

Human Interest Feature as Public Communication Strategy Hajj Pilgrimage 2024

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Abstract

In the organization of the Hajj pilgrimage, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia consistently involves mass media. The Ministry recruits journalists from both mainstream media and Islamic community media to become part of the Hajj Organizing Committee (PPIH). In the 2024 Hajj season, these journalists formed the Media Center Hajj (MCH), which serves as the government's frontline in conducting public communication with pilgrims and the broader public. MCH content is published across various platforms, with a significant portion presented in the form of human interest features. These stories are evaluated daily by the Ministry's Public Relations team, and underperformance may affect the media's future participation in Hajj coverage. In recent years, the Ministry has emphasized human interest stories, recognizing the numerous inspiring narratives among pilgrims that resonate strongly with the public and significantly shape perceptions of the Hajj pilgrimage. The objective of these communication efforts is to foster positive public perception and enhance satisfaction with the Hajj experience, despite its logistical complexity involving 241,000 pilgrims. This study explains how the Ministry of Religious Affairs, through the MCH, strategically employs human interest features as a key tool for public communication during the 2024 Hajj. The researchers, who participated directly as members of the MCH, conclude that this strategy was effective in positively influencing public perception and presenting the Hajj implementation as successful.

Keywords: Hajj 2024, PPIH, Public Communication, Human Interest, Feature

INTRODUCTION

The organization of the Hajj pilgrimage is a major endeavor undertaken by the Indonesian government. The Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama/Kemenag) establishes the Hajj Organizing Committee (Panitia Penyelenggara Ibadah Haji/PPIH) to oversee the implementation process. This committee comprises various elements, including representatives from Kemenag, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Transportation, mass media, Islamic community organizations (Ormas), and others. In 2024, Indonesia sent 241,000 pilgrims to the Holy Land, making it the largest contingent of Hajj pilgrims in the world and the largest in Indonesia's history. Originally, the Hajj quota for Indonesia was 221,000. However, following a diplomatic meeting between President Joko Widodo and King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, an additional 20,000 pilgrims were granted, bringing the total to 241,000.

The PPIH central team—known as the Saudi Arabia PPIH—recruited 1,200 Hajj officers, divided into eight service units: health services, catering services, accommodation services, disability services, services for the elderly and emergency assistance (PKP3JH), religious guidance, arrival and departure logistics, pilgrim protection services, transportation services, and the Media Center Hajj (MCH). These officers were selected through a rigorous recruitment process by Kemenag. Health officers were selected by the Ministry of Health.

Approximately 30,000 applicants registered to become Hajj officers during the January 2024 recruitment period. Ultimately, 1,200 were chosen and subsequently participated in a 10-day technical training session at Pondok Gede Hajj Dormitory in March 2024, during the month of Ramadan. This study focuses on the Media Center Hajj (MCH) service unit. MCH members consist of public relations staff from Kemenag, journalists from mainstream media, and journalists from Islamic-based media outlets. A three-stage selection process was used to determine the final team. From 180 applicants, 69 were selected. The first stage involved administrative screening, requiring participants to hold a press competency certificate and represent media verified by the Press Council. The second stage involved presenting a proposed Hajj coverage program. The final stage included a computer-assisted test (CAT) on Hajj knowledge and an interview.

Hajj publication is a top priority for Kemenag. The Minister of Religious Affairs Yaquut Cholil Qoumas appointed his special staff for media and communications, Wibowo Prasetyo, to supervise this initiative. All Hajj officers—not only MCH—were required to have active social media accounts and to post updates related to their services, using the official tagline *“Elderly-Friendly Hajj”*. Kemenag's Public Relations division also provided photo and video materials for use by the officers. The 10-day training successfully instilled a strong sense of loyalty among the officers, including MCH members.

