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Media Discourse and The Negotiation of Islamic Authority: A Critical Multimodal Analysis of Hajj Cost Reduction Policy in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Media discourse has become a crucial arena in which public policy, religious legitimacy, and state authority are constructed and negotiated, particularly in religiously sensitive policy contexts such as Hajj governance in Indonesia. Despite extensive studies on Hajj administration, limited attention has been given to how media discourse legitimizes policy and reconfigures Islamic authority through linguistic and multimodal representations. This study aims to analyze how media discourse constructs and negotiates Islamic authority in the communication of the Hajj cost reduction policy, identify the discursive and multimodal strategies used to legitimize the policy, and examine their implications for contemporary Islamic governance. Employing a qualitative critical case study, this research analyzes selected online news reports published during the period surrounding the official policy announcement. Data were examined through the integration of Critical Discourse Analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis, focusing on lexical choices, actor representation, visual composition, and numerical visualization. The findings show that media discourse legitimizes the policy by framing Hajj cost reduction as ethical responsibility, positioning state institutions as legitimate religious authorities, reinforcing transparency and efficiency through numerical and visual representations, and embedding fiscal policy within the lived religious experience of Hajj. This study contributes to communication and Islamic governance scholarship by demonstrating that policy legitimacy is produced through the interaction of textual, visual, and numerical modes, resulting in a hybrid form of Islamic authority where bureaucratic governance and moral-religious values mutually reinforce one another.

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary policy environments, media discourse plays a central role in constructing, interpreting, and legitimizing public policy. Rather than functioning as neutral channels of information, news media actively shape how policy issues are framed, which actors are authorized, and what forms of knowledge are considered legitimate (Entman, 1993). In the context of religiously sensitive policies, media communication becomes particularly significant, as it mediates the intersection between state governance and moral-religious values. Consequently, understanding Hajj cost reduction requires not only institutional analysis but also a systematic examination of how media discourse constructs meaning, authority, and legitimacy.

This dynamic is clearly reflected in the case of Hajj cost reduction in Indonesia. The cost of organizing the Hajj pilgrimage constitutes more than an administrative calculation; it represents a critical intersection between Islamic ritual, state governance, and public trust. As the largest Muslim-majority democracy, Indonesia manages Hajj through a complex institutional framework involving the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the House of Representatives, and Hajj fund management bodies. Recent negotiations on Hajj costsparticularly the formal deliberations of the Panja Kemenag–DPR for 2024, the reported reduction agreement for 2025, and subsequent public communication emphasizing efficiency and fairness (News, 2025), demonstrate how fiscal decisions are not only formulated but also communicated and legitimized through media discourse. These processes reveal that Hajj governance is inseparable from broader configurations of Islamic authority, where religious scholars (ulama) and political leaders (umara) interact within mediated public narratives (Al Atawneh, 2017; Lindsey, 2012)

Within the perspective of lived religion, Islam is understood not merely as doctrinal orthodoxy but as embodied, institutional, and mediated practice in everyday life. The Hajj thus becomes a lived experience involving financial planning, waiting lists, and engagement with state bureaucracies. In contemporary Indonesia, this experience is increasingly shaped by media representations, which frame how policies are interpreted by the public. Policy communication concerning Hajj costs unfolds within a digitally mediated public sphere where authority is decentralized and continuously negotiated (Campbell, 2013; Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996; Hoover, 2019). As a result, media discourse becomes a decisive arena for constructing perceptions of legitimacy, fairness, and accountability.

From a communication perspective, media representations of public policy are structured through framing processes that define problems, attribute responsibility, and propose solutions (Entman, 1993). Within political communication, the media act as intermediaries between governmental institutions and the public, translating complex policy decisions into accessible narratives that influence public trust. In the case of Hajj governance, this mediation is particularly crucial because fiscal decisions intersect with Islamic ethical values and collective expectations. Therefore, media discourse does not merely transmit administrative information but actively constructs how Islamic authority and state legitimacy are understood within the public sphere.

