



Contestation of Power and the Formation of Social Identity in Communication Practices in Gorontalo City”

Uliyanto Y Mauda

Universitas Islam Bandung

Corresponding Author: Uliyanto Y Mauda maudauliyanto@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how power contestation and the formation of social identity unfold through public communication practices in Gorontalo City. By conceptualizing communication as a social practice that constructs reality, the study investigates policy discourse and the city government’s official news coverage as arenas for producing meaning, legitimacy, and social categorization. Adopting a qualitative case study design, the research draws on document analysis of a corpus of news items published on the Gorontalo City Portal, covering issues of public services, disaster mitigation and waste management, urban development, bureaucratic governance, and interregional solidarity. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis, enriched by critical discourse analysis to trace the relationships among text, discursive practice, and broader social practice

INTRODUCTION

Context and urgency

Communication in the study of contemporary communication is increasingly positioned as a social practice that works to shape reality, not merely to convey messages. Through the choice of diction, the arrangement of arguments, and the repetition of discourse, communication helps normalize the way the public understands an issue and responds to it. The critical discourse analysis perspective emphasizes that texts are always situated within networks of interests and social relations, so the production of meaning is never completely neutral (Sholihat & Sobari, 2024). Within this framework, communication not only represents the social world but also maintains certain orders by determining what is considered common and legitimate to discuss (Sukrin, 2025).

In an urban setting, communication practices become more strategic because cities bring together actors with different positions, capital, and access, ranging from government institutions, bureaucracies, and community groups to the media as a channel for discourse dissemination. Through the lens of structuration, these relationships can be seen as a reciprocal process: social structures shape everyday communication practices, while repeated practices, in turn, reproduce the structures themselves. Adnyani and Rusadi (2023) explain that the relationship between agents and structure occurs dynamically, so patterns of authority, compliance, and participation do not arise spontaneously but are formed through social practices that are continuously repeated. In line with this, Hasna (2021) shows that social structures can function as a framework that guides the actions and communication choices of actors within a particular social space.

The city of Gorontalo, through a series of official city government news, shows how public communication functions as an arena for the production of policy reality. For example, the issue of waste mitigation is constructed as a narrative of risk and prevention, waste accumulation is positioned as a factor that hinders water flow and triggers floods or puddles, and the solution is directed towards inter-departmental collaboration and citizen involvement through communal work and education (Gorontalo City Portal, 2026a). This logic aligns with the assertion of Sholihat and Sobari (2024) that the process of defining problems and offering solutions in texts is part of a discourse work that guides how the public interprets reality. In other words, policy does not merely appear as an administrative action, but also as a reality “stabilized” through recurring institutional narratives in public communication (Sukrin, 2025).

The urgency of understanding public communication as a social practice is also evident when communication is seen not merely as “service information,” but as a social regulation mechanism that shapes compliance, standards of appropriateness, and the boundaries of citizens' actions. From a critical framework, Rico et al. (2024) illustrate how communication can function as a tool of social control, so that policy discourse actually contains strategies to guide behavior and ensure order. In Gorontalo City, the government's emphasis on sanitation as part of public service quality shows how standards of “acceptable” and “unacceptable” are established through authoritative statements from the

mayor, who asserts that basic facilities such as toilets must be “truly attended to” and serve as a reflection of workplace environmental management..

Thus, policy communication does not stand as a neutral explanation, but as a symbolic device that shapes public perceptions of responsibility, the morality of hygiene, and the legitimacy of government actions, in line with the principle of critical discourse analysis that texts always carry interests in framing social reality (Sholihat & Sobari, 2024; Sukrin, 2025).

In addition to social control, the urgency of this study becomes stronger when urban communication is understood as a legitimacy arena, namely who is given the authority to define problems, set priorities, and claim truth in the public space. Zakiyah et al. (2024), through a reading of Habermas, emphasize the relevance of public discourse in shaping the legitimacy of power, so that government communication practices need to be interpreted as a process of building the “validity” of speech and actions in front of citizens..

In the news “Torang Bekeng Bae,” for example, government slogans are presented as markers of success, accompanied by narratives that infrastructure which was previously damaged “has been repaired and enjoyed by the people” and public services “have improved” under the leadership of the mayor and deputy mayor. At the same time, the plan to introduce the phrase “Welcome to the City of the Porch of Medina” in urban spaces shows that development communication also functions as a production of collective identity and a symbol of pride, which can be understood as symbolic capital..

In line with this, Yanwarin and Rahawarin (2023) link the formation of identity with symbolic capital and the potential for social exclusion, so city branding and policy language need to be examined not only as a form of promotion, but also as a mechanism that can reinforce social boundaries about 'who is considered part of us' within narratives of progress and order.

Main issue

Power contests in urban spaces often take place through communication practices that appear ordinary and administrative, but actually contain mechanisms of narrative domination, issue control, and legitimacy of speech. Within a framework that positions language as a tool of power, policy texts can work to establish the boundaries of "what can be talked about," determine problem priorities, and position certain actors as authorities, while other actors are positioned as recipients of instructions or objects of change (Sukrin, 2025). Rahmawati (2025), for example, emphasizes that political and policy communication practices not only convey programs, but also produce power relations through the way issues are formulated and circulated in public spaces.

In the data from this study, the contestation is seen in the reporting of 'job bidding,' which is framed as an important directive from the mayor and emphasized to be promptly carried out by the BKPP, especially because several positions are still held by acting officials (Portal Kota Gorontalo, 2026b). Through such framing, actions that appear as bureaucratic agendas actually help reinforce who has the authority to set the pace of policy, who acts as the implementer, and how urgency is constructed as a reasonable justification to accelerate the process. In other words, policy communication not only announces programs but also

shapes public perception of the necessity and "appropriateness" of government actions.

At the discourse level, administrative agendas such as job bidding can be understood as a reorganization of access to positions and authority, namely who is entitled to occupy strategic positions and through what mechanisms that legitimacy is produced. Adiputra (2021), through a Foucauldian reading, views discourse as a medium for the production of power and knowledge, so that bureaucratic arrangement is not merely an organizational event, but also a discursive practice that determines standards of competence, credibility, and authority. Within this framework, power structures do not always appear as direct coercion, but work through procedures, narratives of professionalism, and the normalization of governance as the "right way."

