

Transforming Public Communication in Hajj Services: A Contextual Model of KBIHU-Based Information Strategies in North Sumatra

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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of public communication strategies implemented by Hajj and Umrah Guidance Groups (KBIHU) in North Sumatra within the framework of the Hajj implementation policy. While existing research on Hajj services largely focuses on logistics, health, and administrative systems, limited attention has been given to how the state communicates with pilgrims in a manner responsive to socio-cultural diversity and public trust challenges. This study addresses that gap by analysing how information services are designed, delivered, and received in a religious public service context. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis involving Ministry of Religious Affairs officials, KBIHU managers, and Indonesian Hajj Brotherhood Association representatives. The findings reveal that public communication is dominated by one-way dissemination, lacks active involvement of local actors, and suffers from inconsistency in information delivery. These limitations hinder transparency, reduce trust in official channels, and increase reliance on informal sources. The study proposes a more participatory and adaptive communication framework that integrates two-way interaction, cultural sensitivity, and continuous engagement before, during, and after the Hajj season. The theoretical contribution lies in positioning this framework within the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), extending its application to a socio-religious public service setting. This approach strengthens state legitimacy by reframing Hajj communication as administrative information delivery and as a trust-building process grounded in accountability, inclusion, and cultural context.

Keywords

Public Communication Model; Implementation Policy; KBIHU; Information Service

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1. INTRODUCTION

Hajj is not merely a religious ritual but also one of the largest public service projects managed by the state across borders. Each year, Indonesia sends more than two hundred thousand pilgrims to Saudi Arabia within a complex logistics, finance, and bureaucracy system. When the state's obligation meets the spiritual expectations of the people, public communication becomes a key factor—not only to convey information but also to build trust (Kamboh, 2024; Liu, 2021; Paek, 2021).

The study of public communication within the Hajj implementation policy requires a critical



understanding of the complex interactions between the state, pilgrims, and digital media as a field of mediated information and perception. Public communication does not merely convey administrative information but is a strategic instrument in shaping the state's legitimacy and the pilgrims' trust in the Hajj service system. Challenges such as bureaucratic fragmentation, delayed responses, and the dominance of informal channels demand a more adaptive and participatory communication model.

In this framework, W. Timothy Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (2023) becomes highly relevant, as it emphasises the importance of identifying the type of crisis, the level of reputational threat, and the accuracy of messaging in public institutional contexts. Applying SCCT helps assess the effectiveness of the government's—particularly the Ministry of Religious Affairs'—communication responses to sensitive issues during Hajj implementation, such as repatriation delays, flight security, or pilgrim deaths. The researcher utilised Publish or Perish and VOSviewer software to conduct a bibliometric mapping of international literature, identifying previous research clusters and positioning this study within the global academic discourse, particularly concerning the urgency of responsive, integrated, and contextual public communication strategies in serving Indonesian pilgrims.

The public no longer passively awaits information from mosque pulpits or religious affairs offices (KUA). The increasingly fluid digital ecosystem allows information to spread rapidly, not always accurately, and often preceding official clarification (Showail, 2022; Taibah et al., 2020). In such a context, the state must act as a regulator and a public communicator capable of reaching out, explaining, and responding swiftly. Slow, unresponsive, or confusing communication may lead to speculation, unrest, or even apathy toward Hajj services.

This study examines how the KBIHU public communication model in Hajj implementation is carried out in North Sumatra Province, focusing on the information service strategies pilgrims receive. The main objective is to analyse the patterns, actors, media, and information flows operating during pre-departure orientation (*manasik*), departure, pilgrimage implementation, and return. This approach captures how the state delivers information and evaluates the communication system's effectiveness, responsiveness, and integration. The final goal is to formulate a more adaptive, participatory, and contextual public communication model that can be applied in Hajj policies within socially complex regions such as North Sumatra.

During the Hajj period, the dynamics of public discourse on online media show fluctuating intensity. Data from Brand24 recorded that mentions of the Hajj topic across various digital platforms peaked in mid-June, then sharply declined until mid-July. This decline does not necessarily indicate a loss of public interest but reflects a post-ritual interest cycle. What is more interesting, however, is how sentiment within those conversations was distributed.

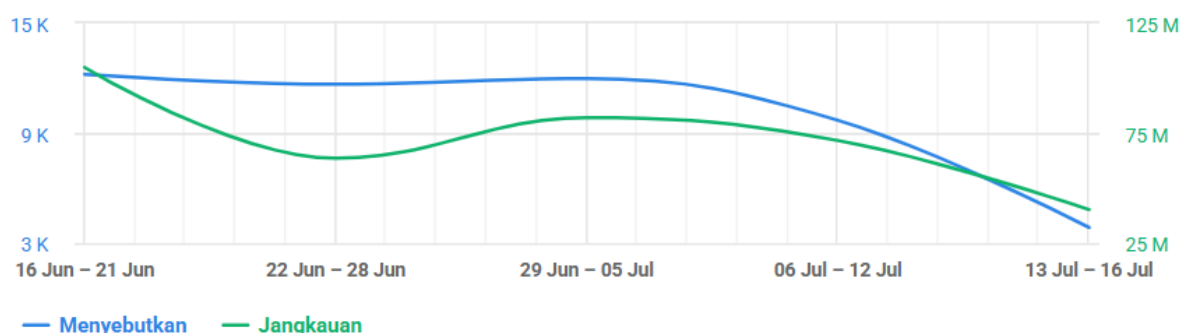


Figure 1. Mentions and Reach of Hajj Discourse in Bahasa (Source: Brand24, 2025)

Figure 1 illustrates the dynamics of Hajj topic mentions and reach in digital spaces from 16 June to 16 July 2025. The blue line indicates the number of mentions, peaking between 16–21 June at approximately 14,800, then gradually decreasing to about 3,400 mentions between 13–16 July. Meanwhile, the green line represents reach data, which hovered around 120 million in the first week and then experienced a steep drop, reaching a low of around 32 million in the third week of July. This pattern indicates that public attention toward Hajj issues surged around the peak of the pilgrimage, then declined drastically after the climax and the pilgrims' return home. The decline can also be interpreted as an indication of the lack of follow-up content or effective communication strategies from the government after the main phase of the pilgrimage concluded, potentially creating an informational void and public speculation (Thabran Talib et al., 2021).

