REFLECTIONS ON PHOTOS OF POLITICAL POWER AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE JOKO WIDODO-K.H. MA’RUF AMIN AND PRABOWO SUBIANTO-SANDIAGA UNO VICTORY DECLARATION PHOTOS

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ABSTRACT

Photography can be used as a means to convey a narrative or a message behind the presented visuals. In the context of political communication, narrative has the power to influence and win opinions. In regard to this, one particular political narrative at which it is interesting to take a closer look among the political moments in Indonesia is the victory declaration in the 2019 Presidential Election contest. Victory declaration is a political phenomenon that occurred in the 2014 and 2019 Presidential Elections. In both occasions this event led to riots.

Based on the description above, the research questions are: (1) How is visual photography produced as a medium to convey narratives within political message? and (2) How does the public as viewers or recipients of political messages perceive political messages in the visual form? This study aimed to identify the meaning of political narratives and the interrelationships of photography in the political context in Indonesia.

The method employed in this study was Paul Ricœur’s Hermeneutics, with reference to semantic understanding, reflective understanding and existential understanding. An interpretive paradigm with data sources in the form of declaration photos, interviews with photographers and viewers.

Our results showed that political success depends on individual aspects in carrying out their roles. In this context these roles of the individuals refer to political figures, agents and supporters. Interrelationships between roles in such group of individuals mainly revolve around cooperation in realizing common prosperity in political goals.

This study concludes that cooperation between politicians, agents and supporters must be guided by political ethics as the main guideline for behaving and acting for the sake of achieving common prosperity. In addition, the use of technology in politics must be guided by ethics as an effort to realize a political system that is just, responsible, trustworthy, and meets the moral standards expected by society. Together, individuals, including politicians, agents and society, broadly play the role of

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moral agents to achieve politics with integrity, honesty and trustworthiness.

**Keywords:** Message construction, Political photos, Paul Ricœur’s Hermeneutics, Visual Rhetoric, the 2019 Presidential Election, Visual Communication

### Introduction

Nearing the general election contestation, photography is commonly used as one of the visual elements in the campaign props by politicians. Various forms and designs of campaign props such as billboards, banners and posters display portrait photos of politicians, with the aim of making their faces more recognizable to their constituents. At this stage, photography is used as a medium to support the personal branding of politicians. All sorts of styles, poses, angles, or lighting directions are used as such in order to form an image so that the figure of the politician appears interesting and attractive. In addition, these photos also function to guide and shape public opinion.

The widespread use of photography as a visual element in campaign props is caused, among others, by the rapid technological development. Media conversion from analog to digital changes human habits in using cameras. This change occurs because digital technology offers convenience in taking pictures. Digital technology allows photos to be edited in such a way using computer software. Digital technology also allows for photo compression so that the size of the photo can be adjusted according to various channels and interests. Irwandi (2019:4) states that that, along with the possibilities of the photographer, determines the various choices of forms of photographic representation enabled by advances in photographic technology itself.

In the context of political communication, photos containing a certain narrative have the power to influence and win public opinions. Therefore, the process and way of telling stories in visual political communication are key elements that must be prepared in such a way that the resulting narrative attracts the public’s attention. In regard to this, one particular political narrative at which it is interesting to take a closer look among the political moments in Indonesia is the victory declaration in the 2019 Presidential Election contest. During that event, photography was used by the two presidential and vice-presidential candidate pairs to emphasize in a visual message to the public that the two candidate pairs had won the election contest. Such declaration of claiming victory is certainly an interesting phenomenon, because at least this has happened twice, namely in the 2014 Presidential Election and the 2019 Presidential Election. This political phenomenon can provide an overview of the quality of democracy that occurs in Indonesia.

The narrative in the political message in the victory declaration for the 2019 Presidential Election is inseparable from the role of the photographer in creating visual messages that can attract the public’s attention. This leads to how a photographer is able to produce photos by interpreting various objects in line with the interests of the elites. Based on this, this study aimed to reveal how visual photography is produced as a medium to convey narratives in political messages and how the public as viewers or recipients of political messages perceive political messages in the visual form. The objectives of this study are to infer the significance of photographic technology used in the political context in Indonesia and identify and interpret the meaning of narratives found in the political message contained in the victory declaration of the 2019 Presidential Election in society.

**Photography as The Visual Power of Political Communication**

The ever-evolving photography is not a neutral technology. It happens when photography is utilized by institutions with a will to power (Bate, 2009:16). Every photo is produced by a photographer in different contexts. Photographers constantly find themselves in different places, times and social conditions. Thus, this compels photographers to
continuously think about how an image looks through photographic techniques and adjusts the photographic equipment for every condition. The “subject material” in practice is always determined by the photographer themselves. However, it is possible that this subject material is also predetermined and directs the photographer to take pictures according to what the elites want. In line with this, Stone-Mann (2013:14-15) states that photography as a political power is not only interpreted as a means or medium to convey political messages visually, but also refers to a construction process in the form of a deliberate re-creation of political events by the actors behind it. The use of photography in politics makes political messages not only more appealing, but also easy to understand and memorable. Thus, political photography plays an important role in political communication. Political photography appears not only in mass media with various platforms, but also appears in other forms such as billboards, posters, pamphlets and social media accounts from politicians and political parties for propaganda purposes. Meanwhile, in terms of events, elections, campaigns, press conferences of political figures, and demonstrations are some of the objects that are often depicted in political photographs.