The power contest unfolded alongside the formation of social identity, as identity is often produced through the categorization of 'us-them,' labeling, representation, and recognition repeatedly circulated in public discourse. In the news story "Torang Bekeng Bae," for example, the government's slogan is positioned as a narrative of success that is "enjoyed by the people" and associated with projects to improve public spaces, while showcasing plans to install the words "Welcome to the City of the Veranda of Medina" as a marker of the city's identity in symbolic space (Portal Kota Gorontalo, 2026c). Such patterns demonstrate how urban space development is not only material but also an identity project, where the discourse of 'we' is constructed through symbols, slogans, and claims of success that bind citizens to a certain collective imagery (Sukrin, 2025).

In social identity and political identity theory, such processes of representation are important because they show how collective identities are produced through public narratives that affirm 'us' as a community aligned with the city's project, while the position of 'those who are not aligned' potentially becomes symbolically marked as a deviation (Lubis et al., 2023; Gudykunst & Mody, n.d.).

Research Gap

Some communication studies still tend to focus their analysis on messages and their effects, so more structural relationships are often not explicitly linked, namely how social structures shape power relations, then how power operates through communication practices, and ultimately influences the formation of social identity within a particular urban context. In fact, public discourse plays a role in determining who is considered legitimate to speak and how issues are framed as collective interests. In the Habermasian reading they use, Zakiyah et al. (2024) emphasize that the legitimacy of power is inseparable from the communication process in the public sphere, because legitimacy is built through the regulation of discourse, the distribution of speaking opportunities, and the way arguments are produced and circulated.

The linkage gap becomes clearer when Gorontalo City's policy communication data is read as a discursive practice, rather than merely informative news. In news coverage of the mayor's office relocation to Terminal 42, for instance, the program is reported not only as a development plan but is

framed as a campaign promise that must be fulfilled through “decisions and real work” (Gorontalo City Portal, 2026d). In the same narrative, mentioning targets, land acquisition agendas, and arguments for equitable development in the northern region function as legitimizing devices, as if positioning the policy as a rational and inevitable step. Thus, policy communication shapes the public's understanding of development priorities while simultaneously reinforcing the authority of those who define the city's “interests.”

On the other hand, the discourse on opening opportunities for third-party cooperation through a barter scheme reveals dimensions of economic-political power that are often overlooked if analysis stops at merely informative aspects (Portal Kota Gorontalo, 2026d). Studies that link discourse, structure, and power in this way align with the tradition of critical discourse analysis, which emphasizes the connection between texts, social practices, and power relations (Aminudin, 2023). Therefore, there is a strong need for qualitative studies that capture symbolic mechanisms and everyday practices, such as forms of instructions, morality, standards of 'acceptable-unacceptable,' and how institutions position citizens. Instructions for repairing school toilets and public facilities, for example, connect sanitation with the quality of public services, even stating that toilets reflect how an institution 'manages its working environment,' accompanied by orders to issue official circulars to ensure periodic inspection and repairs (Portal Kota Gorontalo, 2025).

From the perspective of communication and power studies, this practice is relevant to study because it shows how hygiene norms and governance are produced as moral and administrative standards that shape institutional identity and the identity of citizens as "service recipients" (Sukrin, 2025; Susetyo, 2021).

Objectives and Problem Formulation

Objectives

1. Identifying forms of power contestation that operate through narrative, issue control, and legitimacy of speech in public communication practices in Gorontalo City, based on official city government news data.
2. Analyzing how social identity is formed through representation, labeling, and the categorization of “us-them” in the discourse on city policy and development.
3. Explaining the relationship between local social structures, institutional communication practices, and their symbolic consequences for government–citizen relations in issues of public services, spatial planning, and social solidarity..

Problem Formulation

1. How is the contestation of power displayed and carried out through policy narratives and issue priorities in official news from the Gorontalo City Government?
2. How are the discourses of "we," "citizens," "government," and other social categories represented to shape collective social identity and the symbolic boundary of "us-them"?

3. What symbolic mechanisms are most prominent, such as calls for participation, instructions, public morality, or program legitimacy, in building citizen support and compliance??

Contribution

Theoretically, this article contributes to strengthening critical communication studies in the Indonesian local context by showing that urban public communication is a social practice that connects the construction of reality, power relations, and the formation of social identity. The social construction framework (e.g., Berger) provides a basis for examining how urban reality is produced through institutional discourse. The perspective of representation (Hall) reinforces the analysis of how social identity is produced through the way the city and its citizens are portrayed in official narratives. Practically, the research findings are expected to serve as input for the city government and stakeholders to develop more inclusive public communication, sensitive to the diversity of citizens' social positions, and not merely produce compliance, but also open up space for equal participation in setting the agenda, for example on environmental issues, public services, and urban space development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication and Social Construction

The theoretical framework of social construction views communication not merely as the transfer of messages, but as the process of creating meaning, which is then "hardened" into social reality. In the constructionist tradition, social reality is understood as the result of a recurring dialectic between human action and sedimented structures: externalization (practice and expression), objectivation (standardization through habits and institutions), and then internalization (acceptance as something taken for granted). Several introductory writings on Berger and Luckmann's theory in the context of communication emphasize the role of language as a mechanism that allows social reality to be created, transmitted, and maintained, not just explained (Sulaiman, 2012). Thus, the analysis of urban policy communication should not stop at "what the message contains," but needs to investigate how certain narratives transform issues into realities that appear reasonable, normal, and worthy of compliance..

In the context of public communication, the construction of reality generally takes place through repetition, the structuring of arguments, and the selection of diction that binds the definition of problems and the direction of solutions. For example, when the Gorontalo City Portal frames waste management as a mitigation of flood and waterlogging risks, that narrative transforms the issue of cleanliness into a disaster risk problem that requires a collective response. In the news, the accumulation of waste in drains, rivers, and densely populated settlements is positioned as the cause of obstructed water flow, and solutions are attached to cross-agency coordination, communal work, and public education. This type of narrative structure shows how policy "facts" are produced through cause-and-effect logic, the designation of authoritative parties, and invitations for participation as a form of internalizing new norms. (Sulaiman, 2012).

It is also important to note that the construction of reality in policy communication often goes hand in hand with discursive mechanisms: who is speaking, from which position, and with what authority. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) studies assert that the media is not neutral because language can serve as a tool of hegemony, that is, normalizing dominant ideologies through forms of language that appear everyday (Suhardi & Salamah, 2024). Therefore, 'news texts' on the city government portal can be read as a communicative technology that produces policy reality while simultaneously building a horizon of compliance: citizens are invited to accept the defined problem as set, along with the forms of participation considered appropriate..