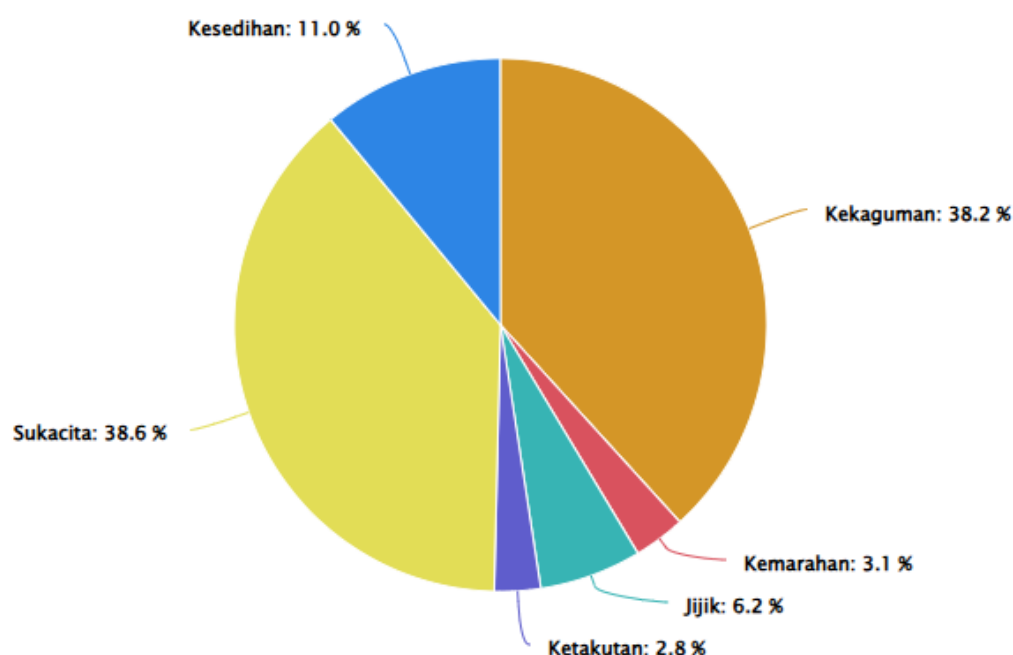


Figure 2. Emotion Analysis in Bahasa (Source: Brand24, 2025)

Figure 2 displays the public's emotional distribution regarding Hajj implementation issues based on Brand24's sentiment analysis. Positive emotions dominate, with joy reaching the highest rate at 38.6%, followed by admiration at 38.2%. Nevertheless, negative emotions are also relatively significant: sadness at 11.0%, disgust at 6.2%, anger at 3.1%, and fear at 2.8%. This data reflects emotional polarisation in public perception. On the one hand, the public appreciates spiritual experiences and certain technical successes. On the other hand, disappointment and concerns arise concerning service quality, safety, and health conditions for pilgrims. Negative emotions indicate that the government's communication strategies have yet to fully meet the demand for complete, accurate, and reassuring information amid high public expectations of Hajj services.

Various strategic issues that emerged during the Hajj implementation reflect diverse public perceptions regarding the services and information provided by the state. Online media monitoring through Brand24 identified several central themes circulating in the digital space, ranging from technical services and administrative information to responses to unexpected events. Each theme holds different emotional weight and communicative implications depending on the narratives constructed and the media through which they are disseminated. The sentiment classification of these contents

illustrates how effectively the state's public communication is tested within a nationally scaled religious context:

Table 1. Themes in the Digital Discourse Landscape

Sentiment	Theme	Short Content	Source	Sentiment
Positive	Flight Services	Garuda's 96.2% punctuality, safe, and comfortable service	idntimes.com	Positive
	Hajj Dormitory Services	Touching and inspirational stories about staff service	TikTok @asrama_hajipadang	Positive
Neutral	Registration Information	Explanation of Hajj registration via SIHATEM and Bimah	jejak-haji.com	Neutral
	Bilateral Policy Info	Prabowo–MBS meeting on Hajj services and Indonesia–Saudi relations	TikTok @inilahcom	Neutral
	Hajj Timeline	Official info from the Saudi's Ministry of Hajj on 1447H Hajj schedule	TikTok @amphuri1	Neutral
	KBIHU Services	Promotion of KBIHU WAC services	TikTok @kbihu_wac	Neutral
Negative	Health Services	418 pilgrims died by day 60, mostly from heart disease	suara.com	Negative
	Security Information	Alleged bomb threat on flight from Jeddah to Soekarno-Hatta Airport	TikTok @kompascom	Negative
	Repatriation Services	760 pilgrims from Banyuwangi stranded in Jeddah, delayed return	detik.com	Negative

Source: Brand24, 2025

Flight services and Hajj dormitory services were the two most positively received aspects. The public appreciated Garuda Indonesia's on-time performance, reaching 96.2%, and humanistic narratives from pilgrims' experiences in the dormitories. These contents mainly circulated via mainstream social media platforms such as TikTok, indicating that storytelling-based communication strategies and operational success stories can effectively strengthen the state's image as a servant of the ummah. In this regard, public communication proves effective when success narratives are empathetically presented and emotionally engaging.

Meanwhile, several neutral themes highlight informative administrative content, such as the SIHATEM application registration procedure, the Saudi authorities' official schedule, and Hajj and Umrah Guidance Groups (KBIHU) promotions. Although these contents did not evoke high emotional reactions, they play an important role as the foundation of policy communication. However, their effectiveness depends heavily on the accessibility of communication channels and the clarity of language and format, considering that the primary audience consists of elderly pilgrims who are often unfamiliar with digital platforms (BBC Indonesia, 2025; Hawari, 2025).

Three other issues generated significant negative sentiment: the high number of pilgrim deaths, the alleged bomb threat on a flight, and delays in the repatriation of Banyuwangi pilgrims. These reflect technical issues and communication crises, as society demands certainty, timely information, and empathy. In such circumstances, the state appears unprepared to manage narratives when information spreads faster than official clarification. Failure to proactively respond to sensitive issues may lead to a breakdown in public trust towards Hajj organisers, especially in the absence of adequate feedback mechanisms.

The public communication system in the Hajj implementation policy still exhibits many gaps, particularly in inter-level coordination and the effectiveness of information delivery to pilgrims (Allam, 2021; Konold & Schwietering, 2021). At the operational level, communication flows tend to be fragmented: information from the central authority does not always reach the regional level in full, while field officers are minimally involved in strategy formulation. As recipients of the information, pilgrims often experience confusion due to the absence of a clear, structured, and equally accessible communication model. The reliance on informal communication channels—such as family WhatsApp groups or hearsay among fellow pilgrims—indicates the weak state-provided public communication system.

