

Mismatch Between Linguistic Structure and Facts: An Analysis of State Officials' Statements Based on Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of public distrust toward state officials is not solely caused by a mismatch between language and empirical reality, but also by the complex processes through which meaning is represented within the social sphere. This study aims to analyze how state officials' language constructs, reproduce, and distort reality through the lens of Stuart Hall's theory of representation. Within this framework, language is understood not merely as a reflection of reality, but as a practice that actively produces meaning through systems of signs and discourse. This research employs a qualitative approach, using discourse analysis, to examine statements made by state officials in the public domain. The findings indicate that meaning within officials' statements is dynamic and open to multiple interpretations, shaped by social context, ideology, and the positionality of the audience. Public distrust emerges from the gap between meanings encoded by officials (encoding) and those interpreted by the public (decoding), including oppositional readings. The expansion of access to information and digital literacy has strengthened the role of the public as active agents in producing and disseminating meaning, thereby diminishing officials' exclusive control over representation. The illogicality and inconsistency found in certain statements reflect not only cognitive limitations but also a failure to construct representations aligned with the collective experiences of society. Therefore, public trust is largely determined by the success of the representational process, encompassing the construction of meaning, strategies of message encoding, and the dynamics of audience interpretation within broader social contexts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the primary responsibilities of public officials is to communicate information to the public regarding governmental performance and the management of issues within their respective areas of authority. Such communication must be delivered accurately and appropriately in all aspects to prevent misinterpretation and misunderstanding (Aji & Purworini, 2024). argue that multiple factors, including economic problems, ineffective policies, or communication failures by public officials, generally trigger crises within a country. From Stuart Hall's perspective of representation, public officials do not merely convey facts; rather, they actively construct meaning through language, symbols, and

discursive practices. As representatives of the state, public officials bear the responsibility of developing messages that are not only informative but also understandable, acceptable, and meaningful to society. Information communicated to the public. Whether concerning public policies, current conditions, or crises, it is the product of an encoding process embedded with particular interests, values, and ideological assumptions (Hastrida & Hendriyani, 2023). Further emphasize that government institutions must provide accurate, accessible, and effective information and communicate it accurately, effectively, efficiently, and in a way that facilitates communication between government agencies and stakeholders.

The language employed by public officials reflects not only their cognitive capacity but also their representational strategies in explaining social realities. In this regard, public officials are expected to provide reassurance, direction, and clarity, particularly during periods of crisis. Referring to Hall's encoding/decoding model, audiences may produce dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings depending on their social backgrounds, experiences, and ideological positions. The significance of effective public communication becomes increasingly evident when contemporary phenomena demonstrate that weaknesses in governmental communication can undermine public perceptions of governmental legitimacy (Azahry et al., 2024). Furthermore, Mayer et al. (1995) argue that perceptions of competence, integrity, and benevolence shape public trust in government.

Statements made by public officials, particularly those intended as solutions or policy responses, may experience shifts in meaning when interpreted by the public. It occurs when the representations officials construct fail to align with citizens' social experiences, thereby encouraging critical interpretations or even rejection of the intended message. In this context, the central issue lies not only in the factual accuracy of the statement but also in how reality is represented and the extent to which such representations resonate with public interpretive frameworks. Moreover, the expansion of information access and increasing levels of digital literacy have strengthened the public's role as producers of meaning. Citizens no longer function solely as passive recipients of information; instead, they actively participate in decoding, reinterpreting, and reproducing meanings across various social media platforms. This observation is consistent with Perdani et al. (2024) found that social media has become an effective instrument of public diplomacy by enabling governments to communicate directly with global audiences, enhance public engagement, and shape public perceptions, particularly in support of nation branding and international relations. Consequently, control over meaning no longer resides exclusively with state officials but is continuously negotiated within broader social spaces through interactions between meaning producers and audiences.

Stuart Hall's theory of representation serves as the primary theoretical foundation of this study. The theory emphasizes the central role of language in constructing and communicating meaning. Representation is understood as a fundamental process through which meaning is produced and exchanged within culture, whereby concepts in the human mind are translated through language. Consequently, representation does not merely reflect reality but actively produces meaning through linguistic practices (Hermayanthi, 2021). In the present study, Hall's framework is employed to analyze the statements of public officials, viewing them not simply as acts of information dissemination but as linguistic

practices that shape social meaning within the public sphere. Similarly, Eduar (2024) explains that Hall's theory provides a framework for understanding how media and culture construct meaning and represent social reality, while representation itself constitutes a crucial component in the process of meaning-making within society (Pujianti et al., 2019). Furthermore, Hall, as cited by Rachmah (2018), associates representation with the broader process of cultural production known as the circuit of culture, emphasizing that meanings are not autonomous but are continuously produced, circulated, and interpreted through interconnected cultural processes. The media play a significant role in shaping social and political realities through cultural constructions that communicate particular ideological perspectives to audiences (Lacey, 2009).

