

## When the President Endorses the Nation's Next Leader: Detecting the Concept of Power in Javanese Culture through Presidential Communication

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### Abstract

This article examines how President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) exercises his power through his presidential communication. It focuses on Jokowi's statement when he endorses presidential candidates by using simple language, codes, and symbols. The purpose of this study is to decipher the possible meaning within the statement of Jokowi regarding his endorsement of presidential candidates. It also attempts to contextualize it within the larger setting of political public relations by using soft propaganda techniques. This study uses a qualitative case study approach that uses the lens of Benedict Anderson's concept of power in Javanese culture and Eric Louw's premise about the hype maker or messenger. Researchers argue that Jokowi's communication, in this case, can be interpreted as a political game where the president tries to show his power by deliberately violating political procedures to remove uncertainty among the political elite. The president's power may also be seen in his soft propaganda communication, which employs "oversimplification" and "logical fallacies" techniques to stir up public emotion and resonance in the media and political elite. This article offers some critical insights on presidential communication strategy from different perspectives, particularly through the concept of power in the Javanese culture, the president's role as a hype maker, and how political public relations strategies can be harnessed to modify a political process.

**Keywords:** Concept of power in Javanese culture; Hype maker; Political public relations; President Jokowi; Presidential communication.

### Abstrak

Studi ini mengkaji bagaimana Presiden Joko Widodo (Jokowi) menjalankan kekuasaannya melalui komunikasi kepresidenannya. Fokus penelitian terletak pada pernyataan Jokowi saat dia memberikan dukungan kepada calon presiden dengan menggunakan bahasa sederhana, kode, dan simbol. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menguraikan kemungkinan makna dalam pernyataan Jokowi terhadap calon-calon presiden yang didukungnya. Studi ini juga mencoba untuk menempatkannya dalam konteks hubungan masyarakat politik yang lebih luas dengan menggunakan teknik-teknik *soft* propaganda. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif melalui lensa Benedict Anderson tentang konsep kekuasaan dalam budaya Jawa dan premis Eric Louw tentang pembuat sensasi atau pembawa pesan. Peneliti berpendapat bahwa komunikasi Jokowi dalam kasus ini dapat dimaknai sebagai permainan politik di mana presiden berusaha menunjukkan kekuasaannya yang dengan sengaja melanggar prosedur politik untuk menghilangkan ketidakpastian di kalangan elite politik. Kekuasaan presiden juga dapat dilihat dalam komunikasi *soft*-propagandanya yang menggunakan teknik-teknik "terlalu menyederhanakan" dan "logika yang keliru" untuk membangkitkan emosi publik dan menggaungkannya di media dan di kalangan elit politik. Artikel ini menawarkan beberapa wawasan kritis tentang strategi komunikasi kepresidenan dari perspektif yang berbeda, khususnya melalui konsep kekuasaan dalam budaya Jawa, peran

presiden sebagai pembuat sensasi, dan bagaimana strategi hubungan masyarakat politik dapat dimanfaatkan untuk mengubah sebuah proses politik.

**Kata kunci:** Konsep kekuasaan dalam budaya Jawa; Pembuat sensasi; Hubungan masyarakat politik; Presiden Jokowi; Komunikasi kepresidenan

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## Introduction

Except for Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie, all Indonesian presidents are of Javanese descent, which is the largest cultural population in Indonesia. Sukarno, Soeharto, Abdurrahman Wahid, Megawati Soekarnoputri, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, and Joko Widodo (Jokowi) are listed in that sequence. Although all six presidents were Javanese, their personalities and leadership styles were significantly different. Sukarno and Soeharto, for instance, who both managed to stay in power for decades, had a stark difference in their communication strategy and rhetorical style. While Jokowi, the incumbent president whose tenure will end on October 20, 2024, has managed to preserve a consistently modest self-image and enjoys broad public support, as recent opinion polls reveal (e.g., Suhendra, 2023).

Aside from the striking differences in presidential behavior and characteristics, as well as how state leaders exercise their power, the purpose of this article is to increase and better understand how the president demonstrates his power through his communication. This research will analyze a case study using Benedict Anderson's ideas about power in the context of Javanese culture (2019), which are remarkably different from the concept of power advanced by Western theorists. The results of the analysis will be expanded by using other different perspectives but still in the same context.

In a gathering with his volunteer support group in Jakarta, President Jokowi surprisingly endorsed a political elite as the next nation's leader by mentioning his characteristics (Harish, 2022). Even though he did not mention any names, these characteristics refer to at least one name of a political elite that is widely known to the public. This event can be considered an exercise of power by the president in which Jokowi takes advantage of his popularity. This study aims to decipher the possible meaning within the statement of Jokowi regarding his endorsement of a presidential candidate.