Social Structure in Communication Practice

Social structure can be understood as a configuration of rules, norms, roles, networks, and stratifications that shape opportunities for action as well as boundaries considered legitimate. The structuration perspective emphasizes that structure is not a rigid external entity, but simultaneously a medium and outcome of social practices: everyday communicative actions shape structure, while structure frames what is possible to do and say (Adnyani & Rusadi, 2023). In urban spaces, structure is evident in inter-institutional relations, bureaucratic procedures, access to media, and the social positions of citizens. Its implications directly affect "access to speak" (who can speak), "authority of speech" (whose speech counts), and "communication styles" (instructional, persuasive, participatory).

News data from Gorontalo City shows how the bureaucratic structure produces a form of communication that tends to be command-driven and procedural. In the news about "job bidding," the Mayor ordered the BKPP to immediately carry out the job auction, accompanied by the reason that several positions were still held by acting officials. This narrative clearly establishes the role structure: the mayor as the source of instructions, the BKPP as the executor, and strategic positions as the object of management. From a structuration perspective, such communication not only conveys policy but also reproduces authority structures (who gives orders, who follows up) while reinforcing bureaucratic standards of "orderliness." (Adnyani & Rusadi, 2023).

Social structure is also evident in public service agendas and infrastructure, which assume standards of adequacy and institutional responsibility. In the instructions for improving school toilets and public facilities, sanitation is stated as an important part of the quality of public services; even toilets are positioned as a reflection of hygiene awareness and how institutions manage the environment. This communication indicates the existence of institutional norms about 'adequate/inadequate,' which then drives the issuance of official circulars as a control mechanism. Here, structure operates through regulatory and symbolic means: formal rules, standards, and evaluations aimed at shaping the behavior of organizations and citizens..

Power, Discourse, and Legitimacy

Power in critical communication studies does not always appear as direct coercion; it often operates through discourse that defines what is considered reasonable, true, and appropriate to do. In a Foucauldian reading, discourse is intertwined with knowledge: it shapes a "regime of truth" that makes certain

statements seem rational while marginalizing others. Foucauldian studies of discourse show how digital and institutional communication practices can become arenas of power that determine the boundaries of statements, while also shaping how the public evaluates right and wrong (Adiputra, 2021). From this starting point, city government portal news can be treated as institutional discourse that produces policy knowledge, including setting issue priorities and legitimizing actions.

Legitimacy becomes a key concept because it explains why a policy is followed not just due to formal authority, but because it is seen as right, reasonable, or appropriate. Public discourse in the Habermasian tradition pays attention to the connection between legitimacy and the public sphere: who is given access to present reasons, and how arguments are structured to be accepted as in the common interest (Zakiyah et al., 2024). In the Gorontalo data, legitimacy is built through rhetoric of urgency and measurable targets. In the news about the relocation of the mayor's office, campaign promises were emphasized as "must not remain mere words" but must be realized in decisions and concrete actions, accompanied by details of the availability of 1.8 hectares of land and instructions for land acquisition. This approach demonstrates a strategy of legitimacy: presenting administrative evidence, targets, and rationalizations for development (equitable distribution in the northern region, effectiveness of inter-agency coordination).

In addition, power also operates through symbolic domination and symbolic capital, which is the ability of certain actors to make their definition of reality widely accepted. Bourdieu emphasizes that symbolic struggles take place in a 'linguistic market': statements have different values depending on the social position of the speaker and the structure of symbolic sanctions operating within society (Bourdieu, 1991). In the slogan 'Torang Bekeng Bae,' for example, the city government's narrative positions the program as a manifestation of the implementation of governance that is 'enjoyed by the people,' thereby framing success as a shared reality. At the symbolic level, institutional authority accumulates symbolic capital: it not only claims to work, but also claims the definition of 'working for the people' as a reasonable standard of judgment.

Social Identity as a Communicative Process

Social identity is not understood as a completed attribute, but rather as a communicative process formed through categorization, representation, performativity, and negotiation. Social Identity Theory emphasizes that individuals define themselves through group membership, and this process occurs through categorization (in-group/out-group), identification, and social comparison, which often leads to a positive bias towards one's own group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Through this lens, urban policy communication practices can be seen as processes that not only regulate services but also shape 'who we are' as city residents and 'who they are' who are considered not yet in line with the norms.

In the data from Gorontalo, identity construction is seen through collective language, slogans, and spatial symbols that link residents to certain images. In the news article "Torang Bekeng Bae," the slogan is positioned as a government

identity that is continuously implemented and tied to public space improvement projects. Even the plan to write "Welcome to the City of Serambi Madinah" at the Telaga five-way intersection indicates that the city's identity is produced through spatial representation: religious and cultural symbols are attached to the city entrance to reinforce collective imagery. Within Stuart Hall's framework of representation, meaning does not merely reflect reality but is produced through a system of representation; it operates through the selection of signs, narratives, and meaning-making practices that shape the way the public understands themselves and their city. (Hall, 1980).

Social identity is also evident in discourses of cross-regional solidarity that construct a 'we' as a moral community. In the news about the delivery of aid to Aceh Tamiang, donations are described as a form of solidarity, care, and moral support between regions, and emphasized as a 'tangible expression of empathy' and the commitment of the government together with the community. Here, policy and humanitarian communication shape the social identity of 'caring citizens' as an in-group category with positive value (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). At the same time, the potential for symbolic boundaries arises: who is considered caring, who is considered neglectful, and how that category is produced through institutional narratives.

Research conceptual framework

Based on the theoretical framework above, this study uses official news from the Gorontalo City Portal as data to examine the contestation of power and the formation of social identity in urban communication practices. Operationally, the key concepts are defined as follows:

1. **Power contestation:** the process of vying for influence and legitimacy that takes place through discourse, including agenda setting, problem definition, and claims of success. Contestation is evident in instructional strategies (for example, the command "job bidding must be carried out immediately") as well as in target justification strategies (for example, campaign promises that must be realized as concrete work). This concept is supported by the view that discourse is a medium of power-knowledge (Adiputra, 2021) and that legitimacy is related to the structure of the speaking space. (Zakiyah et al., 2024).
2. **Communication practices:** communicative methods used by city actors (institutions, officials, citizens, media) to produce policy realities, for instance: the diction of mitigation and risk (waste as the cause of flooding), calls for collaboration (community service and education), or symbolization of success (infrastructure "enjoyed by the people"). These practices are understood as part of the process of reality construction (Sulaiman, 2012) and linguistic hegemony. (Suhardi & Salamah, 2024).
3. **Social identity:** a collective identity formed through categorization and representation, characterized by the construction of 'us' (solidarity, mutual cooperation) and city symbols (Serambi Madinah). This framework refers to the in-group/out-group process (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) as well as the production of meaning through representation (Hall, 1980).