They were taught that their primary duty was to serve the pilgrims, and any opportunity to perform Hajj themselves was merely a "bonus." This principle was internalized among all Hajj officers. In the field, MCH members were assigned to three working areas: Makkah, Madinah, and the Jeddah airport. Their deployment lasted between 48 to 52 days. A key agreement among MCH members was the non-exclusivity of news. Any news, photos, or videos obtained by one member were to be shared and could be used freely by all others. This enabled massive media coverage, especially since most participating outlets were part of large media syndicates. For instance, *Harian Disway* is part of a network of 76 online media outlets, ensuring wide distribution of each published article.

In addition to straight news reporting, every MCH member was also required to produce feature stories. Hajj reporting had to be informative, educational, and entertaining. According to TEMPO Institute, feature stories are a blend of news and opinion, based on facts but presented through storytelling with a human-interest angle and literary language. This genre is also referred to as "special writing," "feature article," or "narrative journalism." The Ministry did not prohibit critical or conflict-based stories as long as they were accurate and confirmed. All Kemenag officials were obligated to respond to verification requests from MCH journalists. All relevant contact information, including that of the Minister, was accessible to MCH members. The Hajj communication system (*Siskohat*) data was

also openly accessible—both to MCH members and the public—including information on pilgrims, arrival and departure schedules, health conditions, missing pilgrims, and fatalities. Some features published in *Harian Disway* were not solely the result of *Disway* reporters' fieldwork but were also written based on reports from other MCH members or public relations staff of Kemenag and then adapted to *Disway*'s unique narrative style. The angle of these stories typically focused on the pilgrims' journey, joy in the Holy Land, Hajj officers' dedication, and various service innovations.

Kemenag hoped that these stories would influence public perception in a positive and widespread manner. According to MCH Coordinator Khoeron, MCH produced a total of 23,522 news stories—40% of which were feature stories. These were distributed across various platforms including print and online media, television, YouTube, and social media. This study analyzes the feature stories produced by the MCH and published in *Harian Disway*—both in print and digital editions (disway.id and harian.disway.id). The researcher, a journalist from *Disway*, participated directly as a member of the 2024 MCH team. *Harian Disway* is part of the *Disway* National Network (DNN), which includes 76 affiliated media outlets founded by prominent media figure Dahlan Iskan on July 4, 2020. The publication quickly rose in popularity, reaching the top 20 national online media rankings within two years. *Disway* is known for its distinctive storytelling style and focus on

human interest narratives. The 2024 Hajj season marked Disway's first participation in MCH, and it was selected on its first attempt. A special Hajj 2024 coverage channel was created on disway.id and syndicated across the entire DNN network. Additionally, Disway published 50 daily feature reports in print and e-paper editions between May 8 and June 30, 2024. Disway's Hajj news was also adapted into social media content on Instagram (@harian.disway.id) and TikTok (@harian.disway), and broadcasted through local TV networks within the DNN.

The aim of this research is to analyze whether the features published by Disway aligned with the public communication objectives of PPIH 2024. Kemenag seeks to maintain public accountability through strategic communication, aiming to shape public perception that the 2024 Hajj was successfully implemented and satisfying for the pilgrims and the wider public.

Was this strategy effective? The 2024 Hajj Pilgrim Satisfaction Index (Indeks Kepuasan Jamaah Haji Indonesia tahun 2024), conducted by Statistics Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik/BPS), released on September 20, 2024, reported a score of 88.20—categorized as "very satisfactory" and up by 2.37 points from 2023. While media coverage alone may not be solely responsible for this outcome, it contributes significantly to shaping perception. BPS Director of Information Systems, Joko Parmiyanto, confirmed that the survey also included questions about media coverage. The BPS survey comprehensively assessed all service sectors, including MCH. The

involvement of journalists in Hajj organizing dates back to 1950. A historical journal article published by Universitas Jambi in July 2024, titled: *Pemberitaan Haji dalam Surat Kabar Pedoman Tahun 1950 (Hajj News in Pedoman Newspaper ini 1950)* by Ulum Fasih, reveals that eight journalists were included in the Hajj committee—then known as PPPHI—to report on the pilgrims' experiences abroad, helping their families stay informed during the months-long voyage by sea.