This mediated experience of Hajj governance should also be read within Indonesia's broader public use of Islamic identity, where Islam is articulated not only as a doctrinal reference but also as a source of national representation, public legitimacy, and state responsibility. In this regard, media coverage of Hajj cost policy intersects with wider patterns of Islamic public communication, in which Muslim audiences evaluate state institutions through expectations of transparency, accountability, and religiously grounded trust (Damayanti et al., 2024; Pambayun et al., 2025).

Despite the central role of media in shaping public understanding, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to examining how Islamic authority is discursively constructed in media representations of Hajj cost reduction. Existing studies tend to focus on administrative efficiency, regulatory frameworks, or financial sustainability, while overlooking how language, visuals, and narrative structures in media discourse produce legitimacy. In contemporary Muslim societies, public policy is not only implemented but also communicated through strategic framing, where media discourse functions as a site of power negotiation (Entman, 1993). Given the integration of Islamic values into public governance (Al-Munzir et al., 2024). the framing of Hajj cost reduction inevitably involves moral and theological dimensions that are mediated through communication processes.

The central research problem, therefore, concerns how media discourse constructs and negotiates Islamic authority and state legitimacy in narratives surrounding Hajj cost reduction. Addressing this issue requires an analytical framework capable of uncovering both linguistic strategies and multimodal

elements that shape public meaning. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides tools to examine how language reflects and reproduces power relations (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2018) while Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) enables the investigation of interactions among textual, visual, and compositional modes (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). Together, these approaches offer a comprehensive framework for analyzing how media communication constructs religious and political authority.

Scholarly studies on Islamic authority demonstrate that religious legitimacy is often intertwined with political governance. In Saudi Arabia, the ulama exert considerable influence over public policy (Al Atawneh, 2017). while in Indonesia, the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) has expanded its role into administrative domains, including Hajj management (Lindsey, 2012). However, these studies have largely focused on institutional arrangements rather than the role of media discourse as a communicative arena where authority is negotiated.

Within discourse studies, CDA has been widely applied to Islamic political communication to reveal how rhetorical strategies legitimize governance (Aguilera-Carnerero, 2021; AlAfnan, 2026). Complementarily, multimodal research shows how visual and symbolic elements contribute to meaning-making in digital media environments (Bouvier, 2016; Joy et al., 2024; Nilsen, 2020). These approaches suggest that policy legitimacy is constructed not only through textual narratives but also through multimodal configurations that shape audience interpretation.

However, several gaps remain. First, while Hajj governance has been extensively studied from administrative perspectives, little attention has been given to how media discourse constructs and legitimizes policy change. Second, research on Islamic authority often focuses on religious figures or institutions, without examining policy communication as a site of negotiation. Third, although CDA and MDA have been widely used, their integration in analyzing media representations of public policy in Muslim-majority democracies remains limited. These gaps highlight the need for a systematic analysis of media discourse in the context of Hajj cost reduction in Indonesia (Ardiansyah et al., 2025).

This study aims to analyze how media discourse constructs and negotiates Islamic authority in coverage of Hajj cost reduction, to identify the discursive and multimodal strategies used to legitimize the policy, and to examine how these representations reflect broader transformations in Islamic governance. The study is grounded in the assumption that media discourse functions not merely as a channel of policy communication but as a discursive arena where fiscal rationality and moral-religious legitimacy are simultaneously produced.

The novelty of this study lies in three contributions. First, it positions media discourse as the central object of analysis in examining Islamic public policy. Second, it integrates Critical Discourse Analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis to investigate policy communication. Third, it provides empirical insight from Indonesia as a Muslim-majority democracy in the Global South, contributing to broader discussions on the relationship between media, religion, and governance. The study focuses on selected mainstream and digital media reports on Hajj cost reduction for the 2024–2025 period, analyzing both textual and visual elements that construct authority and legitimacy.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research methodology grounded in a critical qualitative case study design to examine how media discourse constructs and legitimizes the policy of Hajj cost reduction in Indonesia. Qualitative inquiry enables in-depth analysis of meaning-making processes through the interpretation of texts, media content, and social representations rather than numerical measurement (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study approach is appropriate because the research focuses on a specific contemporary policy event situated within its socio-political and institutional context, where media discourse and governance are closely intertwined (Yin, 2018). The critical orientation of this study allows for the examination of power relations, legitimacy claims, and ideological constructions embedded within media representations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The data consist of publicly available online news articles published by nationally recognized Indonesian media outlets. These outlets were selected based on credibility, wide readership, and consistent coverage of public policy issues. The dataset includes both textual and visual materials such as headlines, news quotations, photographs, and infographics enabling a comprehensive analysis of discursive and multimodal constructions of policy legitimacy. To ensure empirical grounding, the dataset explicitly incorporates at least five news headlines and five direct quotations that represent

dominant media narratives.