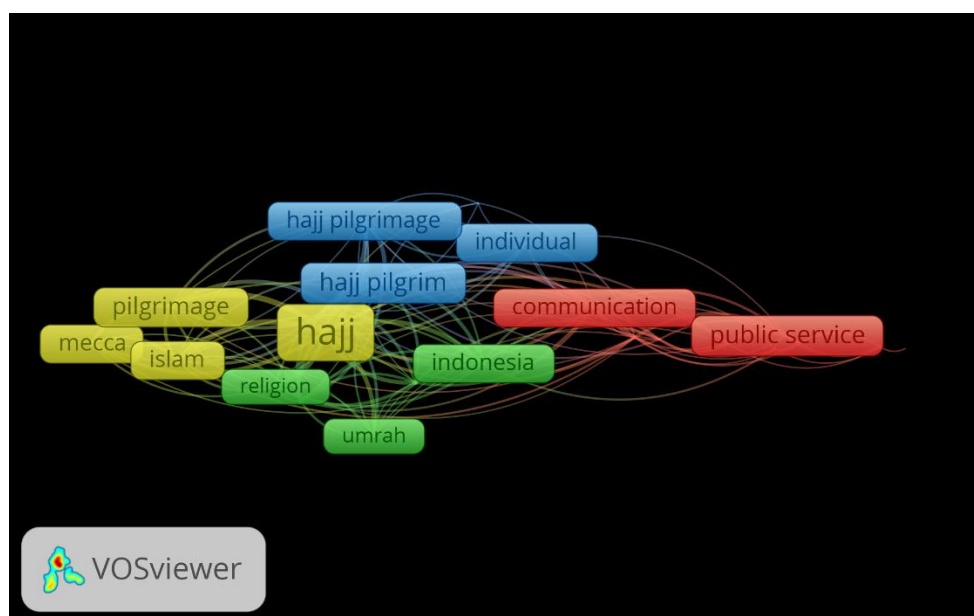


Figure 3. Network Visualisation (Source: VOSviewer, 2025)

The VOSviewer network visualisation illustrates a conceptual map of public communication in Hajj implementation, divided into four main clusters: communication and public service (red), pilgrims and individuals (blue), Indonesian and religious context (green), and core concepts of Hajj and Islam (yellow). The concept of "hajj" lies at the centre of the network, connecting all clusters and affirming its central role in linking individual, religious, communicative, and public service themes. The strong association between "communication" and "public service" with terms such as "hajj pilgrimage" and "individual" underscores the importance of personalised and responsive public communication strategies. The presence of "Indonesia" in the network also suggests that such strategies must be sensitive to local contexts and the socio-cultural characteristics of Indonesian pilgrims, framing public communication in Hajj as a complex process that requires effective multi-aspect integration.

In mapping the global discourse on Hajj-related public communication, a bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer and Publish or Perish software reveals a concentration of studies on logistics, health,

and ICT infrastructures, with limited attention to crisis-responsive communication models grounded in socio-religious contexts. This study addresses that gap by formulating an adaptive communication model based on field data and SCCT application in North Sumatra.

Prior research on Hajj information systems has largely centred on technical and operational aspects, including disaster recovery planning to safeguard infrastructure (Nurhanudin, 2021), evaluations of system effectiveness alongside persistent barriers such as poor network quality and limited digital literacy (Febianti & Farida, 2020), the application of information technology to improve healthcare services for pilgrims (Talib et al., 2021), and the critical yet often neglected issue of personal data privacy in mobile applications (Shambour & Gutub, 2023). Collectively, these studies strongly emphasize technological readiness, efficiency, and security, but leave a significant gap in examining how public communication models integrate such systems to address socio-cultural diversity, trust deficits, and accessibility challenges. North Sumatra provides a critical and representative context for addressing this gap: it combines urban areas with advanced digital infrastructure and rural regions with limited access, encompasses a highly diverse socio-cultural population, and hosts a wide network of KBIHU institutions with varying capacities. These characteristics create a microcosm of Indonesia's broader Hajj service ecosystem, making it an ideal setting to evaluate and refine participatory and adaptive communication strategies that bridge technological solutions with inclusive, trust-based public engagement.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design grounded in the constructivist paradigm (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2020; Weyant, 2022) to capture the subjective meanings and interactional patterns in public communication within the Hajj information service system. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document study (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Informants were selected purposively based on their strategic positions and involvement in Hajj policy implementation, resulting in nine participants comprising officials from the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in North Sumatra, local KBIHU leaders, and representatives of the Indonesian Hajj Brotherhood Association (IPHI). Although relatively small, this sample size aligns with qualitative research principles that prioritise analytical depth over numerical representation, with data saturation achieved when no new substantive themes emerged.

Data collection was complemented by Brand24 monitoring to explore digital discourse and public sentiment on Hajj services in North Sumatra, providing contextual background for the study. Observations focused on interactions during pre-departure orientations (manasik) and departure activities, while document analysis included policy reports, official publications, and media coverage. These sources enriched the triangulation process and informed the refinement of interview questions to ensure relevance to the communication realities faced by pilgrims and service providers.

Table 2. Research Informants

No.	Name	Position
1	Drs. H. Muslim, MM	Head of PHU Division, Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, North Sumatra
2	H. Iyong Sahrial, MA	Head of Registration and Regular Hajj Documents, Regional Office
3	Dr. H. Fakhrizal, MA	Head of Regular Hajj Development and Advocacy, Regional

			Office
4	Dra. Hj. Wan Khairunnisa, MA		Head of Transport, Equipment and Accommodation, Regional Office
5	H. Ilyas Siregar, S.Pd.I, M.Si		Head of Hajj Fund Administration and Information Systems, Regional Office
6	Drs. H. Ilyas Halim, M.Pd		Forum Komunikasi KBIHU North Sumatra
7	Drs. H. Musa Rajekshah, M.Hum		Chairperson of IPHI North Sumatra
8	Hj. Elly Rahmayani, S.Ag		Chairperson of KBIHU Multazam
9	Drs. H. Abidin Azhar Lubis		Chairperson of KBIHU Al-Abidin

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. NVivo 15 was used to code and organise interview transcripts, applying both inductive coding to capture emergent themes and deductive coding guided by the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2022; Coombs & Tachkova, 2023) to identify patterns related to crisis types, perceived responsibility, and communication strategies. Integrating Brand24 outputs with NVivo coding enabled thematic triangulation between online discourse and field data. Member checking with key informants and cross-verification against observation notes, documents, and digital monitoring results (Flick, 2022) ensured credibility and strengthened the validity of findings.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *Public Communication in Information Service Strategies for Pilgrims*

Public communication strategies in Hajj information services have, in principle, been designed through various formal channels—ranging from the Integrated Hajj Information and Computerisation System (Siskohat) and pre-departure orientation (manasik) to the official social media platforms of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. However, in practice, these strategies are often fragmented, bureaucratic, and fail to adequately reach the real needs of pilgrims in the field. Amid growing demands for transparency and timely information, policy implementers face a serious challenge: ensuring that the messages delivered are not only received but also understood, trusted, and actively responded to by pilgrims (Zheng, 2023). To explore these dynamics, this study examines the experiences and perspectives of nine key informants directly involved in the Hajj communication ecosystem in North Sumatra. The interview mapping below illustrates how field actors implement, encounter, and reimagine public communication strategies.