The conceptual relationship model that guides the analysis can be formulated as the following flow as a processual relationship, rather than a rigid linear causal one:

Social structure (rules, norms, roles, networks, stratification, access) + Power structure (symbolic capital, authority, legitimacy) → Communication practices (narrative domination, issue control, calls for participation, problem-solution framing, symbolization of success) → Formation of social identity (us-them, solidarity, stigma/moral judgment, recognition, city image).

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, placing the city of Gorontalo as a 'social arena' where public communication practices, power relations, and the formation of social identity can be observed contextually. The case study was chosen because it allows the researcher to examine contemporary phenomena in depth within the context of real life, utilizing various data sources and linking the findings to the institutional and social dynamics underlying them (Yin, 2014). In line with this, Creswell emphasizes that qualitative research focuses on exploring phenomena, eliciting rich participant perspectives (words/text), and conducting inductive analysis through themes and interpretation of meaning. (Creswell, n.d.).

Operationally, the "case" in this study is not just "Gorontalo City" as an administrative location, but Gorontalo City as a discursive space, that is, a place where policy narratives, bureaucratic instructions, invitations for participation, and symbols of city identity are produced and disseminated. Consequently, the case study design used is explanatory-qualitative, which explains how the contestation of power and social identity operates through communication practices that appear in everyday life..

Location and Context

The research context focuses on the public communication arena of Gorontalo City, which intersects between government institutions and citizens' public spaces. The specific arena being studied includes:

1. City institutions/government (as producers of policy discourse and instructions), for example through the narrative of "job bidding" which is emphasized to be implemented immediately.
2. Public spaces and urban development (as symbolic spaces of identity), for example the renovation of Bundaran HI and Simpang Lima Telaga, which are tied to the slogan "Torang Bekeng Bae" and the identity "Serambi Madinah."
3. Issues of public services and governance that reflect moral-administrative standards (for example, sanitation) as part of policy communication.

By choosing the arena above, the research positions the City of Gorontalo as a location that brings together actors with different access and authority, so that communication practices can be read as social practices full of negotiations of power and identity.

Data Source

1. Official news documents from the Gorontalo City Portal, which serve as the main corpus (for example, issues on waste mitigation and flood risks, job bidding instructions, the renovation of public spaces “Torang Bekeng Bae”, the relocation of the mayor’s office as a campaign promise, and instructions for toilet improvements).
2. If necessary, supporting documents such as circulars, work plans, organizational/community archives, as well as social media posts related to local issues..

3.4. Data Collection Techniques

1. Semi-Structured interviews using a question guide that allows for both exploration and consistency of themes. The questions focus on: (a) the dominant narrative about urban issues (who defines the problems and solutions), (b) actors/parties considered most influential in decision-making, (c) experiences of identity labeling (us–them) and practices of recognition/exclusion, and (d) moments of resistance or negotiation by residents against official discourse. The qualitative framework emphasizes broad questions and the exploration of participants' detailed views as the basis for interpretation. (Creswell, n.d.).
2. Observation is conducted using an observation sheet that records: who speaks most often, who leads, who is interrupted/ignored, how forum rules work, and what identity symbols appear (language, slogans, attributes, spatial arrangement). Observation is also aimed at capturing “communication practices” as social actions, not just the content of the message..
3. Documentation is carried out by archiving text excerpts, screenshots (if the source is digital), and marking important parts of news/documents that show: problem-solution framing, instructions, claims of success, and city identity symbols. For example, waste mitigation narratives link waste to the risk of flooding/ponding, while public service narratives emphasize adequacy standards through circulars and regular inspections.

Data Analysis Techniques

The research uses a combination of thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA).

1. Thematic analysis is used to organize findings across sources through the process of coding and identifying patterns of meaning. Braun and Clarke describe thematic analysis as a flexible method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) in qualitative data, which can be conducted systematically through stages of familiarizing with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and writing up the results (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial codes are developed from the research focus: power, legitimacy, communication strategies, identity, resistance, and then further developed inductively from the data..
2. CDA is used to examine how power operates through language and discourse practices. Fairclough's model views communication events as three-dimensional: text, discourse practice (production and consumption),

and broader socio-cultural practice (Fairclough, 1992; 1995, summarized in brief sources). Operationally, the analysis is conducted through: (a) textual analysis (diction, metaphors, labeling), (b) discourse practice analysis (who produces the text, the imagined audience, legitimacy strategies), and (c) social practice analysis (bureaucratic structure, public service norms, city identity symbols). Using this framework, for example, the instruction "immediately" in job bidding can be interpreted as an authoritative strategy within bureaucratic discourse practice, while the slogan "Torang Bekeng Bae" can be read as a practice of representing collective identity through city space symbols.

Data Validity

Validity (trustworthiness) is maintained through:

1. **Source triangulation** (interviews–observations–documents) to test the consistency of findings across perspectives. Creswell and Miller emphasize that qualitative researchers commonly use triangulation, member checking, thick description, peer review, and auditing to strengthen the validity/trustworthiness of findings. (Creswell & Miller, 2000).
2. **Member checking** by confirming the summary of findings/interpretations with key informants, especially on sensitive issues such as identity labeling or experiences of marginalization (Creswell & Miller, 2000).
3. **Audit trail** in the form of notes on the analysis process: coding logs, analytical memos, decisions on merging/splitting themes, as well as the rationale for interpreting data excerpts, so that the process can be traced and evaluated transparently..

Ethics

The research applies the principles of social research ethics: informed consent, the right to refuse/withdraw at any time, anonymity/pseudonymity, and data protection (secure storage, restricted access). Ethics are important because this study has the potential to touch on power relations, policy critique, and experiences of identity labeling, so researchers need to minimize social risks for participants and avoid exposing identities that could trigger negative consequences in community or bureaucratic environments..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents findings based on document analysis (a corpus of official news from the Gorontalo City Portal) as 'discourse data' that depict institutional communication practices in Gorontalo City. In line with the agreed methodology, the reading was carried out through thematic analysis (coding themes of power, legitimacy, communication strategy, identity, resistance) and further explored using critical discourse analysis (CDA) which positions the text as a social practice, so the focus is not only on 'what is said,' but also 'how it is said' and 'its social implications' (see Fairclough's study in your reference list).

Under the umbrella of the construction of reality and power–legitimacy, the findings are read as a process of policy reality production: policy narratives normalize problem definitions, establish “reasonable” solutions, and guide

citizens' positions within the city's communication structure. At the same time, the findings are also linked to social identity and representation, as policy discourse produces the "us-them" categories through moral labeling, spatial symbols, and claims of success..

