



CONSTRUCTION OF THE REALITY OF HAJI CARTEL REPORTING IN THE REPUBLIKA DAILY (A ROLAND BARTHES ANALYSIS)

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Abstract

This study examines the media construction of the “hajj cartel” issue in Harian Republika, a prominent Indonesian newspaper. The background involves allegations of a “hajj cartel” – monopolistic or corrupt practices in organizing Indonesia's pilgrimage – an issue seen as harmful to pilgrims. The study aims to analyze how Republika frames the “hajj cartel” narrative in its coverage. The method is Barthes' semiotic analysis, focusing on the denotative and connotative meanings of signs in the media. The main findings indicate that Republika portrays the hajj cartel as a serious corruption problem to be eliminated, citing official statements that emphasize transparency and accountability in hajj management. The coverage also features responses from the Hajj Oversight Commission (Komnas Haji) requesting detailed clarification about the cartel claim, reflecting public debate on the issue. This framing presents cartel eradication as a moral and public-policy agenda. In conclusion, Republika's reporting constructs a social reality in which combating the hajj cartel aligns with an anti-corruption narrative in hajj administration.

Keywords: Hajj Cartel, Semiotic Analysis, Media Framing, Republika Newspaper

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi konstruksi realitas pemberitaan kartel haji di Harian Republika. Latar belakang isu kartel haji merujuk pada sorotan publik terhadap praktik monopoli dalam penyelenggaraan ibadah haji yang dianggap merugikan jamaah. Tujuan penelitian adalah mengidentifikasi bagaimana Republika membingkai narasi kartel haji, khususnya melalui pemilihan wacana dan citra. Metode yang digunakan adalah analisis semiotik Roland Barthes, yang menekankan makna denotatif dan konotatif tanda dalam teks media. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Republika memosisikan kartel haji sebagai masalah korupsi serius yang harus dibersihkan, mengutip pernyataan pejabat yang menegaskan komitmen transparansi dan akuntabilitas dalam pengelolaan haji. pemberitaan ini juga menampilkan tanggapan Komnas Haji yang meminta penjelasan lebih rinci mengenai dugaan kartel, mencerminkan dinamika perdebatan publik tentang isu tersebut. Framing ini menggambarkan perjuangan pemberantasan kartel sebagai agenda moral dan kebijakan publik. Kesimpulannya, pemberitaan di Republika membangun realitas sosial tentang isu kartel haji melalui pilihan bahasa dan narasi yang mendukung upaya pemberantasan monopoli, menguatkan gambaran antikorupsi dalam penyelenggaraan haji.

Kata kunci: Kartel Haji, Analisis Semiotik, Framing Media, Harian Republika



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INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the Hajj pilgrimage in Indonesia faces various challenges, with each implementation almost always accompanied by various problems. These challenges are not limited to the departure process, the implementation of the pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia, and the return of pilgrims, but also encompass technical and regulatory issues. This often leads to the need for a systematic review of the Hajj implementation.¹ Behind the sea of pilgrims surrounding the Kaaba, a different story unfolds: the controversy surrounding the Hajj cartel in Indonesia. Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, faces decades-long Hajj queues and ever-rising costs. The complex Hajj management system, from visas to transportation to accommodation in Saudi Arabia, has drawn frequent criticism, leading to the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) investigating alleged corruption in the Hajj quota.²

In the business world, competition is crucial because it can drive the business world and the economy to grow healthily. Economics argues that competition will determine prices through market mechanisms, thus encouraging businesses to innovate their products. Competition will result in a diverse range of products at competitive prices, ultimately benefiting both producers and consumers.³ The Head of the Hajj Organizing Agency (BPH), Dahnil Anzar Simanjuntak, stated that the management of the Hajj involves cartel practices. According to him, this phenomenon occurs not only abroad but also domestically. Responding to this statement, Indonesian Hajj and Umrah observer Ade Marfuddin emphasized that this demonstrates the need for serious, innovative, and visionary steps, as cartels in Hajj management are real. According to him, when it comes to cartels, they usually end up being detrimental, meaning they don't side with consumers; instead, consumers are harmed by the cartels.⁴

The Hajj Organizing Agency (BPH) is committed to eradicating cartel practices in Hajj pilgrimage management in order to provide the best service to the public. According to Dahnil, such cartel practices occur not only abroad but also in Indonesia. This will be a top priority for BPH, as by the 2026 Hajj season, Hajj management will be entirely handled by BPH.⁵ In this

¹ Nur Mahmudah Insani, "Konstruksi Realitas Pemberitaan Detik.Com Tentang Isu Kenaikan Biaya Ibadah Haji Tahun 2024 (Analisis Roland Barthes) | Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Dan Ilmu Sosial," *JMPIS: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Dan Ilmu Sosial* 5, no. 6 (2024), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.38035/jmpis.v5i6.2994>.

² Fuji E. Permana, "Soal Kartel Haji, Komnas Haji Sayangkan BPH Tidak Menjelaskan Secara Rinci," *Republika Online*, May 28, 2025, <https://khazanah.republika.co.id/berita/swyi2i430/soal-kartel-haji-komnas-haji-sayangkan-bph-tidak-menjelaskan-secara-rinci>.

³ Veri Antoni, "Penegakan Hukum Atas Perkara Kartel Di Luar Persekongkolan Tender Di Indonesia," *MIMBAR HUKUM* 31, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.22146/jmh.37966>.

⁴ Fuji E. Permana, "BPH Sebut Ada Kartel Di Penyelenggaraan Haji, Ini Kata Pengamat," *Republika Online*, May 27, 2025, <https://khazanah.republika.co.id/berita/swx7ft430/bph-sebut-ada-kartel-di-penyelenggaraan-haji-ini-kata-pengamat>.