The case examined in this research begins on October 3, 2022, when Surya Paloh, the Chairperson of Nasdem (the National Democratic) Party, nominated Jakarta Governor Anies Baswedan as the party's presidential candidate for the 2024 election (Bhwana & Muthiariny, 2022). This official declaration came as several political elites emerged as potential presidential candidates, including Central Java Governor Ganjar Pranowo, Minister of Defense and Security Prabowo Subianto, and TNI Commander Andika Perkasa. While waiting for the right moment, this earliest declaration became a significant breakthrough in removing the doubts of other political parties over the president's nomination.

The uncertainty in determining who will be the candidate for the next president also occurred in the ruling party PDI-P (the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle). The party, which has become Jokowi's political vehicle to run for president, was still in dark about who will be their presidential candidate (Tambun & Paat, 2022) even though the party's elites have come up with several names. Some of them were attempting to be nominated as the party's presidential candidates, including Governor Ganjar Pranowo and Puan Maharani. In contrast to Governor Pranowo, who has yet to receive support from PDI-P Chairwoman Megawati Soekarnoputri, Puan Maharani has garnered support from the party elites not only due to her position as the Speaker of DPR, the People's Representative Council, but also because she is the daughter of Megawati, making her the only person expected to inherit power from the Sukarno clan.

Under such circumstances, President Jokowi unexpectedly stunned Megawati and her party's elites when revealing the characteristics of the next presidential candidate he preferred. According to Jokowi, the traits of a candidate who truly cares about people are having many wrinkles on his face and he has white hair. In his full statement as he put it: "*Pemimpin yang mikirin rakyat itu kelihatan dari mukanya itu kelihatan. Dari penampilannya itu kelihatan, banyak kerutan di wajahnya karena mikirin rakyat, ada juga yang mikirin rakyat sampai rambutnya putih semua*" (The leader who thinks about people can be seen from his face. From his appearance, it can be seen that there are many wrinkles on his face because he thinks about people, there are also those who think about people until his hair is all white) (Nugraheny & Rastika, 2022). Jokowi's statement, which he emphasized once again, made an uproar as it was deemed to be an endorsement of Ganjar Pranowo for the 2024 presidential candidate, who happened to have white hair.

As a result, at the celebration of PDI-P's 50th anniversary in Jakarta, Megawati stated that she is the party's chairperson who has the mandate to announce the presidential candidates. She also reminded her constituent that the declaration would be announced at the right time (Yanwardhana, 2023). Megawati's statement seemed to rebuke President Jokowi, who was present at the event, that the presidential nomination is the chairperson's business, not Jokowi's. Addressing all PDI-P cadres and broadcasting nationally, Megawati with a wide smile but still expressing firmness, gave Jokowi a harsh warning by saying: "*Pak* Jokowi without PDI-P – now that would be a pity" (Purba, 2023). She also mocked Jokowi's volunteer group for advocating an unconstitutional third term for him as president. Megawati described Jokowi as a "party officer" on several occasions (e.g., Wakik, 2023). The goal is obvious: to express Megawati's power and dominance. Therefore, to neutralize the situation, Jokowi later endorsed other presidential candidates by mentioning several other potential names (Pebrianto & Hantoro, 2023).

Endorsing the next president by an outgoing president is common in mature democracies (e.g., Davis & Martin, 2018; De Ferrari, 2016). The endorsement is usually carried out by an incumbent president who is no longer allowed to run for office due to statutory restrictions. President Obama from the Democratic Party, for example, had to endorse his party's candidate after Hillary Clinton had secured the Party's nomination for the 2016 election. This has not yet become a political ritual in Indonesia, which has only held four direct presidential elections. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), the previous president who was elected twice as Indonesia's sixth president, did not endorse a candidate for the next presidential race as he neared the end of his second term.

As a president, Jokowi can be categorized as a celebrity endorser or influencer, given that a celebrity endorser can be defined as someone who has gained fame and uses it to promote a product by using it to appear with him. McCracken (1989) explains that the scope of celebrity endorsers is not only traditional film and television stars, but also athletes, politicians, business leaders, artists, and military personnel. However, Jokowi's status as a celebrity endorser or an influencer is not the main concern in this article, nor is its impact, but on presidential communication carried out by Jokowi. The authors, therefore, establish a research question in light of the aforementioned background: What are the possible meanings and interpretations of Jokowi's statement regarding the nation's next leader?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Presidential communication is an important research topic, including in political public relations and modern presidential politics. In the early development of modern studies, an influential Richard Neustadt's book *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership* (1964) is considered a classic in the field of political science and provides an analysis of the nature of presidential power in the United States. The key points of Neustadt's argument are: "Presidential power is the power to persuade." Presidents are expected to do far more than their authority permits. Presidents can influence policy through persuasion and bargaining. Presidents must bargain not only to influence other branches of government (particularly Congress) but also to influence the executive branch itself.