Based on this conceptual framework, representation enables audiences to refer to the "real world" composed of objects, events, and social phenomena. However, in the context of public officials' statements, language does not necessarily reflect reality as it exists; rather, it can reframe events and redefine their significance. For example, Hasan Nasbi's response to the alleged terror incident directed at Tempo through the phrase "just cook it" illustrates how language may transform an event initially perceived as a threat into something trivial or insignificant. This example demonstrates how official statements can shape public perceptions through representational processes (Noelle-Neumann, 1993). Further argues that individuals become more willing to express their views when they perceive public opinion moving consistently in a particular direction. From this perspective, Hall distinguishes between two primary systems of representation: mental and linguistic. Language functions as the principal medium through which meanings are produced and communicated. As a system of signs, language conveys and represents intended meanings through what Hall describes as its signifying function (Rahmawan, 2016). This study focuses specifically on linguistic representation in public officials' statements by examining how word choice, rhetorical style, and communicative context function as signs that construct particular meanings. Consequently, official statements are understood not merely as ordinary expressions but as representational practices that influence how society interprets social and political realities.

The effectiveness of governmental communication depends not only on the accuracy of information but also on the success of representational practices. Within Hall's framework, public officials are expected to construct messages that are sensitive to social contexts, anticipate multiple interpretations, and align representations with the collective experiences of society. Effective representation can enhance the credibility of public communication and strengthen public trust in governmental institutions. Stuart Hall (1997) emphasizes that representation is a fundamental cultural practice rooted in shared experiences, cultural codes, language systems, and collectively understood concepts.

In this sense, representation should be viewed not as a final product but as an ongoing process involving the production, circulation, and consumption of meaning within society. Meaning is neither fixed nor stable; rather, it emerges through interactions between message producers and audiences. Hall (1997) argues that cultural representation on social media is a selective process through which meanings are constructed, circulated, and continuously negotiated among digital users rather than merely reflecting reality.

Representation plays an important role in shaping perceptions, identities, and social relationships (Sholichah et al., 2023), while audience interpretation highlights the diversity and subjectivity inherent in media consumption (Livingstone, 2019). Furthermore, Stuart Hall (1997) identifies three approaches to representation: the reflective approach, which views language as a mirror of reality; the intentional approach, which locates meaning in the speaker's intentions; and the constructionist approach, which argues that meaning is produced through language, signs, and social practices. These approaches demonstrate that governmental communication is inherently complex because meaning is shaped not only by reality or intention but also by audience interpretation. Consequently, the success of public communication depends upon the ability to manage representations effectively in order to minimize misunderstanding and enhance clarity.

Dines & Humez (2011) further argue that representation is a continuous communicative process in which meanings are constantly produced and reproduced. Within mass media, narratives and images do not merely depict reality but actively shape audience perceptions of social groups, issues, and events. This perspective highlights the media's role in constructing social reality and collective identities, where the framing of statements significantly influences public understandings of reality (Majid, 2025). Collectively, these perspectives demonstrate how representational processes may generate perceptions of illogicality within public discourse. In Hall's framework, meaning emerges through interactions among language, social context, and interpretation. When these elements become misaligned due to inappropriate language choices or weak message construction, statements may deviate from their intended meanings.

Public outrage toward statements made by public officials often emerges when the meanings constructed through representation fail to correspond with social realities or public interpretive frameworks. Under such circumstances, messages become vulnerable to ambiguity, negative interpretations, and misrepresentation. Audiences may therefore engage in critical or oppositional readings based on their prior knowledge and lived experiences. As a result, messages intended to provide reassurance or clarity may instead generate confusion and speculation, leading to perceptions that officials are unable to communicate effectively. Such perceptions frequently contribute to negative evaluations of public officials at both the regional and national levels in Indonesia. Consequently, failures in representational practices may not only distort meaning but also contribute to declining public trust in governmental institutions.

In the contemporary digital communication landscape, social media influencers play a significant role in shaping and disseminating meanings surrounding controversial public statements. Influencers serve as intermediaries who accelerate information diffusion, broaden issue visibility, and reframe officials' statements through their own perspectives. In many cases, influencer interpretations become important reference points for public understanding, thereby reinforcing or transforming the original meanings intended by public officials. This phenomenon demonstrates that representation no longer occurs solely between state officials and citizens but within a broader digital environment involving multiple influential actors.