⁵ A. Syalaby Ichsan, "Dahnil: Ada Kartel Dalam Pengelolaan Haji," *Republika Online*, May 27, 2025, <https://khazanah.republika.co.id/berita/sww70i483/dahnil-ada-kartel-dalam-pengelolaan-haji>.

context, the role of the mass media becomes crucial. As the primary source of information to the public, the mass media has the capacity to shape public opinion on the issues raised.⁶ The mass media acts as a liaison between the government and the public. Through the news they present, the mass media has its own way of directing public opinion and influencing public behavior. One way to direct opinion and influence action is through media framing. Framing is the form of reality constructed by the media regarding events in society.⁷

*Framing*News framing is a concept designed to examine the impact of media on society. This news framing process is carried out by journalists and is highly dependent on the availability of information from various sources, such as perception, credibility, legitimacy, power status, and others. The occurrence of news framing is also supported by several factors such as keywords, key phrases, media as a source of corroborating evidence for the news, and the omission of several other elements that can be a factor in the formation of diverse perspectives in society.⁸ The reality presented through media framing does not simply emerge based on the facts of the event. Mass media has significant power to change public opinion through media framing. Of course, framing differs between media outlets and is influenced by several factors.⁹ Based on the discussion above, the researcher will conduct a study to determine and describe the ideology or construction of reality in the media, thus establishing a pro-Hajj ideology for the following year. This study is important because media coverage influences public understanding and interpretation, which can ultimately influence their decision to perform the Hajj.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research method is qualitative, with the type of media research,¹⁰ which aims to reveal how the Republika daily newspaper constructs the reality of news coverage regarding the Hajj cartel. The data source for this research was obtained by collecting all online news in Indonesia about the Hajj cartel coverage in the Republika daily newspaper, starting from May 2025 to

⁶ Ahmad Aridho and dkk, "Peran Media Massa Dalam Membentuk Opini Publik: Demokratisasi Pasca-Reformasi," *IJEDR: Indonesian Journal of Education and Development Research* 2, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.57235/ijedr.v2i1.1693>.

⁷ Athiyah Afifah, "Konstruksi Pemberitaan Ekonomi Pada Media Bisnis.Com Di Konferensi Tingkat Tinggi G20 Tahun 2022" (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2023), <https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/handle/123456789/74934>.

⁸ Aurelia Andini Poetri, "Konstruksi Realitas Media Dalam Pemberitaan Wabah Monkeypox Di Indonesia (Analisis Framing Pemberitaan Monkeypox Pada Media Online Cnn Indonesia Dan Kompas.Com Periode 01 Juli 2022 - 01 September 2022)" (Universitas Sriwijaya, 2023), <https://share.google/5ECeJIICOF6ZUZnYF>.

⁹ Didi Permadi et al., "Media Massa dan Kontruksi Realitas (Analisis Framing Terhadap Pemberitaan UU IKN pada Media Online Tempo.co dan mediaindonesia.com)," *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 22, no. 1 (2024): 1, <https://doi.org/10.31315/jik.v22i1.7754>.

¹⁰ Gatot Wijayanto et al., *Metode Riset Berbasis Digital: Penelitian Pasca Pandemi* (MEDIA SAINS INDONESIA, 2022), <https://share.google/56dpxii5NF4eZmE1c>.

October 2025. The data analysis technique used in this research is Roland Barthes' content analysis model. Barthes' concept is known as the "order of signification" or two-stage signification, which includes denotation, the literal meaning according to the dictionary, and connotation, which is an additional meaning that arises from cultural and personal experiences.¹¹ This analytical method facilitates researchers in exploring the meaning inherent in news texts, while also revealing how these texts shape the reality perceived by the public.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role and Position of Online Mass Media as a Media for Da'wah

The transformation of lifestyle patterns and dynamics of human life in the contemporary global era is greatly influenced by advances in science and technology (IPTEK). Various activities can now be conducted more efficiently and practically, including social interactions and economic transactions. The increasing pace of life encourages individuals to continually seek tools that simplify daily activities, one of which is utilizing the internet as an effective communication medium.¹² News plays an essential role as a vehicle for education and a means of raising public awareness of various issues and events, enabling the public to understand the dynamics of reality comprehensively and reflectively. This function is closely related to how the media constructs reality into a meaningful discourse. As emphasized by Gaye Tuchman, the events presented by the media are actually the result of a construction formed through a process of selection, arrangement, and formulation of reality to produce a specific narrative or discourse that can be understood by the audience.¹³

Islamic preaching media is a tool used by preachers to convey religious messages to the public. With the changing times, Islamic preaching media is no longer limited to conventional spaces such as the pulpit, but has instead evolved in line with the creativity of preachers in transmitting Islamic educational values through various social media platforms that can be easily accessed via smartphones. The widespread use of smartphones as a communication medium has expanded the function of mobile phones, no longer simply for sending short messages or making voice calls, but also as a vehicle for disseminating information and preaching in a more varied and

¹¹ Insani, "Konstruksi Realitas Pemberitaan Detik.Com Tentang Isu Kenaikan Biaya Ibadah Haji Tahun 2024 (Analisis Roland Barthes) | Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Dan Ilmu Sosial."

¹² Rahmi Wahyuni and Siti Rahma Harahap, "Efektivitas Media Sosial Sebagai Media Dakwah Pada Era Digital: Study Literature Review," *An-Nadwah* 29, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.37064/an-nadwah.v29i2.18571>.