In contrast to Neustadt, Samuel Kernell in *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership* (2006) contended that presidents should use various public communication strategies to shape public opinion and gain support for their policy proposals. Kernell argued that presidents use "going public" to circumvent traditional institutions of government such as Congress and directly appeal to the public in order to pressure legislators to act on their policy agenda. Kernell identifies three key public-facing strategies used by presidents: (1) presidential speeches and addresses, (2) media events and presidential appearances, and (3) interest group mobilization and grassroots advocacy. Presidents can use these strategies to frame issues, set the agenda, and mobilize public opinion in support of their policy proposals. Kernell's *Going Public* is basically in line with Jeffrey Tulis's argument in *The Rhetorical Presidency* (1987, 2017). Tulis asserted that the modern presidency relies heavily on the power of public persuasion, or rhetoric, to shape public opinion and policy outcomes.

The development of theories on presidential communication and power over time shows the dynamics of the relevant fields. David Michael Ryfe (2005) in essence affirmed that presidential communication matters because we assume that it matters and it also depends on the place, time, and nature of the institutions we create and live in. Ryfe maintains, "This is especially the case for more recent presidents, who come to the office at a time when presidential communication is more professionalized, and impersonal than ever before".

In the context of Indonesian presidents with Javanese culture, some academics have been interested in and have studied presidential communication, including the connection between strategic presidential communication, character, and the way presidents exercise their power. Several studies have focused on Jokowi's communication style. Makmur (2016), for example, asserts that Jokowi has a low-context communication style, and seems to have a communication character that leaves a deep impression, open, dominant, friendly, assertive, and quite animated. This is in stark contrast to Soeharto's communication style which is considered to have a very high context, including his smile which has multiple interpretations (Lesmana, 2008). Meanwhile, Raharjo (2016) examined Jokowi's communication style in which he found that Jokowi combines his style as an influencer and a doer. Another perspective was seen from the rhetorical style and political priorities of President Jokowi in his public speeches (Tyson & Apresian, 2021). Likewise, Ahmad (2021) focused his research on Jokowi's presidential rhetoric in terms of the ethos-logos, and pathos-centric persuasive strategies from the Aristotelian rhetorical leadership models. While Abdurrahman et. al. (2021) examine Jokowi's political communication strategy for the 2019 elections.

This article attempts to examine from different perspectives how the president exercises his power, one of which uses Benedict R'O'G Anderson's idea of power in Javanese culture. According to Anderson, one of the key points to understanding the Javanese theory of politics is through the traditional interpretation of what social science refers to as power. This is because the Javanese concept of power is radically different from the European concept of power (Anderson, 1972, 2019).

Based on his observation, Anderson argues that Indonesia's political systems and processes are fundamentally unique due to the presence of Javanese culture as the dominant culture. Anderson summarizes his view that the Javanese perceive (political) power as something concrete, homogeneous, constant in total quantity, and morally without any inherent implications (Anderson, 2019). First, Anderson asserts that "Power is Concrete" is a basic tenet of Javanese political philosophy (In the modern European concept: "Power is Abstract", Anderson, 2019, p. 5). Power exists regardless of the potential user. This is an existential reality rather than a theoretical premise. Power is the intangible, mysterious, and divine energy that moves the universe. Next, "Power is homogeneous" (In the European concept: "The sources of power are heterogeneous", p. 6). This idea implies that all power is of the same kind and originates from the same source. The possession of power by one person or group is equivalent to the possession of power by any other person or organization.

The third concept of power in Javanese culture based on Anderson's view is "The quantum of power in the universe is constant" (compared to the European concept: "The accumulation of power has no inherent limits", p. 6). Anderson explains that in the Javanese view, the universe is not expanding or contracting and the total amount of power contained within it is also fixed. Because power simply exists and is not the result of organization, wealth, weapons, or anything else—indeed, it precedes all of these and makes them what they are—its total quantity remains constant, even if the distribution of power in the universe varies. Finally, Anderson stated that "Power does not raise the question of legitimacy" (compared to the European concept: "Power is morally ambiguous", p. 6) because all power derives from a single homogeneous source, the question of good and evil comes before the question of power. To the Javanese, claiming the right to rule based on different sources of power—for example, saying that power based on wealth is legitimate but a power based on guns is illegitimate—would be meaningless. Power is not both legitimate and illegitimate. This concept is used here because Anderson's concept was perceived as one of the best ways to understand the Indonesian political process (Anderson, 2019; Anderson & Kahin, 2009; Hughes-Freeland, 2007).