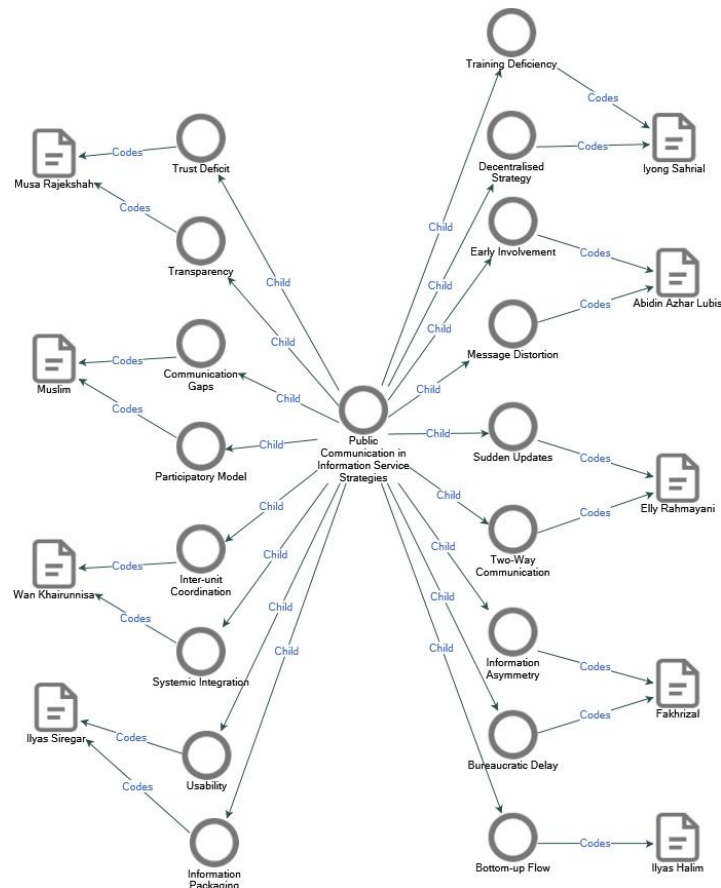


Figure 5. Interview Mapping (Source: NVivo 15, 2024)

The interview mapping indicates that the primary issues in public communication strategies for Hajj implementation revolve around trust deficits and information access inequality. Informants from IPHI emphasised that the lack of trust in official channels drives pilgrims to seek alternative, unverified sources of information. This situation signifies the state's failure to establish participatory and responsive communication that meets the public's emotional and informational needs.

Internal communication gaps between departments further exacerbate this inequality. The lack of systemic coordination among the transportation, accommodation, and technical service divisions results in fragmented messaging received by pilgrims. Critical information is often delayed or inconsistent, especially during the departure and repatriation phases—arguably the most crucial moments in Hajj communication management (Showail, 2022).

Digital instruments such as Siskohat have yet to equitably bridge the informational needs of pilgrims. Technological literacy barriers render the system exclusive to a select few. Information is often presented in a technical and system-oriented format, failing to resonate with the cultural and linguistic dimensions familiar to lay pilgrims (Pamuji et al., 2022; Siregar & Alda, 2023). The Head of the Information Systems Division stressed the importance of usability and repackaging information to be more humanistic and contextual.

Several informants expressed an urgent need for two-way communication approaches. The prevailing top-down system stifles clarification and feedback, making pilgrims passive information recipients. The Chairpersons of KBIHU Multazam and Al-Abidin strongly asserted the importance of involving stakeholders from the outset, not merely during implementation. Dialogic communication practices are believed to significantly improve the overall quality of information services.

Sudden information updates without official announcements worsen the trust crisis. Pilgrims often learn about schedule or policy changes not through formal channels, but via social media or WhatsApp groups. This condition demonstrates that the state's information flow lags behind the real-time needs on the ground. This not only damages institutional credibility but also weakens control over public narratives.

Grassroots-level information distribution experiences distortion due to the lack of communication training for field officers (Irawati et al., 2024). The Head of the Registration Division revealed that standard operating procedures are inconsistently implemented due to limited communication competence among officers. The lack of investment in communication skills development results in message delivery inconsistencies and potential misinterpretations.

A central theme across all interviews is the demand for decentralising communication strategies. Centrally driven models are perceived as unresponsive to local linguistic, cultural, and accessibility-related complexities. Informants from KBIHU and regional implementers highlighted the need to develop flexible, community-based communication systems that accommodate contextual diversity.

The design of a public communication model in Hajj implementation must shift its orientation from mere information transmission to an active and balanced relational ecosystem. Each actor—central institutions, regional technical implementers, and guidance communities—must be positioned as integral components of the information production and distribution network. This approach addresses technical needs and strengthens the state's symbolic legitimacy as a servant of the ummah.

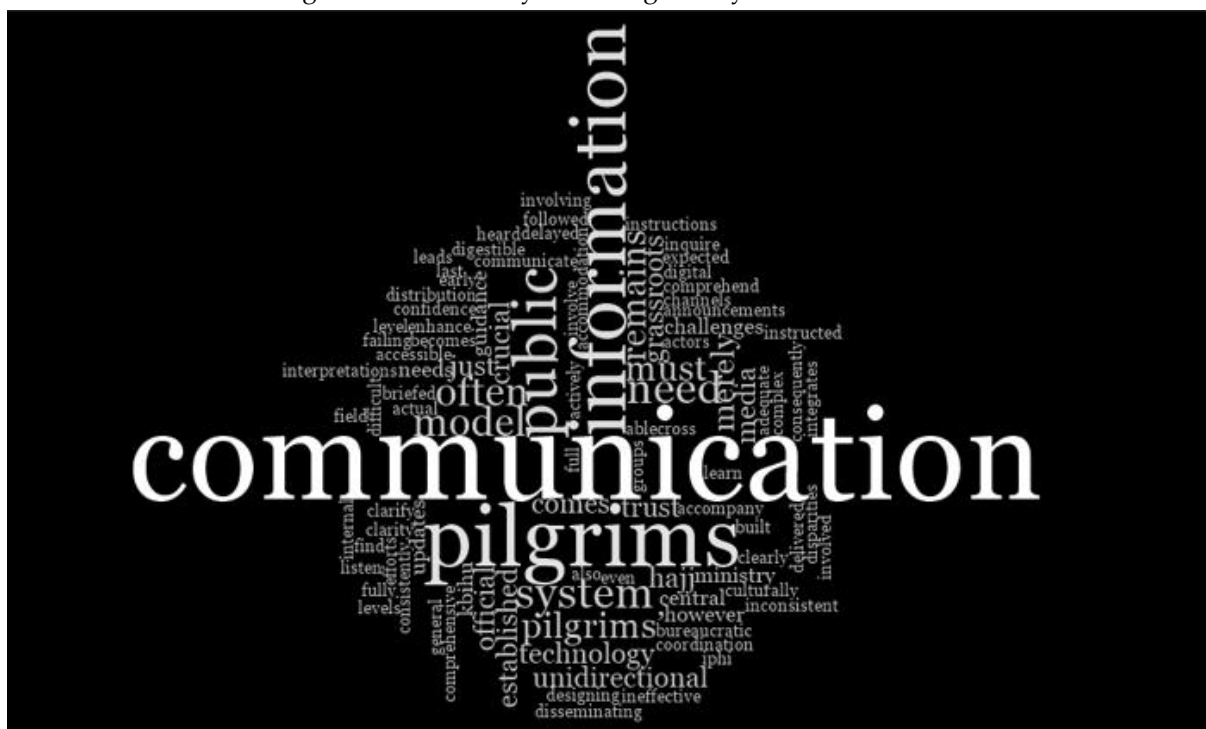


Figure 6. Interview Word Cloud (Source: NVivo 15, 2025)

The thematic word cloud from the interview data affirms that "communication" is the most central in the discourse on Hajj information service strategies. This dominance reflects that the core of problems and solutions in KBIHU Hajj implementation in North Sumatra is deeply intertwined with the effectiveness of public communication. Other key terms, such as "pilgrims," "information," and "public," appear as secondary nodes, reinforcing the analytical framework that Hajj services are not

merely administrative but fundamentally dependent on how critical messages are received and interpreted by pilgrims (Hikmah et al., 2023; Taibah et al., 2020).