¹³ Ika Novita et al., "Konstruksi Realitas Media (Analisis Framing Pemberitaan UU Cipta Kerja Omnibus Law Dalam Media Online Vivanews Dan Tirto.Id)," *Jurnal Syntax Admiration* 2, no. 1 (2021), <https://jurnalsyntaxadmiration.com/index.php/jurnal/article/view/162/254>.

interactive way.¹⁴ In the context of da'wah, mass media plays a strategic role as a channel for conveying religious messages. Ideally, da'wah activities should align with the dynamics of modern developments and optimize existing progress in transmitting da'wah values to the wider community. In addition to serving as a medium for personal expression and interests, mass media, in this era of rapid technological advancement, also has the potential to become an effective vehicle for da'wah. Utilizing mass media allows for the expansion of da'wah messages, allowing each individual to contribute to da'wah activities through these media according to their capacity, competence, and knowledge.¹⁵

Digital da'wah presents social and cultural implications that deserve serious consideration. In an increasingly pluralistic and heterogeneous society, da'wah messages need to be delivered inclusively and with respect for diversity. Such an approach is crucial for preventing potential conflict and strengthening social harmony. Digital da'wah is required to represent Islamic values that are peaceful, tolerant, and provide solutions to various contemporary humanitarian issues. Through this study, it is hoped that a more comprehensive understanding of the role of digital da'wah in disseminating Islamic teachings in the modern era will be gained. Furthermore, digital da'wah opens up new spaces and opportunities for disseminating Islamic messages more effectively. The use of technology and social media platforms allows Muslim scholars and influencers to reach a wider audience, while providing guidance and knowledge relevant to daily life. Nevertheless, conventional da'wah retains its significance, particularly in building deep emotional and spiritual bonds through face-to-face interactions. Therefore, the synergy between digital and conventional da'wah has the potential to produce a more holistic and comprehensive approach to spreading the message of Islam.¹⁶

News about the Hajj Cartel in the Republika Daily

Based on media research on news published by the Republika daily newspaper between May 2025 and October 2025, there were 18 articles discussing the case. These reports can be classified into three main topics, as shown in the table below:

¹⁴ Muhammad Badrul Munir, "Pemanfaatan Media Sosial sebagai Media Dakwah di Era Digital," *Prophetica: Scientific and Research Journal of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting* 3, no. 2 (2019), <https://journal.uinsgd.ac.id/index.php/prophetica/article/view/45268>.

¹⁵ Qudratullah, "Media Massa Sebagai Sarana Dakwah Kontemporer," *Jurnal Al-Hikmah: Jurnal Dakwah* 13, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24260/jhjd.v13i2.1469>.

¹⁶ Ibnu Kasir and Syahrol Awali, "Peran Dakwah Digital Dalam Menyebarkan Pesan Islam Di Era Modern," *Jurnal An-Nasyr: Jurnal Dakwah Dalam Mata Tinta* 11, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.54621/jn.v11i1.842>.

Table 1. List of Republika News Reports on the Hajj Cartel

No	Date	Title	News Content
1	May 27, 2025	BPH Says There's a Cartel in Hajj Organization, Says Observer	The Deputy Head of the Hajj Management Agency (BPH), Dahnil Anzar Simanjuntak, stated that the Hajj administration, both in Indonesia and abroad, is experiencing cartel-like practices. This statement comes amid preparations for the BPH to fully manage the Hajj (transferring from its previous institution), making the cartel issue a key part of the evaluation and reform of Hajj administration.
	May 27, 2025	Dahnil: There's a Cartel in Hajj Management	Dahnil stated that based on observations and internal data, cartel practices are evident in the management of the Hajj pilgrimage, not only abroad (in destination countries) but also domestically (in Indonesia). According to Dahnil, the existence of such cartels makes the Hajj administration vulnerable to monopolies or collusion, which could undermine the principles of transparency, accountability, and fairness for pilgrims.
	May 28, 2025	Regarding the Hajj Cartel, the National Hajj Commission regrets that the BPH did not provide a detailed explanation.	The news began with a statement by the deputy head of the Hajj Management Agency (BPH), Dahnil Anzar Simanjuntak, who stated that there were allegations of "cartel" practices in the Hajj administration, both domestically and internationally (including Hajj-related services). "Cartel" in this context is understood as a structure or coordinated arrangement by certain actors who control aspects of the Hajj administration (e.g., flights, accommodation, transportation, and related services), which can hinder healthy competition and potentially harm pilgrims.
	July 15, 2025	Mr. Haji Says President Prabowo Ordered the Eradication of the Hajj Cartel, 'Enough, Just Go and Destroy It'	According to the deputy head of the Hajj Agency (BP Haji), Dahnil Anzar Simanjuntak, President Prabowo has given strict instructions after receiving reports of a "cartel" in the organization of the 2025 Hajj. This directive comes amid efforts to reform the organization of the Indonesian Hajj, especially when BP Haji is preparing to fully manage the Hajj services.
	July 16, 2025	Dahnil: President Demands Eradication of Hajj Cartel	In a meeting titled "Dissecting the Problems of Hajj Implementation" on July 15, 2025, Dahnil stated that after he reported the findings of alleged cartels in the Hajj administration to Prabowo, who, as head of state, responded with a firm order: "Enough, just wipe it out." This order was practically seen as a mandate to eradicate all forms of cartels in the implementation and administration of the Hajj as part of efforts to ensure the integrity, transparency, and accountability