This observation is consistent with Gaspersz et al. (2024), who argue that influencers in Indonesia have evolved from content creators into digital opinion leaders whose

credibility significantly shapes public opinion. According to Storey (2015), representation is the process of linking reality with how reality is understood through systems of signs and language. Meaning, therefore, does not inherently reside within events themselves but is produced through interpretive processes influenced by various actors, including influencers. (Chandler, 2007) similarly argues that representation constitutes an arena of ideological struggle in which meanings are contested and negotiated, while audience interpretations shape public perceptions and social norms (Couldry & Hepp, 2022).

Hasan Nasbi's response to the incident involving the delivery of a pig's head to the Tempo office through the phrase "just cook it" can be understood within Hall's representational framework as a non-neutral process of meaning construction. Rather than representing the incident as a serious threat to press freedom, the statement frames it as trivial and unworthy of concern. At the level of language as a signifying system, the phrase illustrates a shift from denotative to connotative meaning that symbolically minimizes the seriousness of the event. This example demonstrates how language may normalize problematic actions and influence public perceptions of serious issues.

As part of a discourse produced by actors occupying positions of institutional power, such statements can shape broader public understandings. According to Hall, representations generated by authoritative institutions possess significant legitimacy in establishing dominant meanings. Consequently, framing an act of intimidation as insignificant extends beyond mere language and may influence collective perceptions of the importance of protecting press freedom. In this sense, the phrase functions not merely as a comment but as a representational practice contributing to the construction of social reality. During times of crisis, the communication style adopted by public officials becomes particularly significant. Official communication serves not only to disseminate information but also to shape public perceptions, establish legitimacy, and reduce social tensions (Coombs, 2007). Nevertheless, in some cases, initial governmental responses appear defensive and technocratic, leading to perceptions of insufficient social sensitivity to evolving public concerns (Kathryn, 2025).

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Stuart Hall's theory of representation demonstrates that meaning does not exist naturally but is produced through language and exchanged among members of a given culture. Representation connects concepts in the mind with systems of signs, enabling individuals to assign meaning to events, objects, and social actions (S Hall et al., 2013). Within the context of this study, the language used by state officials is understood as a representational practice that constructs social reality. Utterances considered illogical, such as the phrase "just cook it" delivered by Hasan Nasbi in response to the terror incident targeting *Tempo*, function not only as communication but also as the production of meaning that may shift public perception of an event. According to Triadi & Nur (2024:172), case study research is an effort by researchers to observe and analyze problems at a specific level of inquiry.

The method employed in this study is representational analysis using a qualitative content analysis approach. This approach aims to examine how meaning is constructed through language while considering the surrounding social, political, and power relations.

The study is interpretative in nature, focusing on the interpretation of symbols and utterances rather than quantitative measurement. In line with Creswell (2023:248), the researcher serves as the key instrument in qualitative research, collecting data through documentation and observation and acting as the primary tool for information gathering. The main objectives of this study are to examine state officials' illogical utterances and the contextual events that underpin them. By extending the analysis to similar cases in the public sphere, this study seeks to demonstrate that illogical utterances are not merely individual errors but part of representational practices that can construct, obscure, or even distort social reality in the public eye.

The primary research instrument is the researcher, who acts as an observer, analyst, and interpreter of meaning. Within the framework of Stuart Hall's theory of representation, the researcher plays a crucial role in deconstructing how language operates as a system of signs that produces meaning. To minimize research subjectivity, the data in this study were selected based on the level of news virality. The selected statements are those that generated widespread public discussion, both through direct media coverage and extensive conversations across various social media platforms. Viral statements are not ordinary remarks; rather, they are statements that provoke public controversy, frustration, anger, and disappointment among different segments of society. Data verification was conducted by comparing multiple news reports covering the same event or statement. This process was intended to avoid discrepancies in reported utterances across different media outlets. As is widely recognized, many mass media organizations tend to employ hyperbolic and sensationalized reporting practices to capitalize on particular events and attract greater public attention. Therefore, cross-checking information from multiple sources was necessary to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the data analyzed in this study.

2.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study design to analyze linguistic representation in the discourse of state officials. Grounded in Stuart Hall's theory of representation, language is understood not merely as a communicative tool but as a practice that actively produces and constructs meaning within social life. The methodological approach adopted is qualitative content analysis with an interpretive orientation, aiming to examine how meaning is constructed through language use, symbols, and socio-political context. This study is not oriented toward quantitative measurement; rather, it emphasizes an in-depth interpretation of utterances perceived as illogical or disproportionate within the public sphere. Consequently, the researcher is positioned as the primary instrument in the processes of data collection and analysis.