The prominence of the word "pilgrims," nearly equal in size to "communication," underscores that the primary actors in this communication system are the pilgrims themselves. Communication discourse in this context is not merely about transmitting technical information, but about how pilgrims' experiences are positioned within communication design. Access inequality, technological literacy gaps, and differences in information interpretation are serious challenges requiring empathetic and decentralised approaches (Abdoh, 2025; Basahel et al., 2021; M. K. Y. Shambour, 2021).

The appearance of terms such as "system," "model," and "bureaucratic" indicates that many informants highlighted structural barriers within the top-down communication mechanisms. The persistence of unidirectional communication systems contributes to miscommunication and misinterpretation on the ground. Terms such as "inconsistent," "unclear," and "instructions" further emphasise that the issue is not merely with content but also with how and when information is delivered.

Terms like "trust," "clarity," and "accessible" suggest that the quality of public communication is heavily influenced by pilgrims' perceptions of institutional transparency and openness. The absence of clear information directly contributes to a trust deficit and an increased reliance on informal sources such as WhatsApp groups or local religious figures. Therefore, communication design must focus on one-way dissemination and the ability to listen, respond, and build interactive two-way dialogue (Gutomo & Harliantara, 2025).

Overall, this word cloud visualises the complexity of Hajj information service communication, which cannot be reduced to a mere administrative task. The key terms represent structural dimensions ("system," "model," "ministry"), cultural dimensions ("trust," "accessible," "clarity"), and practical dimensions ("instructions," "follow," "disseminating"). These three dimensions must be bridged through a holistic and participatory public communication approach to ensure that Hajj services fully address pilgrims' spiritual and practical needs.

The analysis of KBIHU public communication strategies in Hajj information services in North Sumatra reveals systemic challenges—ranging from the lack of two-way channels and inconsistent information to the trust deficit toward official communication platforms. In this context, the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) developed by W. Timothy Coombs offers a relevant analytical lens. SCCT emphasises that the effectiveness of crisis communication is determined by an organisation's ability to recognise public perceptions, build appropriate response strategies based on perceived responsibility, and restore trust through empathetic and accountable communication (Coombs, 2022; Coombs & Tachkova, 2023).

When applied to Hajj implementation, a responsive, dialogic, and contextual public communication model is not merely a technical strategy but a tool for mitigating trust crises and disinformation. Within the SCCT framework, the Ministry of Religious Affairs falls into the "preventable" cluster, as the public perceives the agency as having full control over information flow and service delivery. Therefore, a purely informative communication strategy is inadequate; a rebuilding strategy is needed—one that prioritises transparency, involves local actors such as KBIHU, and integrates digital and face-to-face channels to create a resilient and adaptive communication ecosystem.

Several key findings from the field align with SCCT's taxonomy of crisis response strategies. For instance, during sudden schedule changes, the Ministry's limited reaction to the widespread reliance

on informal communication channels—such as WhatsApp groups reflects a gap where a rebuild strategy should have been applied. Rather than acknowledging the delay and engaging in corrective messaging, communication remained stagnant and top-down, thereby missing the opportunity to restore trust through transparency and direct engagement.

The persistence of contradictory information between internal units—such as transportation, accommodation, and technical services—illustrates an implicit diminish strategy, where confusion is treated as a minor issue rather than a critical failure in inter-agency coordination. SCCT warns that underestimating stakeholder expectations in preventable crises can intensify reputational risk, particularly when service recipients depend highly on timely and accurate information. Conversely, instances where the Ministry highlights positive achievements—such as Garuda Indonesia's 96.2% flight punctuality or touching stories from Hajj dormitory staff—represent a clear bolstering strategy, attempting to reinforce the agency's credibility through narrative framing.

However, the dominance of one-way communication across most platforms indicates that rebuild strategies remain underutilised, even when public sentiment calls for accountability and reassurance. To effectively apply SCCT in the Hajj context, communication must move beyond reactive dissemination and integrate proactive, dialogic approaches that respond not.

3.2. KBIHU Hajj Information Service Communication Model in North Sumatra

The KBIHU communication model for Hajj information services in North Sumatra reflects the relational patterns, message flows, and actors involved in delivering information from the government to the pilgrims. This model extends beyond formal structure; it demonstrates how communication addresses the pilgrims' contextual needs—technical, emotional, and social. This study aims to map the operational model in the field, including the dominant forms of communication, the authoritative sources referenced, and how policy implementers perceive their roles within the public communication system. The interview mapping below outlines how nine strategic informants within the Hajj ecosystem in North Sumatra have constructed, implemented, and critiqued this model.