				of the administration. According to Dahnil, the detected cartel practices were not a small phenomenon but a “large system with all the resources” that could endanger the implementation if left unchecked. Therefore, “clearance” was deemed necessary, despite the risk of “counter-resistance” from the perpetrators.
2	July 4, 2025	Ending the Hajj Monopoly		This article begins with the note that by the end of 2024, the regular Hajj queue in Indonesia had reached around 5.4 million people, a significant indicator of the large demand for Hajj services from pilgrims, indicating that poor Hajj services such as failed departures, inadequate accommodation and medical services, cases of hunger, and unprofessionalism of officers are not just random incidents, but part of structural weaknesses in the governance of the national Hajj administration.
	July 9, 2025	The House of Representatives Supervisory Team Requests Law Enforcement Officers to Monitor Contract Drafting	of	The House of Representatives' Supervisory Team emphasized that oversight of the Hajj administration must involve external institutions and law enforcement officials (e.g., the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), the Financial and Development Supervisory Agency (BPKP), the Attorney General's Office, or the Criminal Investigation Agency) from the earliest stages, namely during the drafting of the Hajj service contract. According to the Chairman of the House of Representatives' Supervisory Team, Cucun Ahmad Syamsurijal, the absence of thorough oversight from the outset is considered one of the causes of recurring problems in the Hajj administration (transportation, accommodation, visas, logistics, services in Saudi Arabia). The House of Representatives' Supervisory Team proposed external involvement, not just internal oversight within the organizing institution, to prevent potential abuse of authority, collusion, or monopolization of services before the work contract is executed.
	August 11, 2025	The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) has issued a statement stating that 2024 Special Hajj Pilgrims were subject to Rp 75 million in extortion.		News reports indicate that the Indonesian Anti-Corruption Society (MAKI) has received information that pilgrims for the 2024 Special Hajj pilgrimage were allegedly subject to illegal levies amounting to Rp 75 million per person. Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) spokesperson Budi Prasetyo stated that his agency would "investigate" the information. The investigation into alleged corruption in the determination of quotas and the organization of the 2023-2024 Hajj pilgrimage was elevated to the preliminary stage on August 9, 2025.

September 10, 2025	The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) said that Ministry of Religious Affairs officials received commitment fees of thousands of US dollars per quota.	The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) stated that allegations of special Hajj quota trading were uncovered during the 2023-2024 Hajj program. In this practice, quotas that should have been officially allocated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) were actually traded to travel agencies/Hajj agents. According to investigators, travel agencies paid "commitment fees" or "fees per quota" to certain Kemenag officials. These fees were recorded as ranging from US\$2,600 to US\$7,000 per quota.
September 5, 2025	The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) Reveals that the Sale and Purchase of Additional Hajj Quotas Delayed the Departure of Other Prospective Pilgrims.	The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) has revealed that a number of additional Hajj quotas granted by the Saudi Arabian government to the Indonesian government were allegedly misused through a practice of "quota buying and selling" by Hajj travel agencies and individuals within the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag). Instead of being allocated fairly to prospective pilgrims according to the queue, these additional quotas were instead traded to new prospective pilgrims (or agencies) so they could depart immediately without having to wait in long queues. As a result of this practice, prospective pilgrims who had registered earlier and were waiting for their official turn were delayed in their departure because the quotas were diverted to commercial channels through trading.
September 10, 2025	In the Hajj Quota Case, the Corruption Eradication Committee (KPK) Discovered Pilgrims Who Paid Higher Fees and Departed Immediately	The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) has revealed that in the 2024 Hajj pilgrimage, there were alleged quota-buying practices, in which prospective pilgrims were offered the opportunity to "depart immediately" by paying fees significantly higher than the official standard. The fees paid were not official fees, but rather a kind of "fee" outside the established procedures, as compensation for obtaining a special quota (or additional quota) that would allow for early departure. As a result, the "official" quota became unfair: prospective pilgrims who had waited long or followed the regular procedures were eliminated, while pilgrims with significant financial resources received priority access to services.
September 15, 2025	This is How Additional Hajj Quotas Are Bought and Sold	According to the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) investigation, this additional quota was distributed inconsistently with the original regulations: instead of allocating a portion of the quota for the regular queue and respecting the official proportion between regular and special routes, the additional quota was distributed in a way that opened

			up opportunities for commercialization. In practice, the additional Hajj quota, specifically for the "special Hajj" route, was distributed through travel agencies/Hajj organizing agents (PIHK) and through associations of certain agencies. These agencies or agents (or even between agencies) then resold the quota to prospective pilgrims outside the official queue mechanism.
3	September 10, 2025	KPK: If You Don't Give Money to Ministry of Religious Affairs Officials, Travel Agencies Won't Get Special Hajj Quotas	The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) stated that there is a practice where Hajj/Umhrah agents/travel agencies are "threatened" with losing their special Hajj quota if they fail to deposit a certain amount of money to individuals within the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This means that the Hajj quota, particularly the additional/special Hajj quota, is allegedly allocated not based on official procedures or regular mechanisms, but rather through financial transactions (bribes/deposits) to officials.
	September 10, 2025	In the Hajj Quota Case, the Corruption Eradication Committee (KPK) Alleges that Ministry of Religious Affairs Officials Obtained Allocations Through Relatives and Staff.	The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) revealed that in the Hajj quota case, illicit funds flowed to Ministry of Religious Affairs officials not directly from travel agents or Hajj organizers, but through "intermediaries": relatives, expert staff, or trusted staff of the officials concerned. The funds received were not always directly evident in cash in the officials' accounts; some were converted into assets such as luxury homes, vehicles, and other assets. Therefore, the KPK has seized several assets suspected of being linked to the illicit funds.
	September 10, 2025	The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) said the Minister of Religion's decree on additional Hajj quotas was issued after lobbying from associations.	Lobbying by the Hajj travel agency associations with the Ministry of Religious Affairs occurred after the Saudi Arabian government granted Indonesia an additional Hajj quota. These associations held meetings with Ministry officials to influence the allocation of the additional quota. Following this lobbying, according to the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), Ministerial Decree No. 130 of 2024 was issued, which stipulates the distribution of the additional Hajj quota of 20,000 prospective pilgrims, with an allocation of 50% for regular Hajj and 50% for special Hajj.
	September 15, 2025	The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) Reveals the Need to Investigate Mass	The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) stated that investigations into religious organizations were necessary because the Hajj quota case "concerns religious issues": the organization of the Hajj pilgrimage involves religious communities, so if there is an illicit flow of money or misappropriation in quota

	Organizations in the Hajj Quota Case	allocation, mass organizations could be implicated as part of the Hajj organization ecosystem.
September 24, 2025	The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) Reveals the Reasons Behind the Sale and Purchase of Special Hajj Quotas Between Travel Agencies	The Corruption Eradication Committee (KPK) confirmed that the practice of buying and selling special Hajj quotas between Hajj travel agencies/companies (PIHK) occurred, and this mechanism was triggered by the lack of official organizer certification (PIHK) in some agencies, so that unlicensed agencies obtained quotas by purchasing from other agencies.
October 7, 2025	The Corruption Eradication Committee (KPK) said that Hajj quotas were being traded among prospective pilgrims.	The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) stated that in its investigation into the 2023-2024 Hajj quota/management case, it was suspected that a number of quotas that should have been allocated to Hajj organizers such as escorts, health workers, supervisors, or administrators were instead sold to prospective pilgrims.