2.2. Scope of the Study

The scope of this study focuses on the analysis of public statements by government officials that are perceived as illogical, contradictory, or inconsistent with the context of the events they address. As public authorities responsible for conveying information to society, government officials are expected to provide clear, comprehensive, and reassuring explanations. However, in practice, instances of incomplete information delivery and ambiguous statements are still frequently observed. Such communication practices may lead to public confusion and social unrest. One of the cases examined in this study is Hasan Nasbi's response to the terror incident targeting Tempo, particularly his statement,

“just cook it” (“masak saja”). This expression indicates a potential shift in meaning that may frame a serious threat as something trivial or even humorous. In addition to this case, the study also investigates various examples of political communication in Indonesia, both within the legislative and executive branches, that demonstrate certain tendencies in how information is presented, potentially leading to public misunderstanding or interpretations that diverge from the actual context of the events.

2.3. Sample and Sampling Method

The sample in this study consists of utterances or statements made by state officials obtained from various public sources, such as press conferences, media interviews, and online news reports. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, which involves selecting data based on specific criteria that align with the study's objectives. These criteria include statements that exhibit illogicality, inconsistency, or a mismatch with the current social context. This technique was chosen to ensure that the data analyzed are relevant to the research's focus.

In addition, this study examines several similar cases to strengthen the analysis and identify patterns in the communication of state officials. The level of virality was also considered an indicator for data selection. Public responses in digital spaces often take the form of demands for clarification when officials make statements that are perceived as inappropriate or controversial. Overall, this study analyzes eight controversial statements made by Indonesian state officials. These statements were selected because they became subjects of public debate, generated multiple interpretations, and triggered significant public reactions. The data were drawn from various political figures within the executive and legislative branches and cover diverse contexts, ranging from policy communication and responses to particular events to comments on social and political issues.

The inclusion of these eight cases aims to provide a broader understanding of patterns of meaning construction, communication strategies, and possible shifts in public interpretation of events or issues within political discourse.

2.4. Data Collection Method

This study is not confined to a specific geographical location; rather, it focuses on the public sphere, particularly digital communication spaces and mass media in Indonesia. The research data were collected from various media platforms that published official statements made by state officials in textual and audio formats. Accordingly, the research setting is virtual and contextual, following the dynamics of viral news coverage and issues that attract significant public attention.

Public response is one of the primary considerations in selecting research data. It is evident in the numerous follow-up clarifications issued by state officials after their initial statements generated public concern. These clarifications were intended to mitigate public reactions triggered by statements perceived as controversial and emotionally provocative. Such reactions were reflected in comments across various social media platforms, where members of the public expressed concern, criticism, and anger in response to the statements.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Observation Results

As explained previously, the data in this study consists of statements made by government officials that generated public concern. The data were selected based on the extent of public reactions and the impacts that emerged following the dissemination of these controversial statements. A detailed description of the data is presented in the table below.

Table 1. Research data

No	Speaker	Utterance and Context	Time of Statement
D01	Hasan Nasbi (Head of the Presidential Office)	Responding to the terror incident involving the delivery of a pig's head to <i>Tempo</i> news office, he stated, "just cook it"	Friday, 21 March 2025
D02	Nasaruddin Umar (Minister of Religious Affairs)	The statement "if you want to earn money, don't become a teacher; become a trader" was delivered in response to the view that teaching is a noble profession based on vocation.	Wednesday, 3 September 2025
D03	Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa (Minister of Finance)	In response to the 17+8 People's Demands protest movement, he referred to it as "the voice of a small portion of the people"	Monday, 8 September 2025
D04	Immanuel Ebenezer (Vice Minister of Manpower)	In response to the #kaburajadulu hashtag, he stated: "If you want to leave, just leave. If necessary, do not come back."	Sunday, 15 February 2025
D05	Rachmat Pambudy (Minister of National Development Planning)	Regarding employment difficulties, he stated that "the MBG program is important, employment is important, but MBG is more urgent."	29 January 2026
D06	Arifah Fauzi (Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection)	In response to an accident at Bekasi Timur Station, she proposed that "women's train carriages should be moved to the middle of the train, while male carriages are placed at the front and back."	Wednesday, 29 April 2026
D07	Natalius Pigai (Minister of Human Rights)	In response to a case of acid attack, he stated that "acid attacks are criminal acts (planned) that must be dealt with firmly under the law, not categorized as gross human rights violations."	Tuesday, 31 March 2026
D01	Hasan Nasbi (Head of the Presidential Office)	Responding to the terror incident involving the delivery of a pig's head to <i>Tempo</i> news office, he stated, "just cook it"	1 March 2026

4. DISCUSSION

Data D01 concerns the incident involving the delivery of a pig's head to the editorial office of *Tempo*. Within the Indonesian socio-cultural context, where Islam is the majority religion, pork holds a religious meaning as something that is classified as forbidden (*haram*) in Islamic teachings. This condition contributes to the perception that the symbol

of a pig's head may be sensitive for certain groups within society and may potentially be interpreted as an act of insult or intimidation. From a representational perspective, such meanings are not inherently attached to the object itself but are produced through systems of signs and interpretive processes shaped by long-standing cultural practices. Consequently, the significance of the event depends on the social and cultural frameworks through which it is understood.