Tema Temuan 1: The arena of power contestation in gorontalo city

Formal arena (government and service policy)

The formal arena becomes apparent when policies are produced through bureaucratic forums and declared as binding instructions. In the news about 'job bidding,' the implementation of the position auction is positioned as an important instruction conveyed at coordination and evaluation meetings (Rakorev), with direct orders to the BKPP to immediately prepare and carry out the process. Furthermore, the reason for acceleration is emphasized through the argument that several positions are still filled by acting officials (Plt), thus the legitimacy of the policy is built on the need for 'organizational order.'

A similar pattern appears in instructions for repairing school toilets and public facilities, which are also conveyed in Rakorev, showing how public service discourse is produced from formal authority centers. Through the lens of social structure-communication practice, this formal arena operates through rules, roles, and hierarchy, that is, who gives the mandate, who carries it out, and how standards of adequacy are decided. The references to structuration that you cited (for example, Hasna, 2021; Adnyani & Rusadi, 2023) help affirm that institutional communication practices tend to reproduce authority structures..

Informal arena (everyday spaces of residents and collective practices))

Informal arenas emerge when policy issues are brought into the daily practices of citizens, such as in waste mitigation. The Regional Disaster Management Agency (BPBD) links waste management with the risk of flooding and waterlogging, then encourages cross-departmental coordination while engaging the community to raise awareness about maintaining cleanliness.

The invitation was translated into collective actions typical in informal arenas, such as monitoring flood-prone areas, communal work to clean drainage channels, and community education. Here, power contests do not always take the form of open debates, but rather a struggle over the definition of 'responsibility': who is considered the cause of the problem, and who must adjust their behavior..

Digital arena (news channels and image circulation)

The digital arena is seen through two channels: (1) government news portals as a medium for distributing official discourse, and (2) explicit references to perceptions on social media. In MSME discourse, the news mentions social media homepages that are usually filled with negative events, but in recent months there have been 'almost no incidents,' accompanied by citizens' comments that criminal news has decreased or even become nonexistent. This shows that the image of 'order' and 'security' is produced not only in physical spaces but also in digital spaces as a public evaluation arena. In your list of references, there are also citations about the role of social media in contemporary social dynamics, reinforcing the relevance of the digital arena as a space of symbolic power.

Theme 1 Discussion

Conceptually, these findings show that the contestation of power in Gorontalo City moves across different arenas: formal (meetings–instructions), informal (collective practices), and digital (circulation of images). From the perspective of reality construction, the "policy reality" becomes stable when official narratives are repeatedly presented in institutional media and take shape in practices within the community space (for example, communal work or compliance with service standards).

Finding Theme 2: Communication strategies in power contests

Claims of authority (position, mandate, and procedures)

The dominant strategy is to build authority through positional power and institutional mandate. In the job bidding news, the statement “job bidding will be carried out immediately” is presented as an instruction from the mayor that must be followed up, and is reinforced with a planned implementation date (the 27th). On the sanitation issue, the mayor expresses concern for employees and the public who carry out activities with “inadequate” facilities and emphasizes that toilets are basic facilities that must be addressed. This strategy consolidates legitimacy by positioning policies as moral-administrative necessities, rather than mere options.

Moral language and standardization (order–cleanliness–decency)

Instructions for toilets have shifted from technical language to moral language: toilets are positioned as a reflection of how agencies maintain their environment, and if well-kept, it indicates 'awareness of hygiene in practice.' It was then requested to issue an official circular to ensure regular inspection, maintenance, and repair..

At the CDA level, this can be read as a process of normalization: cleanliness is not just a technical matter, but a measure of the moral 'good institution,' while also serving as a control tool through repeated procedures (circulation–monitoring–improvement).

Framing development and 'people's interests' as legitimacy

In the plan to move the mayor's office, the policy is framed as a campaign promise that 'cannot stop as mere words,' but must become a decision and tangible work that the public can feel. Its legitimacy is reinforced through administrative details: 1.8 hectares of land are already available, part of it has been cleared, and the rest is ordered to be vacated immediately, with a target to complete before the end of the term. Here, the discourse of targets and numbers serves as a 'rational language' to lock the policy as a reasonable and measurable step, not merely political rhetoric..

Narrowing of the discourse horizon (implicit silencing)

In this corpus of documents, silencing rarely appears as an explicit prohibition. However, subtler mechanisms are evident: issues are locked within institutional definitions and the solutions that have been provided. In waste mitigation, for example, the problem is defined as the accumulation of garbage in drains/rivers/settlements that obstructs water flow, and then the solutions are directed towards communal work, education, cross-agency coordination, and citizen participation..

The space to frame problems as issues of more structural waste management governance (for example, transportation systems, law enforcement, or the responsibility of certain institutions) does not appear prominently in the text, so the discourse tends to be 'orderly' within the framework set by the institution..

Theme 2 Discussion

These findings are consistent with the focus of power-legitimacy studies in your reference list. For instance, the reference on the relevance of public discourse to the legitimacy of power (Zakiyah et al., 2024) provides a basis that legitimacy is inherent in those who get a voice and how arguments are structured to be accepted. Using CDA (Fairclough), the authority and framing strategies above can be read as discourse practices that reproduce the city's social structure: the government as the agenda-setter, and citizens as directed participants..

Finding Theme 3: Formation of social identity (us-them)

The identity of the "ideal citizen" through moral categories (orderly/neglectful, clean/dirty, productive/unproductive)

Waste mitigation builds the category of 'responsible citizens' through appeals not to litter, especially into rivers and drainage systems, as well as active participation in communal work. Conversely, the identity of 'negligent citizens' implicitly appears as those contributing to flood risks. In sanitation issues, institutional identity is produced through labels of 'inadequate facilities' and well-maintained toilets as a sign of hygiene awareness..

In the theme of MSMEs, the identity of young people is framed through the opposition of "staying away from negative things" versus negative behavior, then linked to hangout activities oriented towards culinary spaces and trading. Within the framework of social identity, these categories function as a "us-them" process: who is considered part of the ideal group (orderly, clean, productive) and who is positioned as a problem or in need of guidance. References to social identity theory in your bibliography (for example, studies using Social Identity Theory) indicate that identity often operates through categorization and the affirmation of values in specific groups..

The city's identity through the representation of spatial symbols and slogans.

In the news 'Torang Bekeng Bae,' the government slogan is positioned as an identity that continues to be implemented, and success is narrated through improved infrastructure that has been 'enjoyed by the people,' including claims that public services are getting better..