Based on the table above, Republika Daily's news about the Hajj cartel is classified into three main topics. First, the official statement from the government regarding the Hajj cartel. The news discusses the government, namely President Prabowo Subianto, firmly ordering the eradication of the Hajj cartel. The government sees a monopolistic structure and unhealthy practices in the organization of the Hajj, and there is an impression that the cartel has a strong network and has been operating for a long time. Second, criticism and responses from the National Commission on Hajj and observers, namely the National Commission on Hajj regrets that BP Haji did not explain in detail the form of the cartel, observers requested empirical explanations, data, and evidence of cartel practices, and there is a push for the government not only to make statements, but also to prepare concrete legal and administrative steps. Third, conflicts of interest and cartel resistance, namely the Cartel has large and strong resources, eradicating the cartel is not easy because it involves many actors, and the government wants to show political firmness towards interest groups.

Construction of Reality in Republika Daily News

In analyzing the construction of reality in the news about the Hajj cartel in the Republika Daily, Roland Barthes' model analysis provides an effective framework for understanding how meaning is formed and communicated through news.¹⁷ Barthes paid attention to the way media messages construct meaning through two layers of signification, namely denotative meaning which

¹⁷ Rahman Asri, "Konstruksi Realitas Kecerdasan Anak: Analisis Semiotik Barthes Iklan Susu Formula Anak Di Televisi," *Jurnal Komunikasi Dan Kajian Media* 2, no. 1 (2018), <https://eprints.uai.ac.id/1478/>.

refers to the literal meaning of the text or visuals presented in the news, and connotative meaning which reflects additional layers of meaning resulting from more complex social and cultural interpretations.¹⁸

Roland Barthes, a key figure in modern semiotic studies, posited that meaning operates through two layers of signification: denotation and connotation. Denotation refers to the literal meaning inherent in a sign, while connotation is a second layer of meaning influenced by cultural, social, and ideological contexts. Furthermore, Barthes asserted that it is in this connotative realm that myths are formed as semiological systems that function to communicate dominant ideologies by presenting them as if they were natural and unquestionable.¹⁹

Denotation refers to the fundamental or literal meaning inherent in a sign, that is, the meaning conveyed directly without any further interpretation. At this level, a sign functions as an objective representation of factual or physical reality, without any ideological or emotional content. Denotation forms the basis for initial understanding of an object or event by emphasizing what is explicitly visible or written. In the context of language, denotation relates to the lexical meaning or standard definition of a word, while in the visual realm, denotation refers to what is displayed visibly without linking it to cultural associations or specific values.²⁰

According to Roland Barthes, meaning does not stop at the denotative realm alone, but continues to the second level, namely connotation. Connotation is understood as an additional layer of meaning born from the network of cultural associations, social values, ideologies, and subjective interpretations inherent in a sign. At this level, signs gain depth of meaning through social experiences and historical contexts that frame how they are interpreted. Connotation allows a sign to be read in various ways, depending on the interpreter's background and the circumstances in which it appears. Barthes emphasized that every sign, even if it appears neutral at the denotative level, actually contains a rich connotative content. Therefore, the meaning in a text or media cannot be fully understood solely through its literal presentation, but rather requires further analysis to uncover the process of formation and dissemination of additional meanings within a particular cultural framework.²¹

¹⁸ Asnat Riwi and Tri Pujiati, "Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes Pada Film 3 Dara," *Deiksis* 10, no. 3 (2018), <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.30998/deiksis.v10i03.2809>.

¹⁹ A. A. Raka Jayaningsih and I. Putu Juni Antara, "Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes Pada Buku Kumpulan Cerita Pendek Sagra," *Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Ilmu Komunikasi Medium* 6 (2025), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24843/dw59v354>.

²⁰ Vina Siti Sri Novia and Muhammad Rayhan Bustam, "Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes Pada Sampul Buku Five Little Pigs Karya Agatha Christie," *Mahadaya* 2, no. 2 (2022), <https://ojs.unikom.ac.id/index.php/mahadaya/article/view/7795/3322>.

²¹ Mohammad Kanzunnudin, "Analisis Semiotik Roland Barthes Pada Puisi 'Ibu' Karya D. Zawawi Imron (Semiotic Analysis Of Roland Barthes At 'Ibu' Poetry By D. Zawawi Imron)," *SAWERIGADING* 28, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.26499/sawer.v28i2.1040>.

Roland Barthes's approach opens up space for critical analysis of texts, particularly in the media realm, by positioning the media not merely as a neutral channel for conveying information, but as an active agent that contributes to shaping public perception through the use of connotative signs. Barthes demonstrates that signs not only function to represent reality but also to produce meanings that go beyond what is literally presented. Through this framework, it can be understood that media texts, both in linguistic and visual forms, are constantly involved in a process of constructing meaning that is influenced by broader cultural, political, and social contexts. Such analysis allows for the exploration of layers of latent meaning within seemingly simple texts, while also revealing the close relationship between these meaning-making processes and specific ideological and social configurations. Thus, in every text or medium, denotation and connotation operate simultaneously to produce complex meanings, which in turn shape how we understand reality, culture, and self-identity.²²