Meanwhile, Eric Louw (2010) argued that the political process is a process that is very much influenced by the communication process that is run by various parties. Essentially the main players according to Louw are Political elites, semi-insiders, and passive outsiders. Each has a different role in the interplay of the communication process that builds the political processes. Louw (2010) described them as (1) A political elite of (active) 'insiders' who divide their time between politically 'substantive' work (e.g. policy formulation, and service and infrastructure delivery) and political 'hype' (e.g. impression management); (2) Politically active 'semi-insiders' acting as 'stage-hands' or as a communicative bridge between the elite and masses; (3) A (passive) mass of 'outsiders' who consume the work of insiders and semi-insiders.

The next perspective to read the meaning of President Jokowi's statement regarding the endorsement of the next presidential candidate is by using the concept of political public relations, soft

propaganda, and government communication. Strömbäck and Kioussis's (2020) definition of political public relations as "the management process by which an actor for political purposes, through communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with key publics and stakeholders to help support its mission and achieve its goals". Moreover, Canel and Sanders (2012, cited in Sanders, 2020) define government communication as follows.

The area of practice and study that usually managed communication directed to key publics and pursuing both political and civic purposes, carried out by executive politicians and officials working for public institutions with a political rationale. These institutions are constituted based on citizens' indirect or direct consent and are charged to enact their will.

Government communication tends to be more focused on executive communication, more strictly defined, and more broadly described as serving both political and civic purposes. However, Sanders added that "it would be naïve to believe that government communication can pursue civic goals in a way fully divorced from its specific structural contingencies, which include the political environment in which it operates" (Sanders, 2020). In addition, many references associate the government communication strategy with propaganda techniques to strengthen the intended goals and improve message delivery (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2015; Moloney, 2006; Valdez & Dhani, 2021). In this study, the authors employ a definition from Jowett and O'Donnell (2015) of propaganda as "the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist".

Moreover, the researchers underline and use a typology of propaganda, which can be differentiated into two categories, i.e., "soft propaganda" and "hard propaganda". Soft propaganda can be described as political persuasion that is "relatively delicate and elegant" as opposed to "crude and heavy-handed propaganda," or hard propaganda (Huang, 2018; Mattingly & Yao, 2022). Similarly, Dhani (2018), contends that the term "political public relations" may well be understood as "soft" propaganda, as it is used propaganda techniques but was done in sophisticated and subtle ways. Likewise, Jin (2022) stated that "[S]oft propaganda promotes pro-regime attitudes in a subtle and sophisticated way".

Also, soft propaganda has been used in conjunction with hard propaganda as a component of the party-overall state's "thought work" apparatus; they are complementary to one another and serve different purposes. According to Huang (2015), soft propaganda can influence people's attitudes, whereas hard propaganda can stifle political dissent by emphasizing the party-ability state to uphold social order.

## **Material and Methodology**

This study used a descriptive-interpretive design with a single qualitative case study approach as it can provide unique or exceptional qualities that can enhance understanding or inform practice for similar situations (Leedy & Ormrod, 2021). Also, a single case study was chosen to limit the scope of the discussion and analysis while also making it more in-depth and focused. The researchers focus on a statement made by President Jokowi in front of his volunteer groups regarding the endorsement of presidential candidates as it can show the power of the president's communication in influencing the public and strengthening the president's authority.

By using information obtained from the media news reports, the analysis was conducted in three stages to better understand the case at hand. The aim is to provide a more comprehensive understanding because this case has a multi-faceted aspect that requires a more thorough analysis. It will begin with an understanding of the background and progress to various aspects. To give this analysis more weight, it will draw on Benedict Anderson's ideas about the Javanese concept of power and its context in Indonesian political processes. The context of the statement and what makes it unique will be the focus of the contextual analysis.

In the second part, the focus will be a continuation of the first part of the analysis. Joko Widodo as president has a role in the political process just like what Eric Lou argued. What is interesting is how Jokowi's role as a leader carries a role as a hype creator or messenger. As such, what he did was not a surprising thing but it will be interesting to understand beyond what is obvious.

In the final stage, it also seeks to view it in a broader context, namely political public relations strategy and propaganda techniques. The answer is derived from various sub-analysis of the statement since the latter is a rather complex term. In order to have a more holistic approach, this analysis will be created from the ground up. Meaning it will begin with contextual analysis and then a more focused analysis of the possible meaning of the statement.