Furthermore, photography also has persuasive visual power that can influence the individual regarding the subject it depicts, for example: A reader can feel an event after looking at photographs of political demonstrations in newspapers or a reader can understand the meaning of photographs of political leaders after observing their smiles and body movements or gestures. Therefore, photography has great potential in terms of iconicity. The power of iconicity created by photographers can influence and shape public opinion when it is focused on the characteristic attributes of political actors. Visual depiction of leaders can be defined as simulated nonverbal experience, making it a powerful source of information and attribution. Faces of politicians can be used as centers of nonverbal information and understanding. Thus, photography as a recording media technology has the power to affect humans emotionally, evoking a series of ideas and related perceptions that are stored in our subconscious. Photography can also be the defining characteristic in power dynamics and political dynamics. Visuals as a communication technology are regularly manipulated by anyone to produce fake images and enjoy the political influence resulting from the visuals.

**Phenomenology-Hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur**

Hermeneutic phenomenology proposed by Ricoeur is the result of a synthesis of phenomenology and hermeneutics. In his synthesis, Ricoeur tries to show the interrelated relationships between phenomenology and hermeneutics. Phenomenology is positioned as an irre-placeable assumption in hermeneutics. Meanwhile, Ricoeur also states that the phenomenology method will not be able to survive in its entirety without interpreting the experiences experienced by the subject. Therefore, to generate interpretation as a whole in the process of meaning and understanding carried out by humans, hermeneutics is needed as a method of interpretation (Ricoeur, 1991:53-54). The structure of the concept of hermeneutics by Ricoeur consists of three parts which originate from his rationale for the theory of interpretation, namely discourse, metaphor, text and narrative. Ricoeur’s hermeneutic perspective does not merely mean an activity to find the meaning contained in the text, but also concerns meaning of life by reflection (Hardiman, 2015:241). According to Ricoeur, there is no interpretation without reflection. This means that there is no point in knowing science if you do not apply it in life. Through the gift, humans can think logically, think what is right or wrong, so they can do self-reflection (Raharjo, 2020:79-80).

**Material and Methods**

This study was a descriptive qualitative study aimed at observing carefully and in detail the phenomena of interest (Liliweri, 2018:111). Related to this, the unit of analysis in this study was visual text in the form of photos of the 2019 Presidential Election victory declaration. Other analysis units included results of interviews with individuals or sources considered to have answers to the questions formulated in this study. Based on this, the data sources in this study can be divided into two
types, namely: literature and photo text documents from the victory declaration of the 2019 Presidential Election as well as interviews with personal photographers from the two presidential and vice-presidential candidate pairs. In addition, the researcher also collected interview data of viewers based on non-probability sampling method with purposive sampling technique. Meanwhile, Paul Ricœur’s hermeneutics here referred to three operational stages used as a step for interpretation, namely semantic understanding, reflective understanding and existential understanding.

Results and Discussion

Based on the interviews with personal photographers from the two presidential and vice-presidential candidate pairs. It appears that photography as a medium of visual communication in politics has the power to influence perception, form opinion and affect the feelings of those who see it. Through the arrangement of composition, lighting, color and other elements, photography can create an atmosphere, emphasize certain aspects or direct attention to an important subject. Political photography itself refers to the use of photography as political campaigns, documentation of political events or in the context of social change and political activism. Through photography, political messages can quickly reach a wide audience and affect their opinion as well as attitude towards the political issue represented in the photograph. The meaning, uniqueness and power of photography in relation to visual producers and viewers can be seen in political narrative production practives in visual photography messages. Personal photographers working for politicians are professional photographers specially hired to capture important moments in the lives and careers of political elites. In doing their job, photographers enjoy a special affinity for producing photographs of various aspects of political activity. Photographers in the current era of camera civilization show an increasingly important personal role. It is particularly true when it concerns personal branding needs of politicians which must be supported from a visual aspect. It is understood by politicians that visual communication, especially photography, has the utility to support the image they want to construct and display to the public.

The role and responsibility of a personal photographer is enormous. They are required not only to master good photography techniques, such as appealing composition, lighting and angle, but also to possess nimbleness to capture a moment precisely. The reason is that these moments often present a more personal picture of the politician’s character. In fact, not only that, photographers who work for politicians must have good communication skills to be able to direct and arrange photos, poses and expressions in accordance with the political message to be conveyed.

In producing these photos, personal photographers play an important role in producing political narrative to be conveyed. However, such role does not necessarily grant liberty to the photographer in doing their job. This can be seen from the intervention photographers received during the production process. The results of the study showed that the intervention comes from the communications team who constantly provided survey data as a provision for photographers to create political narratives in visual form. In addition, intervention also comes from the politician themselves who directly controls the photographer to create political narratives following to their directions.