The research strategy adopts qualitative document analysis, which systematically examines media texts to identify patterns of meaning, thematic structures, and discursive constructions (Bowen, 2009). Data collection was conducted through a systematic keyword search using terms such as "*biaya haji*," "*penurunan biaya haji*," and "BPIH." The temporal scope was limited to one month before and one month after the official announcement of the Hajj cost reduction policy to capture concentrated media discourse surrounding the event.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure alignment between selected data and the research objectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Inclusion criteria required that the selected materials: (1) be straight news reports (excluding opinion and editorial content), (2) explicitly address the Hajj cost reduction policy, and (3) contain visual elements such as images or infographics. A total of approximately 20–30 articles were selected to allow analytical depth while maintaining diversity across media sources. All materials were systematically archived and prepared for coding.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of qualitative analysis proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (Miles et al., 2014), consisting of three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the first stage, textual and visual data were coded to identify relevant discursive elements, including lexical choices, thematic emphasis, and representations of actors, as well as visual features such as numerical displays, layout, and imagery. In the second stage, coded data were organized into thematic matrices to facilitate comparison across media sources and identify recurring patterns. In the final stage, interpretations were developed iteratively and verified through cross-checking across the dataset to ensure consistency and coherence.

The analytical framework integrates Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). At the textual level, the analysis focuses on lexical selection, thematic organization, agency representation, modality, and legitimation strategies. Particular attention is given to how fiscal language is moralized and how authority is constructed through media narratives. At the multimodal level, the analysis examines visual salience, compositional hierarchy, numerical emphasis, and the interaction between textual and graphical elements. This integration enables a comprehensive understanding of how meaning and legitimacy are constructed across multiple semiotic modes.

As a qualitative study, this research does not employ statistical testing. Instead, methodological rigor is ensured through criteria of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility is achieved through triangulation across multiple media sources, transferability through detailed contextual description, dependability through systematic documentation of analytical procedures, and confirmability through reflexive awareness and an auditable data trail. NVivo software was used to support coding, enhance analytical transparency, and maintain systematic organization of the dataset.

Overall, this methodological framework provides a coherent and rigorous approach to examining how media discourse operates as a site of negotiation of Islamic authority and policy legitimacy within contemporary Indonesian Hajj governance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Discursive Construction of Fiscal Rationality as Religious Responsibility

To ensure that the analysis is grounded in empirical media discourse, this study draws on a corpus of news reports that explicitly frame the policy of Hajj cost reduction. The dataset includes representative headlines and direct quotations that illustrate how the policy is constructed and communicated in media narratives.

The following headlines were identified as dominant patterns across national media coverage:

1. "*Biaya Haji 2025 Turun, Pemerintah Tekankan Efisiensi dan Keadilan"*
2. *"Beban Jamaah Berkurang, Biaya Haji Lebih Terjangkau"*
3. *"Panja DPR dan Kemenag Sepakati Penurunan Biaya Haji"*
4. *"Pemerintah Pastikan Biaya Haji Lebih Ringan bagi Jamaah"*
5. *"Optimalisasi Dana Haji untuk Kepentingan Jamaah"*

In addition, key quotations from news reports further reinforce these discursive patterns:

1. *"Penurunan biaya haji ini merupakan hasil efisiensi dan optimalisasi dana jamaah."*
2. *"Kebijakan ini adalah bentuk tanggung jawab negara dalam melayani umat."*
3. *"Pemerintah berkomitmen menjaga keadilan agar biaya haji lebih terjangkau."*

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4. *"Langkah ini diambil untuk meringankan beban calon jamaah."*
5. *"Pengelolaan dana haji dilakukan secara transparan dan akuntabel."*

These empirical data demonstrate that media discourse consistently frames Hajj cost reduction through a combination of economic and moral vocabularies.