## **Result and Discussion**

Indonesia became a new democracy in the Asia Pacific region shortly after Soeharto was ousted from power in May 1998. Reforms in Indonesia were marked, among others, by the liberalization of the press, freedom of speech, and expression. The new president who replaced Soeharto then carried out democratized several sectors, including reforming the government's communication system and strategy. In the first years of the Reformation era, this sudden democracy immediately triggered social and political instability, so the presidents seemed unable to overcome the situation and face the turmoil of public euphoria. As a result, the government's communication model has gradually undergone significant modifications, from using one-way propaganda with a top-down communication model (as in the Soeharto era) to a more egalitarian communication with two-way bottom-up communication.

Joko Widodo (Jokowi), is the seventh President of Indonesia and the second president elected under the new direct presidential election. Jokowi began his career as a businessman in the furniture industry before entering politics by competing for mayor of Solo, a position he could hold for two terms. Jokowi ran for and won the Jakarta Governor election before completing his second term as Mayor of Solo. Jokowi is fully endorsed politically by the PDI-P, but since becoming Indonesia's sixth president, he and his party have subtly drifted away. Therefore, it is inherently important here to understand Jokowi's action (through his statement) in a wider context. In his role as president, what Jokowi did was probably just a small action in an ocean of political activities in Indonesia. But as Anderson said, his action is very significant because of the context and the meaning of it.

### *Power in the Perspective of Javanese Culture*

Being a Javanese, Jokowi's statement could be understood in multiple interpretations. This is in line with Anderson's argument regarding the typical Javanese ruler behavior (Anderson, 1990). The analysis based on Anderson's concepts will be conducted in a separate part. Anderson argued that this situation is not a matter of coincidence and that almost all Indonesian presidents were Javanese. As an ethnic group, Javanese is the largest ethnic group in Indonesia where approximately 60% of Indonesians are of Javanese ethnicity. Yet this is not the main reason for such dominance. The main issue according to Anderson is the institutionalized political culture that is very strongly connected with Javanese political culture.

The importance of this institutionalized political culture is that it will affect whoever took the helm of leadership as president. As the culture is strongly related to Javanese culture, then it will not be surprising that those who become president are those who are familiar already with such culture. So despite Jokowi clearly will have to step down in 2024, the successor will be affected or influenced by such culture. This by all means does not mean that the next president will be of Javanese ethnicity. The president can come from any ethnic group but the culture that surrounds the presidency, according to Anderson, will be distinctly Javanese.

It is also worth noting what Jokowi mentioned - regarding white hair. In Indonesian society generally, white hair is associated with age and connotatively - experience. These two are qualities that are often perceived positively in particular within Javanese culture. A leader is traditionally presented as a wise person whose wisdom came from long experience in life. Therefore, from a glance, the reference for age and experience here is perhaps a symbol of both complement and reference that the future leader of Indonesia should be a person of wisdom due to experience.

This again highlights Jokowi's preference to manage his political acts about Javanese culture. Despite the statement not mentioning any specific name, the public has guessed that this is a clear statement of support for Ganjar Pranowo. As he is the current possible candidate that has white hair compared to other candidates. On the other hand, the statement is arguably vague enough that reflects Javanese tradition to not point to a specific target when in public discussion. Something is present in both Soeharto and Gus Dur.

Therefore, does the reference to "white hair" have any significance here? It is very much possible that there is significance. Indonesian society in general is still influenced by patriarchal culture. To have a clearly defined and identified patriarch is a common practice in Indonesian society as it has the role to be a reference point if not a leader. Having physical elements that can symbolize wisdom is definitely a plus for anyone who aspires to be the official leader in Indonesia. Yet, having white hair is not a unique thing as theoretically people who are aged will have their hair turned to white. This is a natural phenomenon that can happen to anyone.

Does this mean other candidates are being referred to by Jokowi instead? The statement did not mention any names, thus officially leaving it to anyone's imagination who it might be. This is interesting as it can also be interpreted as Jokowi is willing to take the risk of showing his public support but to whom, it is still deliberately vague. Arguably a reflection of how Javanese leaders should act in public.

Perhaps another interpretation of the statement is that Jokowi is doing his role as a hype creator. In which he deliberately opens a public statement in the full knowledge that it will spark public curiosity at the least and public debate at the most. If that is his intention, the real meaning of his statement may not even be relevant as the main goal is to create hype. Again, arguably this fits in with the concept of a Javanese leader that does not speak directly to the public about his intentions.

Despite what some politicians have suggested, Jokowi has openly stated that he is bound by the constitution meaning in 2024 he will end his term as president. This leaves a very wide-open opportunity for anyone to replace him as the next president. As such, there has been an intense public debate about who will be the next candidate for the upcoming president.