Previous studies on the Hajj Media Center have also been published, such as in Multazam: Jurnal Manajemen Haji dan Umrah (Multazam: Journal of Hajj and Umrah Management), under the title *Strategi Komunikasi dalam Penyelenggaraan Ibadah Haji untuk Menangkal Disinformasi dan Hoaks (Communication Strategy in Hajj Implementation to Combat Disinformation and Hoaxes)*. That study described the 2023 Hajj season, where 65 journalists competed with the social media narratives of pilgrims and the public, addressing disinformation such as the alleged abandonment of pilgrims in Madinah. During the 2023 peak Hajj season in Muzdalifah, delays occurred. MCH provided balanced coverage by explaining the issues were caused by Mashariq's failure in managing transportation. Though MCH is on the front line of information correction, it has traditionally relied on conventional news formats, limiting its speed in countering misinformation. The suggestion from prior research was to utilize more social media content and features to

effectively combat disinformation. For the 2024 Hajj, MCH enhanced its output by producing more human interest features, which are seen as more emotionally resonant and “evergreen” or timeless compared to rapidly outdated straight news.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Public Communication and Government Public Relations

According to Mulyana (2016, p. 5), citing Rudolph F. Verderber, communication has two main functions. The first is social in nature, encompassing purposes such as pleasure, establishing bonds with others, and maintaining relationships. The second function is decision-making. Through communication, individuals can decide whether or not to act at a given time. Verderber adds that, except in cases of emotional reaction, decision-making usually involves information processing, information exchange, and often, persuasion. At its core, communication strategy centers on the dissemination of messages or information. Governments utilize communication strategies to engage their audiences and convey policies they have established (Zahra, 2023). The objective and definition of information give rise to studies of interconnected sequences of actions or events in the communication process. One of the most significant contributions in this field comes from Harold Lasswell, who described the communication process as: “who says what to

whom through what channel with what effect” (West & Turner, 2007, p. 31).

From this model, five key elements of communication can be identified. In the context of governmental or political communication, these are:

a. The Government as Communicator

Communicators can be individuals or institutions, including members of the legislature or executive branch. A mayor or any government official may serve as a communicator.

b. Messages Conveyed to the Public

These messages can take the form of written statements or programs that reinforce particular government positions or policies.

c. Choice of Media and Communication Channels

Marshall McLuhan famously stated, “the medium is the message,” meaning the method of message delivery influences the meaning of the message itself (Rohkman & Surahmat, 2016, Politik Bahasa Penguasa, p. 8).

d. The Target Audience

The audience is the intended recipient of the message and is expected to support the government’s programs. Denis McQuail (2005) in Wahid (2016, p. 7) emphasizes the audience as a critical factor in the success of communication.

e. The Intended Effects on the Audience

These effects include fostering understanding of governmental systems, policies, or political support, which may manifest as thoughts, feelings, or behaviors influenced by the message received.

Lasswell's model is linear, viewing communication as a transfer of messages rather than meaning. The effects on recipients are influenced by all elements of the communication process. A change in one element alters the outcome. A message delivered through different media or to different audiences may yield different effects (Fiske, 2014, p. 50). James Taylor, as referenced by Littlejohn and Foss (2016, p. 367), sees organizing as a process of interaction. Taylor explains that organizing occurs when two individuals interact over a shared concern, called co-orientation—a mutual orientation toward a common object. When meaning is not aligned between parties, communication becomes ineffective.

Given the dynamic nature of public communication, equally dynamic message delivery tools are required. Government communication should reflect this inherent dynamism in both the elements and processes of communication.

In political communication practices, communicators must analyze their audience, adapt their messaging, and construct appropriate arguments. Ruben and Stewart (2014, p. 394) emphasize that effective public communication always considers the audience. A basic

requirement is understanding the geographic context of the audience, which aligns with the general view that communication effectiveness depends on how well communicators know their audience. Audience characteristics such as education, cultural background, age, and others play important roles. For example, education level correlates with an audience's capacity to receive and understand messages. Thus, communicators who can effectively analyze their audience are better equipped to craft messages, choose appropriate channels, and ultimately influence outcomes.