Table 2. Roland Barthes' Analysis of Republika Daily News

No News	Denotation	Connotation
1	The main topic of this analysis is official statements from the government, reflected in references to the BPH, the National Commission on Hajj, and the president as actors emphasizing authoritativeness. Literal facts: The denotation is an acknowledgement of the existence of cartels, criticism of transparency, and an executive order for eradication. This forms the basis of objective information, without additional connotations, like a building structure that is perpendicular to nothing. Aesthetically, this denotation is like a blank canvas ready to be colored, inviting readers to see the reality of the government as the entity responsible for the integrity of the Hajj system. Denotatively, these titles collectively report official statements from government entities regarding the existence and handling of Hajj cartels. "BPH Says There Is a Cartel in the Hajj Organization, Says Observer" states that the Hajj Management Agency (BPH), as an official institution, acknowledges the existence of cartels in the current Hajj organization, with observers as supporting sources. "Dahnil: There Is a Cartel in Hajj Management" confirms Dahnil Anzar	These news stories collectively construct a myth about official government statements as symbols of assertive power yet threatened by the dark forces of corruption. "BPH Says There's a Cartel in Hajj Organization, Observers Say" implies that BPH's confession is not simply fact, but rather the revelation of secrets in a sacred realm, constructing a narrative of systemic injustice that undermines public trust in official institutions. The word "this" emphasizes the urgency of the moment, like whispers of betrayal echoing in religious spaces. "Dahnil: There's a Cartel in Hajj Management" positions Dahnil's statement as a credible insider's voice, connoting the exposure of a mafia network that undermines government integrity, implying moral failure within the official bureaucracy. "Regarding the Hajj Cartel, Komnas Haji Regrets BPH Doesn't Explain in Detail" carries connotations of ethical disappointment and criticism of lack of transparency, constructing a myth about the government hiding details to perhaps protect elite interests, like a curtain

²² Noval Sufriyanto Talani et al., "Problem Tafsir Semiotika Dalam Kajian Media Dan Komunikasi: Sebuah Tinjauan Kritis," *Jurnal Magister Ilmu Komunikasi* 9, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.30813/bricolage.v9i1.3407>.

	Simanjuntak's statement, likely as an observer or related figure, regarding cartels in the management aspect, which is implicitly related to the official context. "Regarding the Hajj Cartel, Komnas Haji Regrets Bph's Lack of Detailed Explanation" criticized the National Hajj Commission (Komnas Haji), a government agency, for the lack of detailed explanation from BPH regarding the cartel, highlighting the aspect of official transparency. "Bp Haji Says President Prabowo Ordered the Eradication of the Hajj Cartel, 'Enough, You Just Crush It'" reported that the Hajj Management Agency stated an official order from President Prabowo Subianto to eradicate the cartel, with a direct quote meaning "enough, you just crush it." "Dahnil: President Requests Eradication of the Hajj Cartel" reiterated Dahnil's statement about the president's demand for total eradication.	covering the darkness. "Mr. Haji Says President Prabowo Ordered Eradication of Hajj Cartel, 'Enough, You Just Clear It'" reinforces the connotation of heroic leadership, where the presidential order connotes a radical action such as clearing fertile land from weeds, building a narrative of the president as the architect of justice in the fight against corruption, a symbolic jihad full of executive power. "Dahnil: President Asks to Clear Hajj Cartel" repeats the "clear it" motif, reinforcing the connotation of drastic action, implying that the government's official statement is a call for total transformation, constructing the myth of a revolutionary leader in the face of the cartel threat.
2	These news stories collectively report criticism and official responses from the National Commission on Hajj (Komnas Haji) and observers such as the House of Representatives' Supervisory Team (Timwas DPR) and the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) to the practices of the Hajj cartel, which involve monopolies, extortion, and quota trading. "Ending the Hajj Monopoly" states efforts to end monopolies in the organization of the Hajj, with implications for criticism of exclusive practices that are detrimental to pilgrims. "Timwas DPR Requests Law Enforcement to Monitor Hajj from Contract Preparation" emphasizes the request of the House of Representatives' Supervisory Team, as a legislative observer, for law enforcement to monitor the Hajj process starting from the contract stage, highlighting the need for preventive oversight. "Information Circulating that 2024 Special Hajj Pilgrims Subject to Rp. 75 Million in Extortion, This is What the KPK Says" reports information about the Rp. 75 million in extortion imposed on 2024 special Hajj pilgrims, with the response of the KPK as the supervisory agency. "Special Hajj Quota Sale and Purchase, KPK: Ministry of Religious Affairs Officials Receive Commitment Fees of Thousands of US Dollars Per Quota" states that the KPK uncovered the sale and purchase of	These news stories collectively construct a myth about the criticism and responses of the National Commission on Hajj (Komnas Haji) and observers such as the House of Representatives' Supervisory Team (Timwas DPR) and the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) as symbols of resistance to systemic injustice in the sacred realm of Hajj. "Ending the Hajj Monopoly" implies that monopoly is not simply a business practice, but rather a chain of oppression that undermines spiritual equality, constructing a narrative of the need for collective liberation from the shackles of the elite. "Timwas DPR Asks Law Enforcement to Guard the Hajj from the Time of Contract Drafting" connotes a call for preventative oversight, like a vigilant night watchman, implying that legislative criticism is a bulwark against corruption that threatens the integrity of the pilgrimage. "Information Circulating That 2024 Special Hajj Pilgrims Subject to Rp. 75 Million in Extortion, This is What the KPK Says" evokes associations with brutal financial exploitation, constructing a myth about extortion as an open wound on the social body, with the KPK as a doctor diagnosing a chronic illness. "Special Hajj Quota Buying and Selling, KPK: Ministry