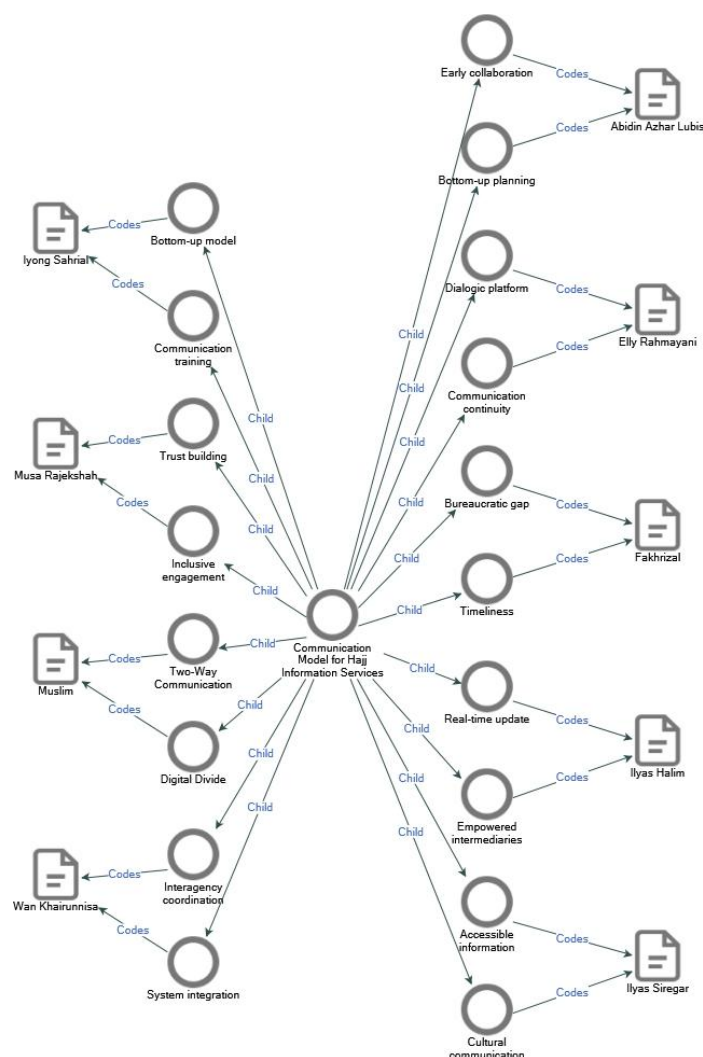


Figure 7. Interview Mapping (Source: NVivo 15, 2025)

The communication model for Hajj information services in North Sumatra demonstrates a complex structure involving various actors, media, and strategies (Hussain et al., 2021; Setiawan, 2021). The interview map analysed from nine key informants reveals that the success of a communication system does not solely depend on information availability, but also on how it is designed, delivered, and received within diverse social and cultural contexts. There is a shared awareness among implementers that the communication model can no longer rely solely on top-down systems, but must be rooted in participatory principles and the active involvement of local actors from the planning stage.

A bottom-up model emerged as a crucial element in several interviews, particularly in communication planning and the involvement of Hajj guidance groups. This strategy underscores the importance of early collaboration to ensure message alignment with field realities. Early engagement of groups like KBIHU encourages the formation of dialogic platforms, enabling information to be exchanged vertically and horizontally. This fosters communication continuity between the state and the pilgrims through trained and trusted intermediaries (Khakim, 2025).

The importance of communication sustainability arose in response to seasonal and reactive communication patterns. Important updates, such as schedule changes or policy shifts, are often received suddenly and unequally. In such cases, a communication model that ensures information continuity becomes essential so that all parties involved are not merely passive recipients but part of an

active, adaptive information navigation system (Hrivnák et al., 2021; Zhang, 2022). This model must also address bureaucratic delays that hinder real-time information dissemination.

Access inequality and the digital divide remain primary obstacles. Several informants stressed the need for user-friendly systems for those with low digital literacy. Accessibility is a key principle in the model, including presentation formats that are easily understood and aligned with pilgrims' communication habits. This dimension cannot be separated from cultural and linguistic contexts; therefore, the proposed model must integrate a culturally based communication approach.

System integration across departments within the Ministry of Religious Affairs is also a significant concern. Poor internal coordination often results in contradictory information, which confuses pilgrims. Thus, the ideal communication model requires integrated information governance across divisions, from central to regional levels. The system must link information chains, consistently, and traceably for all stakeholders (Moises et al., 2024).

The need for communication training for field officers emerged as a key strategy for strengthening the model. These officers, who serve as the front line of communication, are often inadequately equipped with public communication skills, resulting in ineffective or misunderstood messaging. The model should include regular communication training programmes focused on practical skills, cultural sensitivity, and adapting to emergencies (Abdoh, 2025; Syukri et al., 2025).

The trust dimension is the foundation for effective public communication in Hajj services. Several informants highlighted the need to build trust in official information channels. Such trust does not arise solely from authority but is built through openness, responsiveness, and message inclusiveness. Therefore, the communication model must embody inclusive engagement principles that authentically bridge government authority with the social experiences of pilgrims (Alghamdi & Mostafa, 2024; Hikmah et al., 2023; Syukri et al., 2025).

The Hajj information service communication model in North Sumatra reflects the need for a public communication design that is not only bureaucratically efficient but also socially adaptive. The interview mapping shows that the success of information services depends on technical integration, cultural sensitivity, and participatory engagement. These findings affirm that communication is not merely a tool for message transmission but a relational arena shaping trust, understanding, and collaboration in large-scale religious services.