In this incident, a public official, Hasan Nasbi, as Head of the Presidential Communication Office, commented with the phrase "just cook it." This remark illustrates how language may contribute to the construction of alternative meanings surrounding a public event. Rather than directly addressing the symbolic implications of the incident, the statement introduces a different interpretive frame that may lead some audiences to perceive a serious incident as trivial or humorous. However, the extent to which such interpretations are accepted depends on how audiences decode the message within their respective social and cultural contexts. From Stuart Hall's perspective, this case demonstrates a process of representational contestation in which various actors seek to define the meaning of an event through competing discourses. Hall's concepts of encoding and decoding provide a relevant framework for understanding these dynamics. The sender of the pig's head may be understood as encoding a symbolic message, while public officials, media institutions, and audiences subsequently decode the message in different ways. As Hall argues, interpretation is not fixed but is shaped by social position, cultural experience, and ideological orientation.

Although this study does not employ interviews or surveys to examine audience reception directly, developments in media reporting following the widespread circulation of the statement indicate that public discourse played a significant role in shaping its interpretation. Various online discussions indicate that the statement was interpreted differently across social groups. After Hasan Nasbi remarked, "just cook it," several media outlets highlighted public reactions and subsequent clarifications issued by the Presidential Communication Office. Some reports indicated that the statement generated controversy and stimulated public debate regarding the appropriateness of official responses to an incident that some groups perceived as a threat to press freedom.

In online discussions, audience responses appeared diverse rather than uniform. Some commentators interpreted the statement as an attempt to reduce fear and reject the symbolic impact intended by the sender. This interpretation aligns with Hasan Nasbi's clarification, in which he stated that the remark was intended to reduce the psychological impact of intimidation and prevent the perpetrator from achieving the intended effect of generating fear in the public sphere. However, other audiences interpreted the statement differently and questioned whether the response adequately reflected the seriousness of the incident.

These diverse responses highlight the relevance of Stuart Hall's argument that media messages do not produce a single fixed or universal meaning. Instead, audiences may produce dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings depending on their social experiences, political orientations, and interpretive frameworks. Within this framework, the phrase "just cook it" may generate multiple readings. Some audiences may interpret it as an attempt to alleviate public anxiety or to reject the symbolic impact intended by the

act, while others may see it as minimizing the incident's significance. These differences demonstrate Hall's argument that meaning is not directly transmitted from sender to receiver but is instead negotiated through interpretive processes. This case also highlights the role of institutional authority in representational processes. Statements issued by public officials may carry symbolic weight due to their positions within power structures. Nevertheless, the meanings attached to such statements are not determined solely by the speaker. Rather, meaning emerges through interactions between official discourse, media coverage, and audience interpretation.

Ultimately, the significance of this event is shaped through ongoing processes of representation and interpretation. Whether the incident is understood as a serious issue related to press freedom, a symbolic act of intimidation, or a relatively insignificant event depends on the interpretive frameworks employed by different audiences. In this regard, media institutions and public discourse play an important role in producing, circulating, and negotiating meaning within the public sphere. The findings suggest that the controversy surrounding the phrase "just cook it" is not merely a matter of linguistic expression but also reflects the continuous contestation and negotiation of meaning among state actors, media institutions, and audiences in contemporary discursive space.

Data D02 indicates a statement made by Nasaruddin Umar, the Minister of Religious Affairs, regarding the condition of the teaching profession in Indonesia, which is still considered not yet prosperous. The statement became controversial because it was perceived as diminishing the teaching profession, with the utterance, "If you want to become rich, do not become a teacher; become a trader instead." This statement reflects the Minister's perspective, framing teaching as a profession not primarily oriented toward financial gain but rather toward dedication. It, in turn, creates an impression of a distinction between the value of dedication in the teaching profession and the need for adequate income.

Within Stuart Hall's theoretical framework, meaning is not fixed but varies according to interpretation. The statement can be understood as an attempt to emphasize teaching as a form of dedication (encoding). However, when it is received by the public (decoding), its meaning may vary. Some may interpret it as a reinforcement of the value of dedication in teaching, while others may perceive it as a disregard for teachers' welfare. It shows that meaning does not inherently reside in the words themselves but is constructed through processes of interpretation.

Furthermore, the statement can also be understood as reflecting a perspective that indirectly places teachers' welfare not as a primary responsibility of the state, but rather as a consequence of individual career choice. As a result, structural issues such as low salaries and insufficient teacher protection risk being perceived as personal rather than systemic problems. In this sense, language can shape how society perceives the government's role in ensuring teachers' welfare.