	special Hajj quotas, in which Ministry of Religious Affairs officials received commitment fees of thousands of US dollars per quota, emphasizing criticism of corruption in quota allocation. "KPK Reveals Sale and Purchase of Additional Hajj Quotas Delays the Departure of Other Prospective Pilgrims" explains that the KPK's disclosure of the sale and purchase of additional quotas caused delays in the departure of other pilgrims, as a critical response to the impact of the practice. "Hajj Quota Case, KPK Finds Pilgrims Who Paid Higher Depart Immediately" reports the KPK's findings that pilgrims who paid higher fees were able to depart immediately, highlighting the unfairness of the quota system. "This is How Additional Hajj Quotas Are Traded" describes the mechanism for the sale and purchase of additional quotas, as a factual explanation of observer criticism.	of Religious Affairs Officials Receive Commitment Fees of Thousands of US Dollars Per Quota" reinforces the connotation of human trafficking, where the Hajj quota is connoted as a sacred commodity to be traded, implying the moral failure of officials as a betrayal of religious values. "KPK Reveals that the Sale and Purchase of Additional Hajj Quotas Hinders the Departure of Other Prospective Pilgrims" depicts the obstacles as a social tragedy, constructing a narrative of corruption as a barrier to access to holiness, like the gates of heaven locked by greedy hands. "Hajj Quota Case, KPK Finds Pilgrims Who Paid More Depart Immediately" connotes capitalist injustice, where extra payments imply a class hierarchy in worship, forming the myth of a system that favors the rich. "This is How Additional Hajj Quotas Are Bought and Sold" explains the mechanism with the connotation of a hidden scandal, like a dark secret being revealed, implying that observer criticism is a light that illuminates the darkness of corruption.
3	These news stories collectively report facts about conflicts of interest in the Hajj quota system and cartel resistance through KPK investigations. "KPK: If You Don't Give Money to Ministry of Religious Affairs Officials, Travel Agencies Won't Get Special Hajj Quotas" states that the KPK uncovered a situation where travel agencies didn't receive special Hajj quotas if they didn't give money to Ministry of Religious Affairs officials, highlighting corrupt mechanisms in quota allocation. "In the Hajj Quota Case, KPK Says Ministry of Religious Affairs Officials Obtained Quotas Through Intermediaries, such as Relatives and Staff" explains that the KPK found that Ministry of Religious Affairs officials obtained quotas through intermediaries such as relatives and staff, emphasizing personal networks in distribution. "KPK Says Minister of Religious Affairs Decree on Additional Hajj Quotas Issued After Lobbying from Associations" reports that the Minister of Religious Affairs Decree on additional quotas was issued after lobbying	These news stories collectively construct a myth about conflicts of interest such as lobbying, intermediaries, and quota trading as symbols of systemic injustice that undermine the sanctity of the Hajj, and cartel resistance through the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) as a symbol of moral resistance. "KPK: If You Don't Give Money to Ministry of Religious Affairs Officials, Travel Agencies Won't Get Special Hajj Quotas" implies that payment of money is not just a transaction, but a gateway to corruption that blocks spiritual access, constructing a narrative of a bureaucratic elite monopolizing sacred opportunities like greedy merchants. "In the Hajj Quota Case, the KPK Says Ministry of Religious Affairs Officials Obtained Quotas Through Intermediaries of Relatives and Staff" connotes intimate nepotism, such as family networks that bind the Hajj quota in personal shackles, implying an ethical failure in what should be fair distribution. "KPK Says Minister of

from associations, illustrating external influence in official policy. "KPK Reveals the Reasons for the Need to Investigate Mass Organizations in the Hajj Quota Case" states the KPK's revelations about the need to investigate community organizations in the quota case, highlighting the role of non-governmental entities in the conflict. "KPK Reveals Reasons for Special Hajj Quota Trading Between Travel Agencies" explains that the KPK identified the reasons for the special quota trading between travel agencies as an internal mechanism within the industry. "KPK Says Hajj Officer Quotas Sold to Prospective Pilgrims" states that the KPK discovered that Hajj officer quotas were being traded to prospective pilgrims, highlighting exploitation in official allocations.

Religious Affairs Decree Regarding Additional Hajj Quotas Issued After Lobbying from Associations" evokes associations with lobbying as shadowy manipulation, constructing a myth about official policy tainted by associational interests, like laws shaped by hidden hands. "KPK Reveals Reasons for Investigating Mass Organizations in the Hajj Quota Case" reinforces the connotation of the investigation as a cleanup, implying that civil society organizations are additional actors in the cartel, forming a narrative of an expanding corruption network that goes beyond the government. "KPK Reveals Reasons for Buying and Selling Special Hajj Quotas Among Travel Agencies" depicts trade as predatory competition, connoting internal exploitation that undermines solidarity, like wolves preying on each other in a business cage. "KPK Says There Are Hajj Officer Quotas Sold to Prospective Pilgrims" connotes a betrayal of role, where officer quotas that should be services are traded like merchandise, implying the degradation of religion into a capitalist commodity.

The process of constructing reality in media reporting involves selecting, emphasizing, and framing certain information that is considered important to convey to the public.²³ In the case of the Hajj cartel, Republika employed various reporting strategies that effectively shaped public perception of the policy. Republika framed the Hajj cartel as a symbol of systemic injustice, where the monopoly on quotas and their sale connote a betrayal of religious values. This constructed a myth about the need for reform, like an epic tale that positions readers as witnesses to the struggle for justice. This strategy employed dramatic yet factual headlines, such as "Ending the Hajj Monopoly" or "KPK Reveals that the Sale and Purchase of Additional Hajj Quotas Delayed the Departure of Other Prospective Pilgrims," to appeal to emotions without losing objectivity, creating a rhythm that invites empathy and criticism.