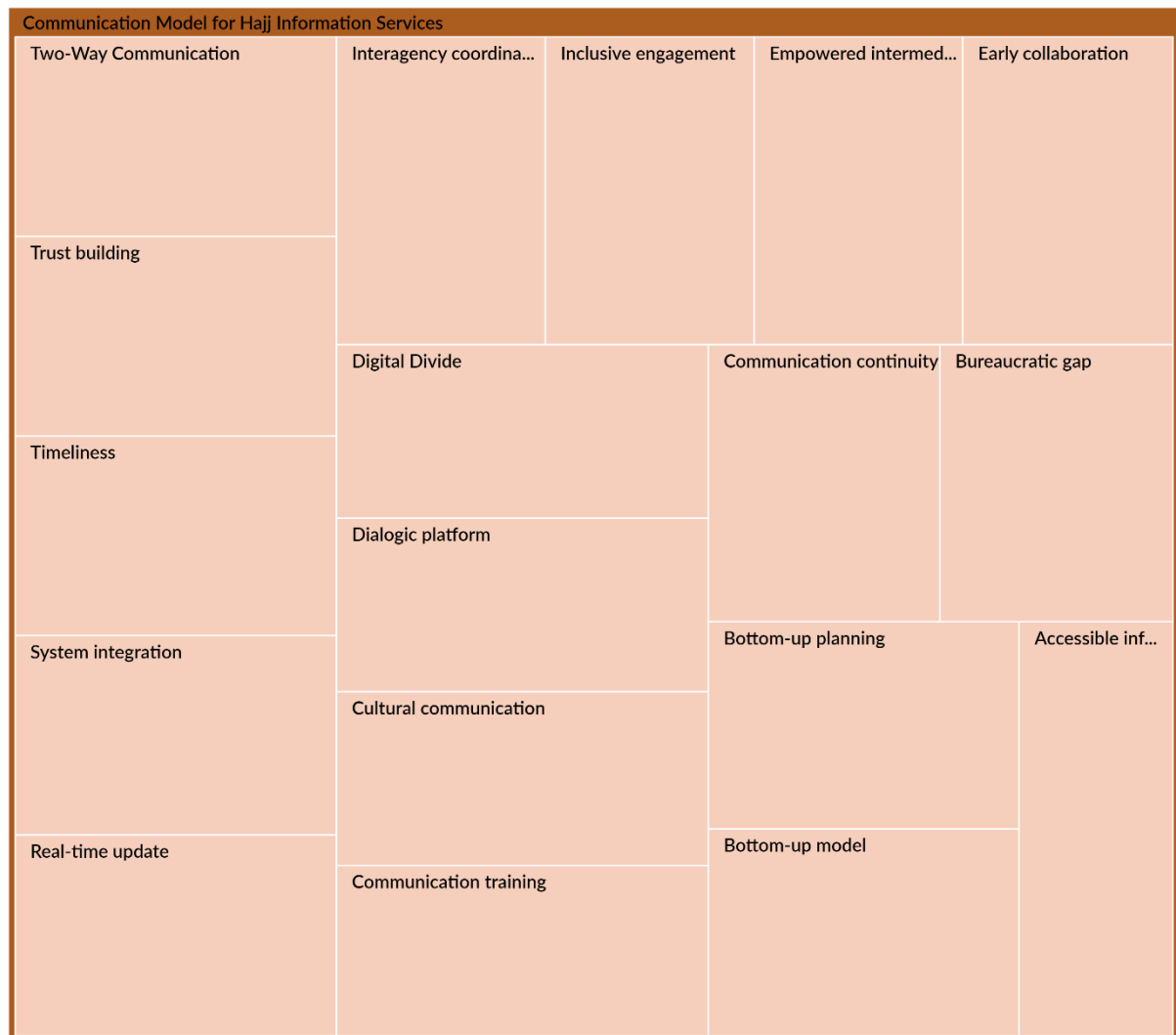


Figure 8. Hierarchical Interview Analysis (Source: NVivo 15, 2025)

As depicted in the hierarchical chart, the communication model for Hajj information services in North Sumatra demonstrates dense meaning within participation, institutional interconnection, and intermediary empowerment. The dimensions of two-way communication, inter-agency coordination, and inclusive engagement occupy the largest portions of the structure, indicating the dominant need for reciprocal communication, inter-unit synergy, and multi-stakeholder involvement. This pattern reflects an effort to address the trust deficit previously caused by top-down, bureaucratic communication. Such informal preference signals a failure of institutional communication, requiring a rebuild approach through dialogic engagement. In the complex context of Hajj, communication must deliver information and manage pilgrims' perceptions, expectations, and experiences comprehensively. This calls for a rebuild strategy under SCCT, emphasising timely disclosure and trust restoration.

The dimensions of trust building, the digital divide, and empowered intermediaries reinforce that communication challenges are not only structural but also socio-cultural and technological. Trust in official channels is often low due to delayed or inaccurate information delivery (Poonia et al., 2024). The digital divide worsens this situation, especially for elderly pilgrims or those from regions with limited digital literacy. Thus, intermediaries such as KBIHU must be systematically empowered to serve as active, trusted communication nodes. This challenge can be interpreted as a reputational risk that demands a rebuild strategy with an inclusive, accessible design.

Time-related communication issues emerged in keywords such as timeliness, real-time update, and communication continuity. These elements illustrate that the success of public communication is not measured by message volume alone, but by how quickly and consistently information is acquired. Delays not only cause disinformation but also reduce institutional credibility. Hence, a communication system responsive to timing and urgent situations is a prerequisite for modern Hajj services.

This hierarchy also presents dialogic platforms and cultural communication as approaches that blend technical and cultural aspects of the communication process. In multicultural regions like North Sumatra, communication approaches must accommodate linguistic diversity, interaction norms, and local meaning systems. Dialogic platforms serve as interactive spaces between the state and society, where communication is not only top-down but also includes feedback to reinforce policy legitimacy (Ravi et al., 2025).

Bureaucratic dynamics are reflected through bureaucratic gap, system integration, and bottom-up planning. These indicate that the obstacles often stem not from a lack of information, but from inter-agency coordination and policy-making processes that overlook grassroots actors. Alongside rebuilding trust through coordination, bolstering strategies may highlight successful integrations already achieved. Bottom-up planning is proposed as an antithesis to the dominant top-down approach, inviting all stakeholders to participate from the outset, rather than merely serving as implementers.

Human resource readiness is addressed through communication training as a form of internal capacity building. Many field officers possess administrative skills but lack public communication techniques, including crisis management, public rhetoric, and conflict mediation. Communication training should not be treated as a complement but as a crucial element to ensure all actors can deliver messages accurately and persuasively. According to SCCT, organisations must restore credibility by investing in human resource training—an archetypal rebuild response.

Accessible information is the culmination of all communication efforts, as communication fails regardless of message format or intent, if pilgrims cannot understand and access it. Simplifying technical terms, translating into local languages, and using visual media are strategies that must be institutionalised. This is particularly vital in worship contexts that demand procedural compliance and strict coordination.

The hierarchical findings of this model align with the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which highlights the importance of communicative responses based on crisis levels and organisational responsibility. In the context of Hajj services, the government bears administrative and reputational responsibility. SCCT recommends communication strategies grounded in accountability, transparency, and corrective actions—all represented in trust, two-way interaction, and local actor empowerment. When the public feels heard and the information received is accurate and timely, the crisis of trust can be eliminated and policy legitimacy significantly enhanced.

3.3. Discussion

The main findings of this study reveal that public communication strategies in the Hajj implementation policy in North Sumatra continue to face various challenges, particularly in the areas of timeliness, accuracy, and trust. This situation aligns with the core principles of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which emphasises the importance of mapping crisis types and organisational responsibility in developing appropriate communication strategies. When the government—specifically the Ministry of Religious Affairs—fails to provide timely and credible information, reputational risks increase, especially as the public perceives the institution to hold full

control over the Hajj service system. According to SCCT, this situation falls within the *preventable cluster*, requiring a communication strategy based on accountability and *rebuilding*.

To illustrate the alignment between empirical findings and the SCCT framework, Table X maps the identified issues and opportunities in Hajj communication to the corresponding crisis types and recommended response strategies. This visualisation clarifies how the PARTAD model operationalises SCCT principles in addressing preventable crises while leveraging opportunities to bolster public trust:

Table 2. Alignment of Empirical Findings with SCCT Strategies

Empirical Finding	SCCT Crisis Type	Appropriate SCCT Strategy	Evidence from the Study
Delays and inconsistency in official communication, leading to reliance on informal channels	Preventable	Rebuild – acknowledge shortcomings, provide corrective actions, and foster dialogue.	Pilgrims received schedule changes via WhatsApp before the official announcement; the lack of timely clarification reduced trust.
Contradictory information between internal units (transport, accommodation, technical services)	Preventable	Rebuild – strengthen inter-unit coordination and transparency	Field officers reported fragmented messaging, confusing the departure and repatriation phases
Digital divide and low technological literacy among elderly pilgrims	Victim (external constraint) / Preventable (design gap)	Bolster – highlight inclusive efforts; Rebuild – redesign systems for accessibility	Siskohat is effective administratively but inaccessible for certain groups (Febianti & Farida, 2020)
Lack of communication training for field officers	Preventable	Rebuild – capacity building and cultural sensitivity training	Officers reported a lack of public communication skills, risking misinterpretation of messages
Positive narratives on punctual flights and dormitory services	Opportunity to bolster	Bolster – reinforce credibility through success stories	Garuda's 96.2% punctuality and dormitory service stories shared on social media improved public perception

The dominance of one-way communication in Hajj operations has proven insufficient in addressing the complex informational needs of pilgrims. In the SCCT framework, *deny* or *diminish* strategies—typically defensive—may exacerbate trust crises. Instead, *rebuild* strategies are required, which acknowledge shortcomings, provide transparent explanations, and foster public participation. This is supported by the findings of Talib et al. (2021), which argue that service efficiency can only be achieved when information and communication systems are underpinned by transparency and active two-way interaction. Thus, the state's legitimacy in Hajj implementation is not solely determined by technical success, but by its ability to build empathetic and participatory communication.