Public responses on social media and online news portals also show a range of opinions. A considerable number of responses were critical, arguing that the statement tends to divert attention from teachers' welfare, which should be addressed through state policy. This criticism also arises because the statement is seen as emphasizing individual choice in career selection, as if teachers' working conditions result from personal decisions

rather than structural problems that require policy intervention. These differing responses indicate that audiences interpret messages in diverse ways. Some accept the message in line with the speaker's intended meaning, while others interpret it more critically. Thus, meaning is not solely determined by the speaker but is also shaped by how the public understands it.

Data D03 contains a statement made by Purbaya, the Minister of Finance, in response to a wave of public protests, in which he referred to them as "only the voice of a small portion of society." From Stuart Hall's perspective, language is not merely used to describe reality but also actively shapes how reality is understood. The phrase "a small portion of society" functions as a label that minimizes the scale and significance of the protests, thereby framing public dissatisfaction as something unimportant or unrepresentative of society at large. In addition, the expression also creates the impression that the number of protesters is relatively small, reinforcing the assumption that the demonstration does not reflect the voice of the majority.

Through the encoding-decoding framework, this statement can be understood as an attempt by those in power to frame the protests as insignificant, possibly to reduce political impact and maintain the government's public image. However, at the decoding stage, the meaning of the statement may vary among audiences. Some may interpret it as a factual description of a limited number of participants, while others may see it as a disregard for the protesters' demands. It demonstrates that meaning is not fixed but is constructed through interpretive processes shaped by individual experiences and perspectives. Public responses on social media also reveal a strong level of debate. Many social media users criticized the statement, arguing that it downplays public voices and does not reflect the extent of public dissatisfaction. Others considered the statement inappropriate, as it may diminish the significance of the ongoing protests. These differing responses indicate that audiences interpret the statement in diverse ways, depending on their perspectives.

From an ideological perspective, this mode of representation also reflects the power relations between the state and society. By framing the protests as a minority voice, the statement creates the impression that the government continues to enjoy majority public support. In Hall's terms, this represents an attempt to produce "common sense," a taken-for-granted understanding that appears natural and unquestionable. However, such framing may obscure more complex social realities, such as widespread public dissatisfaction. Thus, the statement is not merely an opinion but part of a broader process of meaning construction that shapes how the public understands and evaluates acts of protest.

Data D04, which contains the response of Immanuel Ebenezer, Deputy Minister of Manpower, to the viral hashtag #kaburajadulu, can be analyzed from Stuart Hall's perspective as a form of representation that both constructs and is constructed by social meaning. Within Hall's framework, the hashtag #kaburajadulu is not merely a spontaneous expression on social media but also a symbol of public dissatisfaction with perceived economic instability. The hashtag carries a collective meaning of a desire to "leave" an unfavorable situation, thus functioning as a form of social criticism directed toward the government. However, the response, "if you want to leave, just leave; if necessary, do not come back," demonstrates a shift in meaning. Rather than interpreting the hashtag as criticism, the statement reframes it as a negative attitude or even disloyalty to the state.

From Hall's perspective, this reflects the process of encoding, in which those in power frame messages with particular meanings. Language in this context is not neutral, as it can influence how events are understood.

At the decoding stage, the public provides different interpretations. Some view the response as a firm statement, while many others perceive it as a sign of governmental insensitivity toward public concerns. These differences indicate that meaning is not fixed but varies across audiences' interpretations of the message. Public response on social media was also substantial, as shown by the hashtag #kaburajadulu, which reached approximately 186,000 posts on Instagram. This figure indicates that the issue gained wide public attention and served as an expression of public dissatisfaction with prevailing socio-economic conditions.

From an ideological perspective, this statement also reflects power relations between the state and society. Such a response to criticism may be seen as an attempt to regulate public discourse and suppress critical expression. In Hall's terms, this can be understood as a form of hegemony, where certain meanings are presented as natural and unquestionable. However, the hashtag #kaburajadulu may also be interpreted as an indicator of underlying social and economic problems that require attention. Thus, this case illustrates that the public sphere is an arena of struggle over meaning, where both the hashtag and the official response are part of an ongoing process of meaning production that shapes how society understands economic conditions, social critique, and the relationship between citizens and the state.

Data D05 concerns a statement by Rachmat Pambudy, Head of the National Development Planning Agency, regarding various public responses to the difficulty of finding employment in Indonesia. In his statement, he said that "MBG is important, employment is also important, but MBG is more urgent." This statement subsequently generated public responses. Many highlighted the difficulty of obtaining jobs and criticized the budget allocation for the MBG program, which was considered unreasonable by some segments of society. This situation indicates perceived inequality in budget distribution, particularly compared to the facilities received by MBG employees, who are considered to have more favorable income.