The production of the city's identity becomes very explicit when the writing "Welcome to the City of Serambi Madinah" is planned in the Simpang Lima Telaga park. From a representational lens, spatial symbols like this are not just decoration, but a device for reinforcing meaning: the city is defined through religious-cultural signs that are repeated and displayed as the "face of the city," while also establishing symbolic boundaries of who is considered in alignment with that image..

Solidarity and cross-regional moral-collective identity

News about aid for Aceh Tamiang builds the identity of "us" as a moral community: the assistance is referred to as a concrete manifestation of the government's and society's empathy and commitment, with the hope of

alleviating burdens and strengthening togetherness and brotherhood among fellow citizens. The narrative also emphasizes inter-regional synergy and mutual cooperation as national values. The social identity here is not merely a local identity, but a national identity shaped through language of care and humanity..

Discussion Theme 3

Social identity in this data is formed through three pathways: (1) the moral categorization of citizens/agencies, (2) the symbolic representation of urban space, and (3) humanitarian solidarity. From the perspective of symbolic power and symbolic capital, the production of the symbol “Serambi Madinah” and the claim of success “enjoyed by the people” can be interpreted as efforts to accumulate public recognition. Your reference list includes studies on symbolic capital and social exclusion (for example, Yanwarin & Rahawarin, 2023), which are relevant for understanding how collective identity can simultaneously invite inclusion and potentially produce social boundaries.

Finding Theme 4: Resistance and identity negotiation

Resistance that is not visible as a finding (silencing by omission)

One important finding from the official news corpus is the lack of explicit opposing voices. The discourse is predominantly constructed from an institutional perspective: problem definitions, urgency, and solutions mostly appear as authoritative narratives. In waste mitigation, the texts emphasize coordination and calls for participation, but do not present public debates about the root causes or the burden of responsibility..

In the relocation of the mayor's office, the target narrative, land acquisition instructions, and the rationalization of development equality became the focus, without showing potential conflicts of interest, citizen negotiations, or objections from the affected parties. This finding aligns with the principles of CDA that absence also carries meaning: 'those who are not given a voice' serve as an indication of how power operates in the text.

Negotiation of identity through collective language and consensus

Although resistance is not highlighted, the text shows strategies of identity negotiation through collective language. In waste mitigation, the government builds a narrative of “government and community” collaboration as a condition for success, thus smoothing power relations into joint work. In the aid to Aceh Tamiang, the identities of the government and residents are united as a single moral actor: “the government together with the community” comes to help the affected area, and then solidarity is used as a source of consensus..

In MSMEs, the identity negotiation of young people is directed towards the 'productive' category: they gain space to trade and earn income, so the 'hanging out' identity is articulated as a safer and more economical activity.

Discussion of Theme 4

Within the framework of your research, this section on resistance and negotiation serves as a methodological rationale for why a qualitative case study needs to be followed up with interviews and observations. In terms of design, document analysis maps the dominant discourse, while field data is needed to capture counter-narratives (humor/sarcasm, silent strategies, hidden critiques) that may not appear in official channels. Through thematic analysis, “resistance” can become an actively sought code in interviews/observations; with CDA,

resistance can also be read from cracks in the discourse, for example contradictions, actor obfuscation, or issue diversion.

DISCUSSION

Linking findings to theory

The social structure of Gorontalo City and access to communication, legitimacy to speak

Findings indicate that communication access and the legitimacy to speak in Gorontalo City are heavily influenced by the formal government structure that governs who can set the agenda, who acts as the executor, and who is positioned as the recipient of policies. This pattern is evident in the series of instructions during coordination and evaluation meetings (Rakorev), for example, when the mayor delivers directives for improving school toilets and public facilities at a Rakorev, and then those instructions are directed across service institutions (elementary to junior high schools, health clinics, integrated health posts, service offices). Here, the social structure functions as “rules and roles” that centralize the authority to speak to institutional actors. The structuration perspective reinforces this reading: communication practices are not neutral but tend to reproduce the same structures, including patterns of authority hierarchy and compliance. (Adnyani & Rusadi, 2023; Hasna, 2021).

Findings on “job bidding” also show how legitimacy is produced through formal mechanisms. The instruction “job bidding must be immediately implemented” was delivered by the mayor during the Rakorev, directed to the BKPP, and reinforced with the reason that several positions were still held by acting officials (Plt). Theoretically, social structure at the bureaucratic level not only organizes procedures but also arranges the distribution of opportunities and authority, namely who can become strategic actors within the organization. At this point, the legitimacy of speech is not merely about the quality of the argument, but is tied to social position and mandate..

Power that operates through discourse: the establishment of “truth,” normalization, and stigma Within the framework of the theory of social construction of reality and discourse, power does not always present itself as coercion, but works through the establishment of “truths” that appear natural. This is clearly evident in the framing of sanitation as a measure of the quality of public services. The mayor emphasized that sanitation is an important part of public service quality, even expressing “pity” for employees and the public who use “inadequate” facilities, suggesting that toilets must be given proper attention. The further statement that “toilets reflect” how an institution takes care of its environment and that toilet maintenance indicates cleanliness awareness demonstrates the process of normalization: cleanliness is shifted from a technical realm to a moral-institutional standard. This is where the discourse of work serves as a tool of power, because it sets the benchmark of 'appropriate/inappropriate' while simultaneously encouraging compliance through administrative instruments, such as requests for official circulars for regular inspections and maintenance.

Power work through discourse is also evident in the issue of waste mitigation, when BPBD emphasized that mitigation is not only carried out during

emergencies, but starts from prevention and waste management to reduce flood risk. This discourse strongly defines the problem: waste in drains, rivers, and densely populated settlements is positioned as a factor that hinders water flow. Then solutions are prepared within an 'orderly' framework: monitoring vulnerable points, communal work, education, as well as appeals for residents not to litter and actively engage in community cooperation. Through the lens of critical discourse analysis, this shows how policy texts can guide the public to accept a certain version of 'truth' about the causes of problems and reasonable forms of solutions. (Sholihat & Sobari, 2024).

Meanwhile, the concept of legitimacy in public discourse asserts that power gains influence when issues are discussed in a certain way, including who is given the opportunity to speak and how arguments are structured (Zakiyah et al., 2024). From this perspective, official news serves as an arena for producing legitimacy: for instance, the discourse on building a mayor's office at Terminal 42 is framed as a campaign promise that should not remain a series of words but must be realized through decisions and tangible work felt by the community. Legitimacy is then reinforced with rational-instrumental details (availability of 1.8 hectares of land and instructions for land acquisition). In this way, power operates through the rhetoric of "targets" and "clarity of steps" that encourages the public to recognize policies as rational and urgent actions.