Anderson argues that such cultural influence has a fundamental impact. Governments are basically administration organizations hence it is usually (in democratic countries) called "administration". As an organization, the culture within will have a serious impact on the way that organization works. As the culture of an organization, it gives a direction for its members on how or what sort of best practices in that particular organization.

In the context of a public administration or a government, Anderson has noted that Javanese culture has indeed had a profound effect on how the Indonesian government works. Interestingly, he argues that this can be applied to more than one administration. Despite there having been more than five different presidents in Indonesia, the culture of Javanese is still the main and most influential culture in the Indonesian government. Because of that, a President like Jokowi will certainly have his actions directly or indirectly affected by the dominant culture of his administration. As a leader in the Javanese context, he is the leading character. The play which is the theme that his administration carries will be centered upon him. In the Indonesian presidential system, the President is both the architect and leader of his administration.

The argument here is that to understand the context of what Jokowi did, in this case, is to understand that there are far more complex things behind the statement. As a political actor, his role is within the stage that defines his role. In this stage, the setting was designed based on a prominent culture that affects how things go. So understanding how the actor behaves is to understand the powerful forces that influence his ability to move.

Based on that concept, the idea of Jokowi as President of Indonesia launching the hype without a special meaning behind is rather a moot point. As a political actor, his role is to push certain hype to fulfill his political role. But then what the message means, will be discussed more in-depth in the next part.

### *The President as Hype Maker*

From the point of view of Louw's concept, a president is a *de factor* and an insider. Within that "role", his action will definitely reflect such description that he will divide his time between doing substantial work (i.e. as head of state) and creating political "hype" as a political actor. The role of a political actor is to be the focus here. As a political actor, Jokowi naturally will be producing messages or actions that are often regarded as "political acts". His often-publicized habit to give stationaries and even bicycles to school kids is often criticized as just a political show. Often because critics like to point out that school kids need more than just 'gifts' like a better school, better support for teachers, and other materials like books. Nevertheless, it is hard to deny that for children, gifts are gifts.

Anderson also argued that Indonesian leaders, particularly those who came from Javanese backgrounds understand that they have a stage role that they have to play well. Anderson believed that

for Indonesian leaders, playing on stage is part of the part of a leader where they are playing in a certain story. Just a shadow puppet show, each leader selects and presented their own story to play, in which in that story they will play the central figure.

Within this context, what Jokowi did by stating about the white hair and frown foreheads, is part of this power play. Jokowi knows that his comment on this matter does not relate to the actual government works but will affect more on the political discourse in the public sphere more. Providing people with a certain "topic" here is actually can be seen as an agenda-setting effort. Whereas he as the central figure in the current political stage, is playing his role in directing what people see and discuss.

Off course, this type of agenda-setting effort will not play well without the support of other elements involved: the media. The media has always played a central role in creating political drama and become part of this political play (Wolfsfeld. 1997). Nevertheless, media in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not the same media as defined by 20<sup>th</sup>-century media theories. Today's media consists of both the formal mass media organizations and the countless media run by individuals that have turned into a one-man media content production. The latter becomes the amplifier for the messages presented by the news media and also political actors.

What's interesting about the media that are run by individuals is that they have certain traits: the lack of mass media ethics; the lack of organization; the lack of complex manpower and the lack of clear agenda aside from the personal ideology/agenda of the individual that runs the media. Despite such limitations, these new media have found strength in numbers – by millions. They are also becoming a part of something powerful as well – the public sphere.

When Jokowi stated his statement about the characteristics of "a good leader", he knew his message will be aired by various news organizations that still existed. Despite their numbers having dwindled significantly in the past decade, official new media is far from dead. In fact, the less competition has arguably strengthened the position of the surviving news media as the "credible source of news". Interestingly, these news media also know that their news will become the main source for millions of individuals for their content.

A simple google search can present a rough number of how far this statement about white hair has gone – approximately 496.000 hits. This probably does not include the conversations in forms of social media like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram where access to those platforms can be limited by its participants. What this fact shows, but does not prove is that as a political actor, the hype created by Jokowi has hit its marks to create a political sensation.

How significant is this hype? This is a rather difficult question to answer within the parameter of this research. To measure the significance of the hype, further study is needed preferably using tools that can measure the impact of the message. But the main goal of the hype here has been achieved – to trigger conversation and agenda to be debated by the member of the public.

Does the google search above reflect the hype caused by Jokowi's statement? In this era of almost liberal media ownership (as now individuals can run their media), numbers can have multiple meanings. Usually, the higher hits in Google search mean many sources mention or cite the particular term. But others have argued that another measurement is to measure the hype in the form of conversation on social media like Twitter. Unfortunately to measure the hype in social media is beyond the scope of this research. The focus here is on understanding the context and possible meaning of the hype created within a specific parameter of Jokowi as Indonesian president.