Public communication can also be considered a component of government public relations strategy. According to Mardiana et al. (2018), a well-executed public relations strategy can positively shape public perception of an organization. Communication planning is essential for public relations practitioners in achieving communication objectives. Public relations practice involves continuous, systematic efforts to foster goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its audiences (Andriani & Marchellina, 2023).

Mass Media and Public Communication

According to Kustiawan et al. (2022), the realms of politics and mass media maintain a mutually dependent and influential relationship. Mass media, with its persuasive function, has the ability to shape public opinion and influence societal perspectives on current political issues. This implies that the political sphere and mass

media share a strong reciprocal relationship in which both parties rely on and influence each other. Mass media, through its persuasive capabilities, becomes a crucial instrument in politics, as politicians and political parties often utilize it to deliver messages and shape public image. Conversely, the media depends on politics as a source of news and engaging content for its audience, thus forming a mutually beneficial symbiosis. Public communication refers to the transmission of messages—such as ideas, information, or calls to action—to a large audience. These messages may be delivered through various channels including mass media, public speeches at rallies or demonstrations, social networking sites, comment sections on websites or blogs, email, mailing lists, SMS, letters, reader opinions, billboards, and banners. All these channels allow messages to reach a wide and diverse audience. The primary goal of public communication is to disseminate information or ideas to the general public using accessible and far-reaching platforms.

Human Interest Features and Public Communication

Based on the authors' experience, writing a feature story is an art that combines factual reporting with engaging and in-depth narrative. Unlike hard news, which delivers information directly and concisely, feature stories explore the human dimension and contextual background of an event or issue. The writing process involves extensive research, interviews with relevant

sources, and presenting data through storytelling. A typical feature story includes an attention-grabbing lead, richly detailed body paragraphs, and a conclusion that provides insight or reflection. The main purpose of a feature is to inform, entertain, and evoke emotional engagement from readers.

This aligns with Matthew Ricketson's definition in his 2004 book, which states: *"Feature stories are defined as articles containing emotion and analysis as well as information, compared to hard news stories that are first and foremost about information"* (Ricketson, 2004, p. 1). This statement highlights the fundamental difference between feature stories and hard news. Feature stories are comprehensive and often emotionally resonant articles that not only convey information but also include personal reflection and in-depth analysis. They invite readers to understand and emotionally connect with the context and impact of an event through rich narrative and vivid detail. In contrast, hard news focuses on delivering the latest facts quickly and concisely. These articles prioritize efficiency in conveying timely and important developments to the public using a straightforward and factual tone. Feature stories generally require more time to produce and consume. They offer deeper understanding by capturing the experiences of individuals affected by an issue, analyzing causes and consequences, and proposing potential solutions. For instance, a feature on an environmental crisis would explore personal stories, root causes, and systemic

impacts, while a hard news article would merely present the latest data and official statements.

Both article types serve vital roles in journalism. Hard news provides urgent updates that the public needs immediately, while feature stories offer space for reflection, emotional connection, and nuanced understanding.

Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-setting theory is part of mass communication effects. It explains how mass media influences public opinion by determining what becomes headline news and how it is framed. In this study's context, media members of the Hajj Media Center (MCH) play a role in determining which topics become human interest features, thereby shaping public perception. The theory was first developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972 through their research on how mass media influenced public opinion during the 1968 U.S. presidential election (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). They concluded that what the media considers important tends to also be perceived as important by the public.

The agenda-setting process begins with the media—represented in this case by MCH—selecting topics deemed significant enough to be turned into human interest features. These topics are then presented in engaging feature formats, which are strategically designed to influence public opinion. When necessary, stories are redistributed across other platforms to ensure massive dissemination.