In addition, the public also criticized the management of MBG funding, which was perceived as poorly targeted. Some social media users pointed to alleged misuse or corruption in the allocation of program funds. Furthermore, public concern emerged over some poisoning cases linked to the implementation of the MBG program, raising questions about oversight and the quality of its implementation.

From Stuart Hall's perspective, this statement can be explained through the encoding-decoding framework, which describes how the government produces messages and the public interprets them. At the encoding stage, the statement "MBG is more urgent" reflects the government's attempt to position the MBG program as a top priority. It also constructs a hierarchical understanding of needs, in which MBG is considered more important than job creation in certain contexts. At the decoding stage, the public does not uniformly interpret the statement. For individuals experiencing unemployment, the statement is not merely a policy explanation but also a failure to attend to their lived realities. Some members of the public accept the explanation, while many others question

it. Some groups reject the statement, viewing it as reflecting injustice in policy, particularly regarding budget allocation and institutional facilities.

Thus, this statement becomes a site of divergent interpretations between the government and society. It also highlights a gap between policy formulation at the governmental level and the real socio-economic conditions experienced by citizens, especially those struggling to find employment.

Data D06 presents a controversial statement made by Arifah Fauzi, the Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, in response to an accident at Bekasi Timur Station, where all reported victims were women. In her statement, she proposed that PT Kereta Api Indonesia rearrange the train carriages by placing women-only carriages in the middle, with male carriages at the front and rear. This statement generated various public responses. Some people viewed the proposal as a form of protection for women, while others, particularly male groups, criticized it, arguing that it would place men at greater risk in the event of accidents. In addition, the issue went viral on social media, where memes emerged depicting men as "train sacrifices." These memes reflect public criticism and satire toward the policy.

Following this, an official clarification and apology were issued on 30 April 2026. The Minister stated that her statement had been inappropriate and apologized to the public, especially to the victims and their families who felt hurt or uncomfortable. It indicates that the government acknowledged the statement had sparked public reaction and was considered inappropriate by some segments of society. From Stuart Hall's perspective, this case can be explained through the encoding-decoding framework, which describes how the government produces messages and the public interprets them. At the encoding stage, the proposal to rearrange train carriages reflects the government's intention to protect a vulnerable group, namely women. However, the way the statement was delivered did not sufficiently account for the public atmosphere of grief, leading to perceptions that it was inappropriate or insensitive.

At the decoding stage, the public did not interpret the message in the same way. Some accepted the proposal as a form of protection, while others questioned its fairness and timing. Some also rejected it, arguing that it was unfair to men. The emergence of memes also shows that the public expressed criticism through humor and satire. Thus, this case shows that government messages are not always received as intended. The way the public interprets a message is influenced by their experiences, feelings, and the surrounding social context.

Data D07 contains a statement by Natalius Pigai, the Minister of Human Rights, in response to an acid attack case involving a KontraS activist. He stated that the incident was a premeditated criminal act and must be processed through the existing legal system. He also emphasized that the case does not constitute a gross human rights violation. This statement indirectly frames the case as a public offense handled by law enforcement authorities, without involving the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM). Thus, the statement not only responds to an incident but also shapes how the public understands the distinction between criminal acts and human rights violations.

Based on Stuart Hall's theory, this statement not only describes an event but also shapes how the public understands it. The Minister represents the case as a regular criminal

act rather than a gross human rights violation. This framing directs public attention to criminal law aspects and reduces attention to other dimensions such as politics, power relations, or state responsibility. According to Hall, the boundary between human rights violations and non-human rights violations is not always clear. It is also shaped by how an issue is communicated and understood in society. In general, human rights violations refer to actions that violate fundamental human rights, whether committed by the state or by other actors when the state fails to provide protection. In this case, if violence such as an acid attack is seen only as an individual criminal act, broader aspects such as state responsibility or structural patterns of violence may be overlooked. Therefore, the way language is used can influence how society understands a case.

This case also generated widespread public concern. One response came from Dimas Bagus Arya, who argued that the acid attack on Andrie Yunus was not merely a criminal act but also a sign of a broader threat.

According to him, threats against Andrie Yunus and KontraS also represent threats to students, workers, and journalists who are critical of the government. This view reflects public concern regarding freedom of expression. In addition, Coordinating Minister for Law, Human Rights, Immigration, and Corrections, Yusril Ihza Mahendra, also stated that the case represents an attack on democratic values and human rights in Indonesia. It strengthens the view that the case is not only a criminal matter but also related to democracy and human rights. Overall, the public shows significant concern. Many consider the case a threat to civil liberties and the safety of groups that express critical opinions. Therefore, there are calls for the case to be handled seriously and transparently.