The analysis of media discourse reveals that the construction of Hajj cost reduction is strongly anchored in recurring linguistic patterns across these headlines and textual quotations. The emphasis on terms such as "*turun,*" "*lebih terjangkau*," and "*meringankan beban jamaah*" foregrounds reduction as the primary news value. At the macrostructural level, headlines and opening paragraphs prioritize numerical decrease as the central interpretive frame, directing audience attention toward policy success while minimizing the visibility of deliberative processes, institutional negotiations, or potential contestation. In line with van Dijk's concept of macropropositional control, such structuring organizes public understanding by emphasizing selected meanings while marginalizing alternative perspectives (van Dijk, 2018).

At the textual level, the data demonstrate a consistent coupling of technocratic and normative language. Expressions such as "*optimalisasi dana*," "*efisiensi biaya*," and "*pengelolaan keuangan*" are systematically combined with moral terms including "*keadilan*," "*perlindungan jamaah*," and "*tanggung jawab* negara." This pattern is clearly reflected in quotations such as "*Pemerintah berkomitmen menjaga keadilan agar biaya haji lebih terjangkau*" and "*Langkah ini diambil untuk meringankan beban calon jamaah*." Such discursive articulation indicates that fiscal policy is not presented merely as administrative adjustment but as an ethical commitment to the ummah.

Furthermore, media discourse constructs a temporal narrative that reinforces policy legitimacy. Reports implicitly contrast present improvements with previous financial burdens, while projecting future sustainability through references to improved fund management. The emphasis on phrases such as "*lebih ringan*" and "*lebih terjangkau*" situates the policy within a broader trajectory of reform, where present decisions are justified through references to past inefficiencies and anticipated future benefits.

Another significant pattern emerges in the representation of institutional actors. News discourse consistently attributes agency to government bodies, as reflected in statements such as "*Pemerintah memastikan transparansi pengelolaan* dana *haji*" and "*Panja* DPR dan *Kemenag sepakat menurunkan biaya haji*." These constructions position state institutions as authoritative actors responsible for both technical management and moral accountability. Through this representation, fiscal governance is discursively elevated into a form of *amanah*, where financial management is framed as a moral trust entrusted to the state.

The mediated nature of this construction is further reinforced through multimodal elements accompanying the text. Headlines emphasizing numerical reduction are often supported by infographics and visual displays of cost comparison, which enhance the salience of quantitative improvement. The prominence of declining figures visually naturalizes the perception of success, while the absence of alternative frames limits interpretive diversity. In this sense, media discourse does not merely report policy outcomes but actively produces a discursive reality in which cost reduction appears self-evidently beneficial and ethically justified.

When interpreted within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, these findings demonstrate how legitimation strategies—particularly rationalization and moralization—operate simultaneously within media narratives. Economic terminology provides a sense of technical objectivity, while moral language embeds the policy within Islamic ethical values. This dual framing is particularly significant in the Indonesian context, where public policy is evaluated not only in terms of efficiency but also in relation to religious norms.

More importantly, the findings confirm that media discourse functions as an intermediary arena where economic governance is rearticulated as religious responsibility. By repeatedly associating cost reduction with fairness, protection, and service to the ummah, the media construct a normative expectation that state financial management reflects Islamic moral principles. In this regard, policy communication is not merely informational but constitutive—it shapes how authority, legitimacy, and responsibility are understood within the public sphere.

From a communication perspective, these results highlight that media discourse is central to the production of policy legitimacy in religiously grounded contexts. Fiscal narratives are not neutral representations of economic policy but are discursively constructed through the integration of technical

language and moral-religious values. Practically, this suggests that effective policy communication requires alignment between transparency, efficiency, and ethical framing in order to strengthen public trust.

In sum, the discursive construction of fiscal rationality as religious responsibility illustrates how media communication operates as a strategic site where governance, religion, and public perception converge. Through the integration of empirical data and discursive analysis, this section demonstrates that Hajj cost reduction is not merely an economic policy but a communicatively constructed reality shaped by media discourse.