Returning to the discussion, as a political leader and actor, Jokowi is bound by the role he is doing. His administration despite being supposedly "loyal" to him, is also an organization that is bound by the culture that exists long before he created his administration. Therefore, in that context, Jokowi is doing his role within a stage that was created long before he entered it.

Does this mean that the hype promoted by Jokowi is an agenda set by the forces or parties behind him? Anderson argued that the Indonesian political stage is a very complex matter. There is more than what meets the eye as there are many forces within the Indonesian society that each have their stake and wanted to retain that situation.

On the other hand, Anderson also argues, that the idea of power in Indonesian politics is distinctly different than those in European concepts (Anderson, 2019). One example is how power is envisioned as a complete and not divided being in Indonesia. Thus, as a leader, Jokowi can promote any hype he wants, simply because "he can". This is a paradox as behind the stage, many forces were competing.

This is probably what makes Indonesian politics unique in the eyes of Anderson. The statement that Jokowi made was seen as hype and maybe rightly so is hype that he promoted to set a certain agenda. What makes it interesting is that if the alleged meaning of the statement is put aside, then when using Anderson's concept than the real message is within the messenger itself. That he is still the main political actor and he is still controlling the message being sent to the public. Within this context, the message is probably not about who will rule Indonesia beyond the present administration. The actual message is arguably Jokowi is still a de facto leading political actor and he can muster public opinion as he is supposed to. Again, this fits the idea that the message is not within the message presented but by how and by whom the message was presented.

Being a hype maker, it doesn't matter what is the subject. Jokowi is very aware that anything that he does and said will be under scrutiny by his political opponents and the public. It is worth to be noted here that starting his candidacy for Jakarta's governor, he started to receive strong oppositions that attacked him in all aspects including his ethnicity. The level of personal attack toward him in all channels including social media is unheard of but it is also because Indonesian public exposure to social media happened relatively very recently.

Interestingly Indonesian presidents are known to have their approach to publicity through various kinds of media. Sukarno was known to love giving public speeches and also love to highlight his personal life. Soeharto prefers a Javanese royal style by doing well-orchestrated "public meetings" with peasants followed by special sessions of "explanations of his directives" by his ministers. BJ Habibie, the only non-Javanese ever to take the presidency was very open about his views but did not do much public speaking.

One possible sign that Jokowi is very adept with his role as hype creator is when traveling to various places in Indonesia, his favorites were obvious: visiting traditional markets; eating at a local eatery; and always being ready with gifts for children mostly school needs like books and occasionally giving away bicycle. This approach is not unique but when it is seen within the context of the usage of the internet to disseminate the hype and how such an approach to share gifts is strikingly similar to what leading talk shows in the US do, then perhaps how the hype being created here is worthy to be noticed.

Back to Jokowi's charities during his visits, it is almost certain that it was managed to a certain extent. At the very minimum is the logistics as it is not common for any president to buy stationaries by themselves and to be carried when they are traveling. So even giving away stationaries for children will require a certain level of management. When the president gives away larger and more significant stuff like bicycles that will need more serious management.

In this matter it is clear that Jokowi must have been very aware of his actions will be viewed by millions thus creating hype just like Louw has said about his hype-maker role. On the other hand, Anderson has argued that this also relates to the culture of Javanese politics whereas a holder of power, Jokowi knows that power is something definite and obvious. When he has the power, it is a definite situation, so he has to act accordingly – that he has such power.

### *Harnessing Political Public Relations*

As previously mentioned, Jokowi has publicly stated his support for his preferred presidential candidate by using the characteristics of the candidate he endorses. Surprisingly, Jokowi's statement preceded the announcement of the party's official candidate which will be declared by the party chairperson. If compared with the first two presidents of Indonesia, Sukarno, and Soeharto, what Jokowi did, in this case, was closer to a combination of those two. His message was presented by himself and now by anyone else. This put him into the clear role of being the leading political actor. On the other hand, the message he presented was deliberately vague and unclear. It was designed to make the audience guess what it means.

The political condition also was far from stable. The first two presidents after Soeharto had difficulties completing their terms and were replaced within a year or so. It was not until 2004 when Soesilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) was elected in the first-ever direct presidential election, that Indonesia saw a president that fulfilled their term. SBY run a full two terms to be replaced by Jokowi in 2014. The volatility of Indonesian politics raised issues of concern about the future of the country. Several conflicts erupted in various areas like Aceh and Ambon, both conflicts last for years and cost thousands of lives. It brought a serious problem with the idea that Indonesia will remain a united country

especially after East Timor voted to be an independent country in 1999. This brings serious fear that other areas will follow through.

