party's political communication strategy in the 2024 Pamekasan election was the presence of charismatic figures, particularly KH. Ach. Faishol Abdul Hamid. As the caretaker of Pesantren Bata-Bata, KH. Faishol possessed broad influence not only among active students but also across alumni and sympathizers spread throughout the villages. His endorsement provided both moral and religious legitimacy, which was crucial because Pamekasan society still places religious scholars (ulama) as central references in making political choices.

Beyond legitimacy, the social networks of local elites also played a pivotal role in strengthening the communication strategy. Sukriyanto, as a former village head, had long-standing ties with *kalebun* (hamlet leaders) and grassroots community figures. These personal connections were mobilized to accelerate the distribution of campaign information and to build voter loyalty from the ground up. This pattern demonstrates that local political communication is not only reliant on national or regional elites but also rooted in enduring grassroots relationships.

Another strong supporting factor was the religious and cultural identity embodied by the Kharisma pair. They were widely perceived as modest, ethical, and pesantren-rooted leaders. In interviews with figures such as Abd Rahim and Fathorrohman, the candidates were praised for their integrity, especially because they refrained from money politics and instead emphasized ethical conduct and religious values. This perception aligned strongly with the moral expectations of the Pamekasan electorate.

Such religious identity was not only symbolic but also fostered public trust in their political messages. Heryanto's (2017) research underlines how moral legitimacy held by religious leaders is a decisive factor in building public trust, even in the political sphere. This means that political communication rooted in religious and cultural values tends to be more persuasive and widely accepted in communities where these values form the basis of daily life (Gusfa et al., 2021).

Taken together, these supporting factors namely charismatic leadership, grassroots social networks, and religious-cultural identity created a synergistic foundation that reinforced the Democratic Party's communication strategy. The ulama endorsement secured legitimacy, grassroots networks ensured reach and loyalty, and religious-cultural resonance built trust. This combination made the strategy not only effective but also deeply contextualized to the socio-cultural character of Pamekasan society.

Table 3 Supporting Factors of Political Communication Strategy

No	Supporting Factor	Implementation Example	Expected Impact
1	Charismatic figure support	Endorsement from KH. Ach. Faishol Abdul Hamid (<i>Pesantren Bata-Bata</i>) through mass mobilization and campaign networks	Legitimacy, credibility, and mobilization of pesantren-based communities
2	Social networks of local elites	Cooperation with village heads, <i>kalebun</i> , and community leaders at <i>dusun</i> level	Wider grassroots support and stronger voter loyalty
3	Religious and cultural identity	Candidates perceived as ethical, polite, and pesantren-rooted leaders	Trust-building, moral legitimacy, and resonance with local values and worldview



Table 3 demonstrates that the success of the Democratic Party's strategy in Pamekasan was largely shaped by support from religious and traditional elites, grassroots social networks, and cultural-religious identity. The endorsement of KH. Ach. Faishol Abdul Hamid provided both legitimacy and direct mobilization power, enabling campaign penetration into *pesantren* circles and alumni networks (Cholil & Zauddin, 2018). At the grassroots level, Sukriyanto's personal ties with village heads and local leaders strengthened campaign reach and voter loyalty. Meanwhile, the religious and cultural identity of the candidates resonated strongly with community values, allowing them to be perceived as leaders of integrity, thereby fostering deeper trust and support among voters.

3.4. Inhibiting Factors

Alongside its strengths, the Democratic Party's strategy also faced significant inhibiting factors (Bremer & Rennwald, 2023; Wolkenstein, 2022). One of the most pressing was the limited initial popularity of the Kharisma pair, particularly among younger voters. While KH. Kholilurrahman was known as a religious leader, his recognition was limited among millennials and Gen Z. This was a considerable challenge because the youth demographic represents a growing and influential segment of the electorate in contemporary elections.

To address this issue, the campaign team adopted several visibility-enhancing strategies. Social media became a primary tool, where they consistently shared content about the candidates' activities, religious reflections, and humble lifestyle. Additionally, face-to-face activities such as public dialogues and community visits were carried out to help the younger generation connect with the candidates on a more personal level. These strategies were essential in building familiarity and establishing a new image that resonated with youth voters.

Another major challenge was the electoral dispute at the Constitutional Court (MK). As in many other regions in Indonesia, the Pamekasan election was contested through a lawsuit filed by rival candidates. This legal battle consumed considerable energy and resources, as the campaign team had to prepare legal documents, attend hearings, and maintain public support despite prolonged uncertainty. The dispute not only delayed the final outcome but also placed psychological pressure on both the candidates and their supporters.

Despite this, morale was sustained through the solidarity of the campaign team and continued encouragement from *pesantren* leaders. Religious guidance and moral support became crucial in maintaining optimism and perseverance during the legal struggle. This shows that beyond organizational strength, the spiritual dimension also played an important role in overcoming external obstacles.

These inhibiting factors reflect the complex dynamics of local politics. Limited popularity demanded innovative communication strategies, while legal disputes tested the resilience and unity of the campaign team. However, the ability to adapt to these challenges demonstrated that success in political communication is determined not only by planning but also by persistence, flexibility, and community trust in the face of adversity.

Table 4 Inhibiting Factors of Political Communication Strategy

No	Inhibiting	Implementation Example	Consequence/Impact
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Factor			
1	Limited initial popularity	Low recognition among younger voters despite KH. Kholilurrahman’s reputation	Necessitated intensive media campaigns, public dialogues, and direct engagement
2	Election disputes (MK)	Lawsuit at the Constitutional Court regarding election results	Created prolonged legal uncertainty and temporary decline in campaign morale

Table 4 outlines the key obstacles encountered by the Kharisma campaign team. Limited initial popularity, particularly among younger demographics, meant the candidates had to intensify visibility efforts through media production, public dialogues, and face-to-face outreach. Additionally, created a significant challenge by prolonging the campaign’s legal battle and testing team resilience (Ahmad, 2024; Kristiyanto et al., 2023). However, strong internal solidarity and continued support from religious leaders enabled the campaign to maintain momentum and overcome these inhibiting factors.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study show that the Democratic Party Branch Leadership Council (DPC) of Pamekasan implemented a structured political communication strategy to support the KHARISMA pair in the 2024 Pilkada. The strategy combined cultural, symbolic, and figure-based approaches through sowan visits to religious leaders, the selection of candidates with pesantren and rural backgrounds, and the reinforcement of santri identity. In addition, the KHARISMA pair was framed as a representation of regional balance between the northern and southern areas of Pamekasan, strengthened by interpersonal communication such as blusukan activities that fostered emotional closeness with voters.

The discussion highlights that the effectiveness of this strategy was largely supported by the legitimacy of charismatic pesantren figures, the strength of pesantren-based social networks, and coalition building with other political actors. Campaign messages that resonated with local cultural and religious values also enhanced public acceptance. At the same time, several obstacles were identified, including the limited popularity of the KHARISMA pair among younger voters, the challenges of bridging socio-political segmentation across regions, and legal disputes at the Constitutional Court. These findings suggest that political communication strategies in local elections must be adaptive, inclusive, and aligned with socio-cultural contexts to be effective.

Despite these contributions, the study has certain limitations. It focuses only on one case in Pamekasan Regency, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different socio-political dynamics. Future research could expand the analysis to comparative studies across multiple districts or provinces to better understand the variations in political communication strategies in different cultural contexts. Further studies may also employ mixed-method approaches, combining qualitative depth with quantitative measurement, to strengthen empirical evidence and broaden insights into the effectiveness of political communication in local electoral politics.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interests.



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