Reconfiguring Islamic Authority within State Governance

The analysis of media discourse indicates that the representation of actors in news coverage consistently positions state institutions as the primary agents of authority, while pilgrims are constructed as passive beneficiaries. This pattern is evident in both headlines and news quotations. For instance, headlines such as *"Panja DPR dan Kemenag Sepakati Penurunan Biaya Haji"* foreground governmental actors as decision-makers, while quotations such as *"Pemerintah memastikan transparansi pengelolaan dana haji"* and *"Kebijakan ini adalah bentuk tanggung jawab negara dalam melayani umat"* emphasize the active role of the state in managing and legitimizing the policy.

In contrast, references to pilgrims (*jamaah*) are predominantly framed in passive or beneficiary roles. Expressions such as *"meringankan beban jamaah"* and *"jamaah mendapatkan manfaat dari penurunan biaya"* position the public as recipients rather than participants in decision-making processes. This asymmetrical representation suggests that agency is concentrated within governmental institutions, while the role of citizens is discursively limited to that of beneficiaries. Such patterns demonstrate how media discourse constructs a hierarchical relationship between state authority and religious subjects.

At the level of linguistic construction, the data reveal that verbs associated with action such as *"menetapkan," "menjamin," "mengelola,"* and *"memastikan"* are consistently attributed to ministries, parliamentary bodies, and financial authorities. These verbal processes reinforce the image of the state as an active and competent actor. Meanwhile, pilgrims are rarely associated with action-oriented verbs, further reinforcing their passive positioning. This distribution of agency reflects a systematic discursive strategy in which authority is centralized within institutional actors.

In addition, media discourse integrates bureaucratic language with religious and moral expressions, further strengthening the legitimacy of state authority. Statements such as *"tanggung jawab negara dalam melayani umat"* and *"komitmen menjaga keadilan bagi jamaah"* illustrate how administrative actions are framed as moral obligations. This integration suggests that governance is not presented merely as technical management but as an ethical responsibility aligned with Islamic values. Through this framing, the state is positioned not only as a regulator but also as a moral guardian of religious practice.

Another notable pattern in the data is the limited presence of alternative religious voices. The analyzed media texts rarely include perspectives from independent ulama, civil society groups, or dissenting actors. Instead, the discourse is dominated by official statements from government institutions. This absence does not necessarily indicate a lack of alternative views but reflects a selective process of representation in which centralized authority is prioritized. As a result, Islamic authority is discursively reconfigured through the prominence of bureaucratic actors who simultaneously embody administrative competence and religious legitimacy.

The construction of authority is further reinforced through the alignment between policy discourse and broader narratives of governance. Media representations emphasize themes such as transparency, accountability, and efficiency, which are repeatedly linked to state actions. For example, statements highlighting "*transparansi pengelolaan dana haji*" and "*optimalisasi dana jamaah*" contribute to the portrayal of the state as a trustworthy custodian of public and religious resources. This framing strengthens the perception that institutional authority is both technically reliable and ethically grounded.

From a discursive perspective, these patterns indicate that Islamic authority is not solely derived from traditional religious institutions but is actively rearticulated within state governance through media communication. The media play a crucial role in this process by selecting which actors are visible,

which voices are amplified, and how actions are interpreted. Through repeated emphasis on governmental agency and moral responsibility, media discourse constructs a form of authority that blends bureaucratic power with religious legitimacy.

When interpreted within Critical Discourse Analysis, this configuration reflects the activation of institutional actors and the relative passivation of the public, reinforcing asymmetrical power relations. However, in this case, the asymmetry is not presented as domination but as responsible stewardship. The state is framed as acting in the best interest of the ummah, thereby legitimizing its central role in managing religious affairs.

These findings also highlight how media discourse contributes to the broader transformation of Islamic authority in contemporary Indonesia. Rather than being located exclusively within ulama or religious institutions, authority is increasingly distributed across governmental structures and communicated through policy narratives. This shift reflects a hybrid configuration in which religious legitimacy is embedded within administrative processes and mediated through public communication.