This media consistently cites official institutions such as the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), the Audit Board (BPH), the National Commission on Hajj (Komnas Haji), and

²³ Tommy Satriadi Nur Arifin, "Media Massa Dan Proses Konstruksi Realitas Dalam Kajian Teori Sistem Dan Differensiasi," *MUKASI: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 2, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.54259/mukasi.v2i2.1576>.

the House of Representatives (DPR), constructing denotations as the basis of literal truth. This is a strategy to strengthen legitimacy, like a solid foundation supporting a narrative. In connotation, these sources connote law enforcement heroes, constructing the myth of cartel resistance as a modern jihad, with a subtle aesthetic like dialogue in a drama that positions the reader in a position of support for reform.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that *Republika*'s reporting on the Hajj cartel does not merely transmit factual information about alleged irregularities in Hajj governance, but actively constructs a particular understanding of the issue through the selection of sources, headlines, themes, and layers of meaning. The analysis of 18 online news reports published between May and October 2025 reveals three dominant constructions: official government acknowledgment and commitment to addressing cartel practices, criticism and supervisory responses to monopolistic and quota-related irregularities, and conflicts of interest involving networks surrounding Hajj administration. These thematic patterns show that media discourse transforms a complex governance issue into a structured narrative that can be more readily interpreted by the public.

At the denotative level, *Republika* constructs its reports predominantly through statements, investigations, criticisms, and responses attributed to formal institutions and public authorities. References to government agencies, supervisory institutions, law enforcement bodies, and other official actors create an informational structure that emphasizes institutional legitimacy. In this layer of meaning, the Hajj cartel is presented through concrete issues such as monopolistic practices, quota allocation, alleged financial transactions, supervision, and the need for administrative reform. The repeated use of official sources gives the reports an authoritative character and strengthens their appearance as fact-oriented journalism.

At the connotative level, however, the meaning becomes broader than the literal information presented. Cartel practices are associated with systemic injustice, inequality of access, commercialization of religious services, and threats to the integrity of Hajj administration. The use of narratives concerning monopoly, quota trading, additional payments, lobbying, and resistance to reform creates a moral interpretation in which problematic Hajj governance is presented not merely as an administrative failure but as a distortion of fairness and public responsibility. This construction becomes particularly significant because Hajj is simultaneously represented as a religious obligation and a public service requiring transparency, accountability, and equitable access.

Through Barthes' concept of myth, these connotative meanings develop into a broader ideological narrative concerning the necessity of reform. *Republika*'s coverage constructs institutional oversight and the eradication of cartel practices as forms of restoring justice and

integrity to Hajj governance. Public institutions that investigate, supervise, or demand reform are consequently positioned within the narrative as agents confronting an entrenched and structurally powerful problem. In this way, the media does not function as a passive channel but participates in defining which actors, problems, and solutions become dominant within public discourse on Hajj administration.

Overall, the study concludes that *Republika* constructs the Hajj cartel as a systemic governance problem requiring institutional reform, stronger supervision, transparency, and law enforcement. Roland Barthes' framework demonstrates how factual reporting at the denotative level can simultaneously produce moral and ideological meanings at the connotative and mythical levels. Nevertheless, this study is limited to one media outlet and one reporting period, making the findings specific to *Republika*'s editorial discourse. Future research may compare different national media, extend the observation period, or combine semiotic analysis with framing and discourse analysis to examine how ideological, political, economic, and religious orientations influence representations of Hajj governance in Indonesian media.

Research Novelty

The novelty of this study lies in applying Roland Barthes' two-level signification framework to the media representation of the Hajj cartel as an intersection between religious affairs, public governance, and media discourse. Studies on Hajj administration generally concentrate on regulatory, service, economic, or institutional dimensions, while media studies tend to examine political and social issues outside the specific context of Hajj governance. This study connects these domains by investigating how allegations and debates surrounding cartel practices are transformed from factual events into denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings through online news reporting.

A further contribution is the identification of three interconnected narrative constructions within *Republika*'s coverage: government acknowledgment and commitment to eradicating cartel practices, institutional criticism of monopoly and quota irregularities, and conflicts of interest associated with resistance to reform. Rather than examining individual articles separately, the study demonstrates how repeated signs and institutional sources accumulate into a broader narrative of systemic injustice and the need for governance reform. This provides an analytical perspective for understanding how media discourse organizes complex administrative problems into morally intelligible public narratives.

The study also contributes by situating media construction within the particular symbolic context of Hajj. Because Hajj combines religious significance with large-scale public administration, representations of monopoly, commercialization, and unequal access acquire

meanings that extend beyond ordinary governance failures. Within *Republika*'s discourse, these issues become connected to notions of justice, religious integrity, public trust, and moral responsibility. The study therefore expands Barthesian media analysis by demonstrating how religious symbolism and governance discourse interact in constructing public meaning around the administration of a major religious service.

Research Implications

Theoretically, the findings reinforce the proposition that news media should not be understood as neutral transmitters of social reality. Through processes of selection, emphasis, source attribution, and linguistic construction, factual events can acquire additional ideological and moral meanings. Roland Barthes' framework enables researchers to identify how denotative information concerning Hajj administration develops into connotations of systemic injustice and subsequently into broader myths concerning reform, institutional integrity, and resistance to corrupt governance. This perspective provides a useful conceptual basis for further studies connecting semiotics, religious communication, and public-policy discourse.

From the perspective of journalism and media literacy, the findings imply the importance of critically examining not only whether information is factually presented but also how the organization of sources, headlines, terminology, and recurring narratives shapes audience interpretation. News concerning religious public services carries particular sensitivity because administrative issues may simultaneously influence religious sentiment and public trust. Media institutions therefore need to maintain verification, proportionality, contextual explanation, and clear differentiation between reported allegations, institutional statements, and established findings while fulfilling their watchdog and public-information functions.

Practically, the findings indicate that media coverage can contribute to public oversight of Hajj governance by increasing the visibility of transparency, accountability, equitable access, and institutional reform as public concerns. At the same time, policymakers and Hajj administrators need to recognize that inadequate transparency may create an information vacuum in which public meaning is shaped predominantly by competing media narratives. More accessible public data, transparent explanations of quota allocation and service contracting, and responsive institutional communication can therefore strengthen public accountability while enabling citizens to evaluate Hajj governance on the basis of clearer and more comprehensive information.

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