Data D08 presents a statement by Nasaruddin Umar, Minister of Religious Affairs, on the urgency of *zakat* in society. In his statement, he employed an analogy, asserting that the Qur'an did not popularize *zakat* and further argued that during the time of the Prophet and his companions, charity (*sedekah*) was more commonly practiced than *zakat*. This statement subsequently generated controversy within society, particularly among Muslims, as it was perceived to be inconsistent with the widely held understanding that *zakat* constitutes a fundamental pillar of Islamic teaching. Normatively, *zakat* is considered one of the Five Pillars of Islam, with a mandatory status that must be known and fulfilled by every eligible Muslim. Therefore, the statement was interpreted by some members of the public as an attempt to obscure the position of *zakat* within the doctrinal structure of Islam. This controversy demonstrates that public officials' statements, particularly in the religious domain, are highly sensitive due to their direct relation to deeply rooted beliefs and normative understandings within society. From Stuart Hall's perspective of representation theory, Nasaruddin Umar's statement can be understood as a non-neutral process of meaning production, constructed through language, context, and the authority position of the speaker. In this case, *zakat* is represented through a historical analogy emphasizing that during the time of the Prophet and his companions, charity was more commonly practiced than *zakat*. This representation frames *zakat* not solely as a religious obligation of Islam but as part of a broader socio-religious practice with historical dynamics. However, within this process of representation, a potential shift in meaning emerges from the public's established understanding of *zakat* as a fixed and obligatory religious practice.

From a Hallian perspective, representation is always intertwined with power in determining what is considered legitimate meaning (preferred meaning). When *zakat* is normatively understood as a fundamental and obligatory pillar of Islam, statements emphasizing its alleged lack of popularity in early Islamic history may be perceived as a de-emphasis of its obligatory status. It creates tension between the dominant meaning circulating within society and alternative meanings introduced through historical analogy. As a result, some segments of the public adopt an oppositional reading, rejecting the representation as they see it as obscuring the doctrinal position of *zakat*. In contrast, others adopt a negotiated reading, accepting the historical framing while maintaining the normative understanding of *zakat* as a religious obligation.

Furthermore, the statement also stirs controversy regarding public trust in the religious authority of the official concerned. Within religious discourse, the authority of the speaker plays a crucial role in determining the level of public acceptance of an interpretation. When a representation is perceived as deviating from established normative understandings, it not only generates debate over the meaning of *zakat* but also shifts public attention toward the legitimacy of the speaker's religious knowledge. Thus, this case demonstrates that representation in religious discourse is not merely interpretative but also has implications for authority, credibility, and the stability of meaning within the social and religious sphere.

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, the analysis of the eight data sets shows that statements made by state officials on various public issues cannot be regarded as neutral or merely informational. These statements also carry meanings, interests, and relations of power. Using Stuart Hall's theory, it is evident that the language used by state officials significantly shapes how society understands issues such as press freedom, welfare, protests, economic policy, public safety, religion, and human rights. In each case, state officials tend to produce preferred meanings that guide public interpretation in accordance with governmental perspectives.

However, the data also indicate that some officials have limited situational awareness and insufficient understanding of the issues they address. Many statements fail to consider public emotional contexts, issue sensitivity, and broader social impacts. As a result, these statements do not serve as tools for clarification or reassurance but instead often spark controversy and deepen disagreement within society. In many cases, governmental communication fails to deliver clear, empathetic, and policy-based public messages.

Public responses to these statements are also highly varied. Some members of the public accept governmental explanations, while many others criticize, reject, or debate them on social media and in public spaces. These criticisms arise because the public often perceives official statements as inconsistent with actual conditions, insensitive, or as ignoring ongoing social problems. On social media, these responses frequently appear in the form of comments, discussions, and even satire or memes.

On the other hand, the public is not a passive recipient of information but actively interprets it in different ways. Some accept the messages, others interpret them critically, and some reject them entirely. These differences occur because official communication

does not always align with public experiences and social contexts. It also creates the impression that some officials do not fully understand the issues they communicate, resulting in ineffective public communication. In addition, the data also show that language is closely related to power. State officials can shape how issues are understood by emphasizing or downplaying certain aspects. However, when this is not accompanied by caution and social awareness, it can lead to societal tension. Thus, language is not only a tool of communication but can also become a source of conflict when used without responsibility.

In conclusion, all analyzed cases demonstrate a gap in meaning between the government and the public. It is reinforced by diverse public reactions, ranging from acceptance to widespread rejection in public discourse and social media. Stuart Hall's theory emphasizes that reality is constructed through language; however, in these cases, the meanings produced often do not align and instead generate differences in public interpretation.

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