From a practical standpoint, the concentration of agency within state actors has important implications for public perception. On one hand, it reinforces trust in institutional management by presenting the state as competent and morally responsible. On the other hand, it may limit perceptions of participatory governance by minimizing the visibility of public or alternative voices. This suggests that media representation plays a critical role in shaping not only legitimacy but also the perceived inclusiveness of policy processes.

In sum, the analysis demonstrates that media discourse actively reconfigures Islamic authority by positioning the state as the central actor in both administrative and moral domains. Through selective representation of actors, strategic use of language, and emphasis on institutional responsibility, the media construct a hybrid model of authority in which governance and religion are closely intertwined. This confirms that media communication functions as a key arena where authority is negotiated and stabilized within contemporary Indonesian society.

Multimodal Legitimation: Visual Grammar and Numerical Authority

The analysis of media discourse shows that the legitimation of Hajj cost reduction is not constructed solely through textual narratives but is strongly reinforced through multimodal elements, particularly numerical displays, infographics, and visual representations of authority. Empirical observations from news coverage indicate that headlines emphasizing reduction such as *"Biaya Haji 2025 Turun"* and *"Beban Jamaah Berkurang Signifikan"* are frequently accompanied by visual elements highlighting numerical decreases. These include bolded figures, comparative charts, and cost breakdown infographics that make the reduction visually salient.

In many cases, numerical information is positioned prominently at the top or center of the news interface, often using larger fonts or contrasting colors to attract immediate attention. This design directs readers to engage first with quantitative indicators such as the amount of cost reduction before reading the full textual explanation. As a result, the policy is framed primarily as a measurable and observable improvement. The emphasis on figures such as "*penurunan biaya*" and "*angka yang lebih rendah*" reinforces the perception that the policy outcome is objective, factual, and self-evidently beneficial.

This pattern is further supported by the integration of textual and visual messages. News reports often combine statements such as *"penurunan biaya haji merupakan hasil efisiensi dan optimalisasi dana jamaah"* with graphical representations of cost comparison between years. The alignment between verbal claims and numerical visualization produces a coherent narrative in which economic efficiency appears both technically verified and visually confirmed. Through this integration, media discourse constructs what can be described as numerical authority, where numbers function as primary sources of legitimacy.

In addition to numerical displays, photographic images of officials such as ministers, parliamentary representatives, or institutional leaders frequently accompany news articles. These images typically depict actors in formal settings, such as meetings, press conferences, or agreement signings. This visual representation reinforces the perception of institutional competence and accountability. When combined with statistical data, these images produce a multimodal message in which authority is simultaneously embodied (through actors) and objectified (through numbers).

Another important finding is that multimodal elements tend to simplify complex policy

processes. Infographics summarizing cost structures or financial allocations present information in segmented and easily digestible formats. While this enhances accessibility for the audience, it also reduces the visibility of underlying complexities, such as negotiation processes, budget trade-offs, or potential contestation. As a result, the discourse emphasizes outcomes rather than processes, reinforcing a unidimensional interpretation of policy success (Ardiansyah & Tambunan, 2026).

From a discourse perspective, these patterns indicate that multimodal communication plays a crucial role in shaping public interpretation. Numbers and visual layouts are not neutral representations but function as semiotic resources that encode meanings of transparency, efficiency, and managerial competence. By presenting cost reduction through clear and simplified visuals, media discourse reduces interpretive ambiguity and directs audiences toward acceptance of the policy.

The dominance of numerical representation also reflects broader trends in governance communication, where quantitative data are used to establish credibility. In the analyzed media texts, statistical comparisons such as reductions in cost between previous and current years—are presented as definitive evidence of policy success. Because these figures appear precise and verifiable, they are less likely to be questioned, thereby strengthening the persuasive power of the discourse.

At the same time, the reliance on visual and numerical emphasis shapes the boundaries of interpretation. By foregrounding aggregate reduction, the discourse leaves limited space for alternative perspectives, such as the experiential realities of pilgrims or long-term implications of financial restructuring. This selective visibility illustrates how multimodal design not only informs but also structures the limits of public reasoning.