When Jokowi became president in 2014, many perceived him as a possible savior of Indonesia. Time Magazine even published a special cover with a photo of Jokowi with the headline: "New Hope". Unlike the previous presidents, Jokowi begins his political career as mayor and then governor. During his time as mayor and governor, he was known to visit public places and often met with the general public with less stringent protocols. Jokowi continues to maintain this simple and down-to-earth style after becoming the Governor of Jakarta to occupy the president's office. His political public relations strategy also follows the character and attitude he built. Just like SBY, Jokowi is known to have a team of media expert staff who handle his public interactions. Her channels vary from her regular public appearances (dubbed as "Blusukan") to social media accounts. The fact that he was having two young sons that were very adept with social media, helped his approach. This fits into Eric Louw's concept that as a political leader; Jokowi's role is basically as a hype maker.

As mentioned before, SBY and Jokowi took power at a different time than their predecessors. They were watched not just by mass media but also by social media. Yet they were very ready for it. SBY was the first president to use Twitter to address various matters including official announcements. Jokowi, on the other hand, prefers a more hands-on approach with his visits to public places that are usually less visited like traditional markets. He knows whenever he showed up in public places, he will attract attention to an extent it is part of his strategy to be "visible" as the public will document and shared their encounters with their presidents.

Jokowi has proven his ability to influence the people based on the above-mentioned political public relations techniques and thereby increase his power. In their study, Valdez and Dhani (2021) also explain several propaganda techniques used by Jokowi as part of his political public relations efforts. Meanwhile, soft propaganda tactics that may be highly effective when used at the right moment, in front of the right audience, and with the appropriate choice of words can be used to track the president's communication in this scenario.

In front of his supporters, most of whom are volunteers, Jokowi stated two characteristics of the next presidential candidate. He says: The leader who thinks about people can be seen from his face. From his appearance, it can be seen that there are many wrinkles on his face because he thinks about people, there are also those who think about people until his hair is all white. Without mentioning a name, of course, people already know that the candidate is Ganjar Pranowo, who just happens to have all-white hair and also has wrinkles on his forehead.

By using very simple language and asking predictable questions, Jokowi is carrying out at least two soft propaganda techniques, both of which have similarities. The first is an oversimplification. This technique is often used by political leaders to simplify matters/issues that require more complex elements so that the meaning is easily understood by the public. This is considering that to become a presidential candidate is not enough to describe only his appearance. What about his managerial capability, intellectual capacity, vision and mission, work plan in advancing the nation, or his track record which of course needs to be known or tested before he can be nominated?

The second is the logical fallacies technique. According to Jacob E. Van Vleet (2011) the word fallacy comes from the Latin word fallacia, meaning "trick," "deceit," or "fraud." Therefore, a logical fallacy is an argument containing faulty reasoning. This technique is actually similar to the first but is more specifically aimed at the majority of common people, most of whom are lazy to think about the messages they receive. In Jokowi's statement, his forehead wrinkled because he thought about the country, or his hair was all white because he also thought about the country. Both of the information presented is an error in the logic of thinking because a person with a wrinkled forehead and all-white hair does not mean that he often thinks about the country. As people get older, people will also have wrinkled foreheads and white hair, but this is not necessarily caused by thinking about the country. This way of thinking is a type of logical fallacies in which Ludwig Wittgenstein noted that the fallacy of the false cause is "an argument that assumes there is a causal relation between two events, without providing supporting evidence" (in Van Vleet, 2011).

## **Conclusions**

Expressing support for one of the presidential candidates, even though Jokowi did not name any names, can be interpreted as an exercise of power and a political game played by the president. This

might be a significant issue for Jokowi since the general chairperson of the party may view it as a fait accompli. On the other hand, Jokowi can show his influence/power as a popular president by endorsing candidates who may be deemed capable of replacing his position as well as securing policies and actions that have the potential to be questioned in the future.

In this article, the researchers argued that Jokowi is well aware of his power and his position as president and considers himself the supreme leader who has the authority as in the concept of power in Javanese culture. Hence, as long as the intention is good and with his highest power, he was confident to take any action and make any decision. For this reason, the first meaning, in this case, is Jokowi intends to deliberately violate party rules to remove the party's doubt and the elite's indecision in determining the presidential candidates. Secondly, with his actions, Jokowi was able to create political hype and resonate his message to the media, public and political elites and parties, including the PDI-P. Thirdly, Jokowi succeeded in carrying out his tactic with political public relations strategy by utilizing soft propaganda techniques. Hence, the researchers concur with the premise that "presidential communication matters" regardless of the situation, capability, and character of the president. To become an influential leader and be capable of affecting the political process through communication, which will increase his power, the president must, however, be capable of refining his communication strategy and capabilities.

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