Social identity as a result of contestation: representation, symbols, and moral categories

Findings show that social identity is produced through categories embedded in policies. In waste mitigation, "the community" is called upon as a subject that needs to be aware of cleanliness, not litter, and actively participate in mutual cooperation. This category implies a subtle identity opposition: "orderly and caring citizens" versus "negligent citizens" who are considered to contribute to flood risk. In sanitation issues, the label "inadequate facilities" opens the possibility of forming institutional identities of "good" and "negligent" through cleanliness indicators. When viewed through the lens of symbolic violence, moral-institutional standards can function as a tool of power that leads some actors to accept the assessment categories as something normal. (Siswadi, 2024).

Social identity is also produced through the representation of spatial symbols and slogans. 'Torang Bekeng Bae' is positioned as a slogan that is continuously implemented, and then linked to the claim that infrastructure that used to be damaged is now repaired and 'enjoyed by the people,' including that public services are improving. Even more strongly, the plan to place the writing 'Welcome to the City of Serambi Madinah' shows how city identity is produced through symbolic markers embedded in public space. In representation studies, identity is not something 'natural,' but the result of the work of marking, repetition, and recognition in social space; therefore, who has the right to name the city and determine its symbols becomes part of the contestation of meaning. (Hall, 1997).

On the other hand, the discourse on MSMEs shows the formation of generational identity through moral-economic categorization. News reports indicate that crime has decreased, linked to 'young people' who are starting to stay away from negative activities and choosing to hang out while enjoying

culinary experiences, with some even earning an income because they have space to trade. The identity of 'productive youth' is produced through policy narratives that provide space while simultaneously attaching the standard of 'productive/unproductive.' From the perspective of symbolic capital, policies and public narratives can be a source of recognition and reputation for actors, especially when circulated through digital spaces. (Yanwarin & Rahawarin, 2023).

Theoretical implications

First, this reading emphasizes that local communication (through official government portals, bureaucratic forums, and policy narratives) can be understood as an arena of symbolic hegemony. Institutional discourse constructs problem definitions (for example, waste as a trigger for flooding), establishes moral standards (sanitation as a reflection of institutional quality), and links policies to collective values (development as "real work" experienced by the community). Within the CDA framework, texts are not merely reports, but social practices that stabilize reality and direct the positions of subjects (Fairclough in the references of the research you have collected).

Second, the findings strengthen the argument that social identity is not merely an individual choice, but a process influenced by structure. Formal structures create the distribution of speaking access and legitimacy, and then policy discourse produces categories of 'ideal citizens,' 'good institutions,' and 'beneficiary people.' In other words, identity moves from the symbolic level (slogans, labels, spatial signs) to the level of social relations (who is invited to participate, who is considered lacking). Habermasian arguments about public discourse are also relevant: the legitimacy of power cannot be separated from the regulation of speaking spaces and the formation of consensus, so the dominance of narratives has the potential to silence the articulation of certain groups' experiences. (Zakiyah et al., 2024).

Practical implications

These findings have several implications for designing more inclusive public communication at the city level.

1. Opening up communication access and expanding the representation of actors. Policy narratives in the corpus tend to focus on institutional actors, while citizens' voices more often appear as objects of appeals (for example, in waste mitigation) or beneficiaries (for example, "enjoyed by the people"). Inclusive communication practices can be realized by creating real participation channels: neighborhood-based public hearing forums, public response spaces on official portals, and documented feedback mechanisms. This is important so that policy legitimacy comes not only from claims of authority but also from deliberative processes that recognize citizens' experiences.
2. Preventing stigmatization through policy language. In waste-related issues, it is important to avoid constructing identities that oversimplify the causes of the problem to "citizen behavior," as this kind of framing can produce implicit stigma against certain groups. A more balanced strategy is to combine behavioral appeals with transparency about governance (for example, waste collection processes, service capacity, or improvements in

drainage infrastructure), so that the burden of responsibility is not placed solely on residents.

3. 3. Transparency of public information to strengthen fair legitimacy. In job bidding, the narrative of policy acceleration due to the numerous acting positions should be accompanied by more transparent public communication: selection criteria, stages, schedules, and oversight mechanisms. Such transparency broadens legitimacy, not merely as a 'command from leadership,' but as a process that can be publicly tested. The same applies to the relocation of the mayor's office: information about land acquisition and third-party cooperation schemes needs to be communicated with accountability principles so that potential latent conflicts can be prevented from the outset.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

First, the analysis results show that public communication practices in Gorontalo City function as social practices that produce policy realities, not merely the delivery of information. Policy reality is constructed through problem definition, the designation of authorized actors, and the repetition of narratives of solutions considered appropriate. This is evident in the discourse on waste mitigation, where flooding and waterlogging problems are framed through cause-and-effect relationships that place the accumulation of waste in drains, rivers, and densely populated settlements as factors that hinder water flow. The solution narrative is then directed towards community clean-up activities, education, and cooperation as forms of 'appropriate' participation within the framework established by the institutions. This pattern emphasizes that policy texts, as read through critical discourse analysis, not only represent reality but also guide how the public interprets it while simultaneously constraining the range of seemingly legitimate solutions (see the CDA framework in your references).

Second, power contests in urban spaces do not always appear as open conflicts, but more often as contests over the legitimacy of discourse and the authority to define problems. Formal government structures, particularly spaces for bureaucratic coordination, become the main arena for producing legitimacy. The mayor's instructions delivered at the Rakorev regarding the improvement of school toilets and public facilities illustrate how service standards and 'appropriateness' norms are shaped through authoritative statements that traverse various service units. Similarly, 'job bidding' is produced as a formal agenda that demands acceleration because positions are still filled by acting officials, thus organizational needs are used as the basis for legitimacy to reorganize access to strategic positions. This finding aligns with the argument of legitimacy in public discourse (for example, the Habermasian reading in your reference) that power is strengthened when spaces for dialogue and argumentation are managed in such a way that policies appear rational and inevitable.

Third, this study concludes that power operates through discourse in the form of moral-institutional normalization and standardization, especially through the categories of “worthy/unworthy,” “clean/unclean,” or “orderly/neglectful.” The statement that toilets reflect how an institution manages its working environment and that toilet maintenance indicates cleanliness awareness shows how technical issues are elevated to organizational moral norms. When an official circular is then requested for regular inspection, maintenance, and repair, power emerges as a disciplinary mechanism that binds actions to repeated procedures. In the issue of development, normalization also operates through the language of 'targets' and 'real work.' The relocation of the mayor's office to Terminal 42 is framed as a campaign promise that should not remain just a string of words, but must be realized through decisions and tangible work felt by the community. This legitimacy strategy is then reinforced with administrative details (availability of land and land release instructions), which create an impression of rationality and certainty.