When interpreted within Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, these findings demonstrate that legitimacy is constructed through the interaction of multiple semiotic modes. Text, numbers, layout, and imagery work together to produce a coherent narrative in which policy appears rational, transparent, and ethically justified. The visual prominence of numerical reduction supports textual claims of efficiency and fairness, while images of officials reinforce institutional authority. Together, these elements create a layered form of legitimation that operates beyond verbal discourse alone.

Importantly, this multimodal configuration complements the findings of the previous sections. While earlier analysis showed how fiscal rationality is moralized and how state actors are positioned as authoritative agents, the present findings demonstrate how visual grammar consolidates these narratives into a persuasive communicative form. The convergence of language, numbers, and imagery produces a stable representation of governance in which economic calculation and moral responsibility are mutually reinforcing.

From a theoretical perspective, this analysis confirms that media discourse must be understood as inherently multimodal, particularly in digital environments where visual elements are integral to meaning-making. It also highlights the role of numbers as epistemic tools that shape perceptions of truth and objectivity. From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that the design of visual communication is central to policy legitimacy. Clear and accessible visualization can enhance public trust, but selective emphasis may also limit critical engagement.

In sum, the multimodal legitimation of Hajj cost reduction transforms the policy into a visually substantiated achievement. Through the strategic use of numerical data, graphical representation, and institutional imagery, media discourse constructs a form of authority that appears objective, transparent, and uncontested. This demonstrates that media communication operates not only through language but through a coordinated system of semiotic resources that shape how policy, authority, and legitimacy are perceived in contemporary Indonesian society.

Hajj Governance as Lived Islam and Media-Discursive Construction

The findings indicate that media discourse on Hajj cost reduction does not merely construct policy legitimacy at the institutional level but also shapes how the pilgrimage is understood as a lived religious experience. Empirical patterns identified in news headlines and quotations such as *"biaya haji lebih terjangkau," "meringankan beban jamaah,"* and *"tanggung jawab negara dalam melayani umat"*—demonstrate that media narratives consistently link economic policy with religious meaning. Through these representations, affordability is framed not only as a financial issue but as part of a broader moral and spiritual framework.

In this context, media discourse plays a crucial role in shaping how prospective pilgrims interpret

their journey even before departure. The repeated emphasis on themes such as fairness, protection, and accessibility constructs an understanding of Hajj as a religious obligation that is facilitated—and morally safeguarded—by state policy. As reflected in statements like *"penurunan biaya merupakan bentuk keadilan bagi jamaah"* and *"optimalisasi dana dilakukan untuk kepentingan umat,"* fiscal policy is discursively embedded within the ethical language of Islamic responsibility. This suggests that media communication actively contributes to shaping the moral imagination of pilgrimage.

The data also reveal that media discourse situates Hajj governance within a broader narrative of care and responsibility. By highlighting cost reduction alongside themes of transparency and service, news reports construct the state as an enabler of religious fulfillment rather than merely a regulator. In this framing, the pilgrimage is represented as a process that is not only spiritually meaningful but also institutionally supported through responsible governance. As a result, religious experience becomes closely intertwined with policy communication(Mayada et al., 2026).

Furthermore, media representations frequently connect domestic policy with broader systems of pilgrimage management. References to efficiency, coordination, and preparedness—often implied in discussions of cost optimization—position Indonesian Hajj governance within a larger global context. Although not always explicitly detailed, these narratives suggest that cost reduction is part of a wider effort to improve the overall pilgrimage experience, including logistical, financial, and administrative dimensions. Through this framing, media discourse constructs a sense of coherence between national policy and global standards of Hajj management (Lubis et al., 2026).

Another important dimension emerging from the data is the implicit construction of protection and security. Phrases such as *"melayani umat"* and *"menjamin pengelolaan dana"* indicate that the state is represented as responsible not only for financial management but also for safeguarding the well-being of pilgrims. This extends the meaning of governance beyond administrative efficiency to include moral accountability and care. In this way, media discourse reinforces the perception that institutional structures facilitate rather than constrain religious practice.

At the same time, the emphasis on accessibility and fairness reflects broader social values within Indonesian society. By framing cost reduction as a form of justice, media narratives align pilgrimage policy with collective welfare rather than individual privilege. This positioning strengthens the perception that Hajj governance is inclusive and socially responsive. As a result, the pilgrimage is discursively constructed as both a personal religious duty and a collectively supported practice.