Digital divides and technological literacy gaps are significant findings in this study that undermine the effectiveness of official digital platforms such as Siskohat. The study by Febianti and Farida (2020) showed that while Siskohat is administratively effective, it lacks social inclusivity. This suggests that

successful public communication depends not only on technology but also on communication design that bridges the social and cultural gaps among pilgrims. In the SCCT framework, communication strategies must be contextualised to audience characteristics—including education level, age, and cultural background—to avoid massive information distortion and misperception.

Furthermore, the study's finding on the lack of communication training for field officers echoes Shambour and Gutub's (2023) analysis, which reveals that digital communication in religious sectors often neglects humanistic and interpersonal ethics. SCCT underscores the importance of *internal preparedness*, referring to the readiness of internal actors to manage communication crises. When officers lack adequate public communication skills, the risk of narrative errors increases and information crises become more difficult to control. Therefore, communication policy design must incorporate continuous training programmes that address both the technical and affective aspects of public messaging.

An ideal public communication model in Hajj implementation must not only prioritise the speed and volume of information, but also the state's capacity to build a dialogic, flexible, and community-based communication system. This study highlights the importance of a bottom-up approach in communication strategy design, positioning local actors such as KBIHU and IPHI as strategic partners rather than mere executors. This aligns with SCCT's *inclusive engagement* principle, which advocates involving trusted actors to mitigate potential crisis escalation and strengthen the legitimacy of public information.

Overall, this study affirms that public communication strategies in Hajj policy in North Sumatra remain administratively oriented and insufficiently responsive to field realities. When spiritual expectations meet bureaucratic complexity, communication crises become inevitable unless managed with transparency, participation, and cultural adaptation. SCCT offers a relevant conceptual framework for reforming these strategies to address reputational risks and fully respond to the needs of pilgrims. Thus, reformulating public communication models in the Hajj context is not only a technocratic necessity but also a moral imperative.

This study offers a construction of a public communication model that is adaptive, participatory, and contextual in the Hajj implementation policy, particularly in information services for pilgrims in North Sumatra. This model responds to the weaknesses of the top-down approach that has long dominated, incorporating communication sustainability, local actor engagement, and cultural sensitivity as its core pillars. The table below presents the novelty of the model developed, comparing the characteristics of conventional public communication models with the findings of this study:

Table 3. Novelty of the PARTAD Model (Participatory and Adaptive Communication Model for Hajj Services)

Communication Aspect	Conventional Model	Model Developed from This Study
Communication Approach	Top-down, one-way	Two-way (dialogic), participatory, community-based
Information Channels	Focused on formal and official digital media	Integrative: formal, informal, digital, and cultural
Message Design	Technical, bureaucratic, lacking empathy	Humanistic, contextual, accessible and comprehensible
Role of Local Actors	Passive policy implementers	Active communication nodes and strategy co-designers

Crisis Response	Reactive, slow, inconsistent across units	Proactive, integrated, adaptive to field dynamics
Information Continuity	Fragmented, seasonal (Hajj-only)	Continuous year-round (pre, during, post Hajj)
Communication Training	Unsustained, administrative-task oriented	Regular, based on public communication and local culture

Source: Researcher's Analysis (2025)

The PARTAD model offers a more participatory and adaptive public communication approach to Hajj service implementation, replacing the one-way bureaucratic communication model long adopted by government institutions. In the conventional model, information delivery was top-down, closed, and offered limited space for clarification. PARTAD places dialogue as its main principle, involving grassroots groups such as KBIHU and IPHI in both designing and disseminating information. The model goes beyond message accuracy to emphasise cultural sensitivity, technological accessibility, and the emotional dimensions of the pilgrim experience as critical components of public information delivery.

The primary novelty of PARTAD lies in its inclusive and multi-channel communication structure. It not only relies on formal media such as official websites or digital applications, but also leverages social media, interpersonal communication, and informal community-based channels as credible communication nodes. By recognising informal information pathways such as WhatsApp groups, local clerics, or shared pilgrim narratives, the model brings the state closer to the communication realities of the public. This approach narrows the symbolic distance between authority and citizens and accelerates response to disinformation or public anxiety.

Moreover, PARTAD emphasises the importance of communication continuity before, during, and after the Hajj. It integrates communication training for field officers as part of the system and demands message designs that are comprehensible to pilgrims of various educational backgrounds and age groups. Responsiveness to crises—such as delays in repatriation or health issues among pilgrims—is also embedded in the model's adaptive structure, aligning with SCCT's *rebuilding strategy* principles. Thus, PARTAD serves not only as a technical solution but as a conceptual proposition for rebuilding public trust through open, well-planned, and meaningful communication.

4. CONCLUSION

This study contributes uniquely to the fields of public communication and religious policy by integrating the principles of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) into a socio-religious service context through the formulation of the PARTAD Model (Participatory and Adaptive Communication Model for Hajj Services). Unlike previous models that focus predominantly on administrative efficiency or technological infrastructure, the PARTAD Model foregrounds trust-building, cultural sensitivity, and continuous engagement as core elements of communication design. This theoretical advancement not only bridges the gap between crisis communication theory and religious public services but also offers a replicable framework for addressing the complex interplay between administrative structures and the socio-cultural dynamics of service recipients.

The practical and policy implications of this study are significant for the Ministry of Religious Affairs and related stakeholders. Adopting the PARTAD Model can enhance service delivery by embedding two-way dialogue, empowering local actors such as KBIHU and IPHI as co-designers of communication strategies, and ensuring that information is accessible across varying levels of digital

literacy. Policy reforms should prioritise institutionalising communication training for field officers, strengthening inter-unit coordination to avoid contradictory messages, and diversifying information channels to include both formal and culturally embedded communication pathways. Implementing these measures can improve responsiveness during crises, enhance public trust, and reinforce the legitimacy of the state in delivering large-scale religious services.

Future research should extend this study's scope through comparative provincial analyses to determine how socio-cultural and infrastructural variations influence the applicability of the PARTAD Model. Quantitative testing is also recommended to measure the model's effectiveness in improving trust, timeliness, and accuracy of public communication, using metrics such as digital engagement rates, crisis resolution times, and stakeholder satisfaction indices. Additionally, mixed-method approaches could be employed to explore the perspectives of a broader range of stakeholders, including pilgrims with diverse educational backgrounds, to further refine and adapt the model for national-scale application. These targeted research directions will not only validate the model's robustness but also enhance its scalability as a strategic tool for religious policy and public communication reform.

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