There are several stages to a photographer’s process of interpreting political narrative from the communication team. At the earlier stages, a photographer needs to understand the political message desired by politicians. At these stages, the photographer has the opportunity to interpret political messages, goals to be achieved, certain issues to be desired, and the image to be built. These early stages help a photographer to plan the best way to take pictures, pick moments and decide which techniques and tools required to support the creation of visuals in accordance with political narratives.

Then, after understanding the political message desired by the politician, a photographer must be able to read the situation and understand the political context. The next stage is shooting using the technical expertise pos-
sessed by the photographer to support the political narrative that has previously been determined. At this stage the photographer may pursue image editing and processing techniques to amplify political messages. The last stage is selection of photos that match the political message to be conveyed.

In the stages of interpretation taken by the photographer, it was revealed that the process was in line with Paul Ricœur’s concept of Hermeneutics which refers to the three parts of the structure contained in his Theory of Interpretation. In the context of political narrative production, the process in which the politician directs the photographer is a communicative event to convey the discourse as desired by the politician. According to Ricœur, conveying the discourse in a communicative event is a fleeting moment. Therefore, the photographer has to first interpret the desired discourse and objective before putting it into visual form. That way, discourse conveyed by the politician does not pass quickly and disappear.

The stage in which a discourse is put into visual form takes place when the photographer starts taking pictures. In this shooting process, the photographer is again confronted with another communication event where he encounters very abstract moments of political events. However, the capturing process of these moments is not easy, because the photographer is required to be able to capture the discourse amidst the moments of the political event in accordance to the politician’s wishes. Therefore, in practice photographers often first imagine the visuals they want to capture before actually dealing with the moment in a political event.

The imagination process of the photographer according to Paul Ricœur is called metaphor and narrative. Ricœur states that metaphor and narrative are processes of changing meaning in the dynamics of discourse. In the visual context, the photographer must be able to capture moments creatively by presenting symbols, choosing interesting angles and photography techniques. These things help depict a fresher picture of the world. In addition, the process of metaphor and narrative also opens the possibility for the emergence of new interpretations of the world of experience and expands the scope of hermeneutics through more creative shooting.

The description of the process of the photographer and the politician in producing political narratives represents a mutualistic relationship. Through this relationship both individuals collaborate in creating visually stimulating images that attract people to pay attention to their actions in visual form. This action targets visual behavior rooted in the human brain system which processes consciously and unconsciously to pay attention to certain visual stimuli that come from outside themselves. This causes humans to react and pay attention in certain ways towards stimuli received through their eyes.

Public Perception

How viewers interpret political narratives in victory declarations photos is influenced by a number of factors. They include past experiences, beliefs and values. Viewers’ backgrounds and experiences influence how they understand and interpret the political narratives contained in victory declaration photos. It is evidence by the results of interview with one of the viewers who had negative experience with one of the candidates, which were different from other viewers who had different, more positive experience. Their statement is in line with Foss (2018:145-147), stating that viewers’ perceptions of images are given based on the experience and knowledge of each viewer. Differences in experience and knowledge of viewers show different perceptions of the victory declaration photos. Through symbols contained in the victory declaration photos, viewers interpret them as a form of political narrative that leads to a bigger scenario. Viewers also perceive political narratives as an attempt by political elites to confuse society, build a provocative political narrative and part of the action to mobilize militant supporters. On the other hand, the political narrative of Joko Widodo and KH Ma’ruf Amin is understood as a narrative that shows calmness and religiosity. The description of viewers’ perceptions above shows that the political narrative put forward by the political elites is interpreted differently by the public based on the ways and perspectives of each individual.
Viewers also perceive that victory declaration photos published by both of the candidate pairs are a representation of the message that politicians want to convey and view this as having a significant impact on the public. This shows the importance of visual media in conveying political messages to the public. The use of visual language in photography has proven to be effective in influencing society. In addition, experience and visual exposure from the media are also other aspects that can influence people's views and evaluations of political narratives put forward by politicians. Identity backgrounds such as religion, ethnicity or certain professions are also factors that can influence viewers' perceptions of political narratives. Any difference in perceptions may be influenced by historical and social contexts. The statement again shows that individual contexts and experience affect the understanding and interpretation of political narratives. In fact, this can be an aspect that stimulates public views so that they can think broadly and support diverse political discussions in society and actively take part in welcoming political narratives, behaving critically and communicating better.

Conclusions

Based on the research results and discussion using Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology on Joko Widodo-KH Ma'ruf Amin and Prabowo Subianto-Sandiaga Uno's victory declaration photos, the following can be concluded: First, the use of technology in a political context must be guided by ethics as an effort to realize a political system that is just, responsible, trustworthy, and meets the moral standards expected by society. Individuals, including politicians, agents and society, broadly play the role of moral agents to achieve politics with integrity, honesty and trustworthiness. The use of visual symbols can determine audience perception in receiving visual messages.

Recommendations

For future research, in order to obtain more comprehensive data, researchers need to consider interview data from the side of politicians as users of personal photographer services. Furthermore, the collection of interview data from key sources should be carried out more than once. This study can be followed up by studies on the production of political narratives related to media synergy of party members.

References

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