From a communication perspective, these findings demonstrate that policy discourse operates as a constitutive social practice. Media narratives do not simply reflect institutional decisions but actively shape how those decisions are understood and experienced by the public. Through the integration of economic language with moral and religious expressions, media discourse produces a dual layer of meaning in which policy is simultaneously interpreted as administrative action and ethical commitment.

This dynamic also reflects the broader role of media in mediating relationships between state authority and religious life. By repeatedly associating governance with service to the ummah, media discourse constructs a form of authority that is both bureaucratic and moral. In doing so, it contributes to the redefinition of Islamic authority within contemporary Indonesia, where legitimacy is not only derived from religious institutions but also from communicative practices within the public sphere (Naomi et al., 2026).

Theoretically, these findings support the view that discourse plays a central role in shaping social reality, particularly in contexts where religion and governance intersect. However, rather than emphasizing theory as the primary focus, the present analysis demonstrates empirically how media discourse operates in practice. The integration of textual, numerical, and narrative elements shows that legitimacy is constructed through everyday communication processes that connect policy with lived religious experience.

In practical terms, this suggests that the success of public policy in religious contexts depends not only on institutional effectiveness but also on how the policy is communicated. By framing cost reduction as a form of ethical responsibility and collective care, media discourse enhances public trust and strengthens the perceived legitimacy of governance. At the same time, it shapes expectations regarding the role of the state in facilitating religious life.

In sum, the findings demonstrate that Hajj governance in Indonesia is not only an administrative process but also a media-discursive construction of lived Islam. Through the strategic use of language,

narratives, and representations, media discourse links economic policy with spiritual meaning, producing a form of legitimacy that operates simultaneously at institutional and experiential levels. This confirms that media communication functions as a key arena in which religious authority, public policy, and everyday religious life are continuously negotiated.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that media discourse plays a decisive role in constructing and legitimizing the policy of Hajj cost reduction in Indonesia. Grounded in empirical analysis of news headlines, quotations, and visual elements, the findings show that policy legitimacy is not merely produced through institutional decisions but is actively shaped through media communication.

At the linguistic level, media narratives consistently frame cost reduction through the integration of economic and moral vocabularies, positioning fiscal policy as an ethical responsibility toward the ummah. At the level of actor representation, state institutions are constructed as the primary agents of authority, while pilgrims are positioned as beneficiaries, reinforcing the state's dual role as administrative manager and moral guardian. At the multimodal level, the prominence of numerical data, infographics, and visual representations strengthens legitimacy by presenting policy outcomes as objective, transparent, and measurable.

Beyond institutional legitimacy, media discourse also shapes the lived meaning of Hajj, where affordability is interpreted as part of a broader moral and religious experience. Through repeated framing of fairness, responsibility, and service, media narratives embed economic policy within the ethical imagination of pilgrimage.

Taken together, these findings confirm that media communication functions as a discursive arena in which policy, Islamic authority, and public trust are negotiated. The study contributes to communication scholarship by demonstrating that policy legitimacy in religious contexts is constructed through the interaction of textual, visual, and numerical representations. In the Indonesian case, this process produces a hybrid form of authority in which bureaucratic governance and Islamic moral values are mutually reinforcing.

Declarations

AA contributed to the study's conceptual foundation, media data collection, discourse analysis, and manuscript drafting. NFSM developed the methodological approach, coordinated analytical procedures, and supervised manuscript refinement. H examined multimodal representations, including visual and numerical elements, and contributed to critical interpretation. IAA supported theoretical integration, contextual analysis, and substantive manuscript revision. All authors approved the final manuscript and accepted responsibility for its scientific integrity. The authors declare no competing interests. ChatGPT (OpenAI) was used exclusively to enhance academic language, grammatical accuracy, and textual coherence. All AI-assisted revisions were evaluated by the authors, and the tool was not employed for data extraction, NVivo coding, multimodal interpretation, or formulation of research conclusions. The study analyzed publicly accessible news reports without recruiting human participants; therefore, individual informed consent was not applicable. Research sources are publicly accessible through their respective media publishers, subject to applicable copyright restrictions.

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