Fourth, social identity is produced as a result of contestation through processes of representation and labeling. The identity of the “ideal citizen” is constructed through narratives of participation: citizens are invited to be subjects who care about cleanliness, do not litter, and actively engage in communal work. The collective identity of the city is also produced through spatial symbols and slogans. The “Torang Bekeng Bae” program narrates successes that are “enjoyed by the people” and plans to install a marker reading “Welcome to the City of Serambi Madinah” as a strategy for representing the city's identity. Theoretically, this aligns with the representational view that collective identity is produced through symbolic marking and repetition of meaning, so that the process of “who we are” becomes an effect of structured communication practices. (Hall, 1997).

Fifth, the findings show that citizens' resistance to official discourse is not yet clearly visible in institutional news channels. What appears to be more dominant is a narrative of consensus (collaboration, cooperation, success, solidarity) compared to opposing narratives. Therefore, in the next stage of field research, interviews and observations become crucial to capture citizens' experiences, humor/satire, 'silent' strategies, or forms of negotiation that do not appear in official texts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions above, recommendations are formulated at three levels: city government, media/community, and research agenda.

1) Recommendations for the city government and service agencies

- a. Expand access to speaking opportunities and public feedback mechanisms. Since current policy discourse is predominantly produced from the center of authority (Rakorev, instructions), the city government needs to complement policy communication with documented participation channels: public consultation forums at the village level, public response spaces on official portals, and transparent response mechanisms. This is important so that the legitimacy of policies is not only

based on instructions, but also on deliberative processes that recognize citizens' experiences. (Zakiyah et al., 2024).

- b. Avoid implicit stigmatization by balancing framing. In issues related to waste, for example, framing that emphasizes citizen behavior should be balanced with information about governance (service capacity, collection schemes, and drainage improvement), so that responsibility is not entirely directed at citizens as the "cause" of the risk.
 - c. Strengthen transparency in policies that have the potential to be sensitive. Job bidding and the relocation of the mayor's office have socio-political implications (access to positions, land acquisition, potential conflicts of interest). Therefore, the publication of criteria, stages, schedules, and oversight mechanisms needs to be made more detailed, so that the legitimacy of the policy is built not only through claims of urgency but through accountability that can be publicly tested..
- 2) Recommendations for local media, communities, and citizen actors
- a. Encourage public communication literacy and discourse literacy. Community residents, local media, and community organizations can develop critical discussion spaces that help citizens understand how policies are framed, including the implications of moral categories (orderly/neglectful, worthy/unworthy). This can prevent the reproduction of stigma while also strengthening information-based participation..
 - b. Strengthen alternative narrative spaces ethically. Since official news channels tend to focus on institutional narratives, local and community media can provide spaces for citizens' narratives (testimonies, dialogues, citizen reports) while maintaining ethics, verification, and protection of vulnerable parties' identities. This is important so that the contestation of meaning does not move in only one direction..
- 3) Recommendations for further research
- a. Expand primary data to capture resistance and negotiation. Further research needs to include in-depth interviews and observation of community forums to test whether the discourse of collaboration (cooperation, real work, success) is truly accepted, negotiated, or rejected by certain groups.
 - b. Expand the digital arena as a unit of analysis. Considering that the MSME discourse links perceptions of city security with social media feeds, further studies can include analysis of public comments, community posts, and group discussions as data to understand a broader range of symbolic contestation.
 - c. Compare across issues and across areas within the city. For example, compare discourses on public services (sanitation), disasters (waste/floods), and development (city hall/public spaces) to observe consistent patterns and variations in strategies of legitimacy and the production of social identity.

With this recommendation, the article emphasizes that city government communication practices are not just a matter of the effectiveness of information

delivery, but involve how policy realities, legitimacy, and social identity are produced. A more inclusive, transparent, and stigma-sensitive public communication approach will strengthen the quality of local democracy while encouraging meaningful citizen engagement in the City of Gorontalo.

FURTHER STUDY

The follow-up study is aimed at expanding the scope of analysis and deepening the understanding of how power contestation and the formation of social identity operate in communication practices in Gorontalo City. This study has shown that policy narratives in the city's official government channels produce social reality through problem framing, the establishment of solutions considered reasonable, and the reinforcement of legitimacy through target language, moral standards, and city identity symbols. However, since the main findings still rely on a corpus of documents (official news), the next phase of research needs to strengthen the primary database to capture dimensions that are not fully visible in institutional texts, especially resistance, negotiation, and the diverse experiences of citizens.

The first direction for further study is to expand the data arena by bringing together official discourse and citizen discourse. Document analysis should be complemented with in-depth interviews with key actors representing different social positions, such as government officials, neighborhood/RT-RW administrators, community practitioners, traditional leaders, activists, local journalists, as well as residents from groups often affected by service and development policies. This enrichment allows researchers to examine whether the category of the "ideal citizen" (orderly, concerned with cleanliness, productive) produced by official discourse is truly accepted, negotiated, or rejected by citizens. Additionally, observing citizen deliberation forums, cooperation activities, or public service interactions can help researchers capture the dynamics of legitimacy in speech directly, such as who dominates the conversation, who is interrupted, and how identity symbols are used in conversations and actions.

The second direction for further study is to deepen the analysis in the digital arena. Previous findings indicate that social perceptions of order and criminality are also shaped through references to social media. Therefore, further research could include analysis of digital conversations as part of the main data, such as public comments on news posts, community discussions in chat groups, local account posts, and even local memes or humor that could potentially serve as a form of symbolic resistance. This approach would enrich the understanding of social identity because the "us-them" categorization in digital spaces is often more explicit, emotional, and spreads faster than in formal spaces.

The third direction for further study is the development of comparative design. Research can compare different policy issues (e.g., public sanitation services, waste mitigation, urban space development, bureaucratic arrangement) to observe variations in legitimacy strategies and patterns of social identity formation. Comparisons can also be made across urban areas, for example, by comparing districts or regions with different socio-economic characteristics, so

that the relationship between social structure and communication practices can become clearer. If resources allow, further studies can also use a limited mixed-methods approach, such as surveys on perceptions of policy legitimacy or social stigma, to complement qualitative findings and strengthen analytical generalization.

Thus, further studies are expected not only to enrich the data but also to strengthen the theoretical contribution of this research: urban communication can continue to be understood as an arena of symbolic hegemony and complex identity negotiations, so that understanding of Gorontalo City does not stop at the official discourse but encompasses the layered and dynamic social experiences of its citizens.

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