Two-Way Symmetric Model

One of the core models in public relations theory is the two-way symmetric model. It is considered the most ideal because it emphasizes balanced communication between public relations practitioners and the media. This model aims to foster mutual understanding and build dialogue (Woodward, 2000) through two-way communication with symmetrical outcomes (Wilcox, Ault, Agee, & Cameron, 1998). In practice, this model requires openness and cooperation. Public relations officers support journalists in freely covering stories, ensuring that reporters receive complete, accurate, and unbiased information. Transparency and honesty are the model's foundation. Was this two-way symmetric communication model implemented within the MCH? Every journalist in the MCH was granted full freedom to report on all aspects of Hajj implementation. There were no restrictions on coverage topics. The Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama/Kemenag), Bureau of Public Relations, Data, and Information (HDI) facilitated journalists' reporting needs, such as providing transportation to coverage sites and translators for interviews with Saudi officials. If journalists needed to confirm information with Kemenag or PPIH officials—including the Minister—HDI would provide complete support.

Kemenag had implemented a strict selection process for MCH journalists. A core requirement was certification from the Indonesian Press

Council's competency test, ensuring that all participating journalists understood journalistic ethics and media law. Kemenag trusted that these journalists would adhere to professional standards in their reporting. In turn, the journalists trusted that Kemenag would uphold transparency and press freedom.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research method with a content analysis approach. According to Creswell (1998), qualitative research investigates social phenomena and human issues. It produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behaviours. In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the key instrument. Therefore, the researcher must possess a strong theoretical foundation and broad insight to effectively inquire, analyse, and construct a clearer understanding of the object of study. The main focus of this research lies in exploring meaning and value.

Content analysis is utilized as a tool to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts. In this context, the researcher examines feature stories about the Hajj produced by the Media Center Hajj (MCH), particularly those published in *Disway Daily*, to identify and interpret the messages contained within the articles. The study aims to assess whether these features align with the communication objectives set by the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the 2024 PPIH Saudi Arabia technical guidance module, the Media Center Hajj (MCH) is the central hub for coverage, information, and publication activities related to the implementation of the Hajj pilgrimage, both domestically and in Saudi Arabia. The module outlines MCH's core expectations as a provider of public information services, a platform for public confirmation, and a medium for public education.

The MCH team plays an important role in educating the public regarding:

1. Government-prepared facilities and services
2. Hajj site maps
3. Lifestyle and traditions in Saudi Arabia
4. The balance between religious rituals and health
5. Elderly-friendly Hajj practices

MCH members consist of journalists from mainstream media, Islamic mass organization (ormas) media, and public relations staff from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. They are required to cover the pre-Hajj, operational, and post-Hajj periods. All information gathered by MCH members, including photos and videos, must be shared with the entire team. The goal is to enable wide dissemination of Hajj news across multiple media outlets.

MCH members are also briefed to ensure that Hajj-related news fulfils the communication functions of the 2024 PPIH:

1. Menginformasikan (*to inform*),

2. Mendidik (*to educate*),
3. Menghibur (*to entertain*),
4. Memengaruhi (*to influence*).

To Inform

Most Indonesian Hajj pilgrims were traveling abroad—particularly to Saudi Arabia—for the first time. Many had never flown on an airplane before. Therefore, they required detailed information on a wide range of Hajj-related matters.

One feature published in the *Disway Daily* e-paper on May 12, 2024, was titled: [Hunting Permit Masuk Taman Surga](#) (*Hunting Permit to Enter the Garden of Heaven*)—the fourth entry in a 50-part series titled *Hajj Reports*. This article explained how to register for a Raudhah visit through the *Nusuk* mobile app. The journalist shared his own experience using the app to visit Raudhah, a sacred site in Al-Masjid an-Nabawi (Prophet's Mosque) believed to be a special place for prayers. Located between the Prophet Muhammad's tomb and the pulpit, Raudhah requires a special permit for entry. The article provided a step-by-step guide to downloading the app, selecting a visit schedule, QR code verification, and worship procedures inside Raudhah. The message of this article was to inform pilgrims of how to register and visit Raudhah independently. Although group permits (*tasreh*) are handled by PPIH, individual pilgrims can also register using the app. The timing of this feature's publication coincided with the first day of Indonesian pilgrims' arrival in Madinah,

making it particularly relevant. Written in feature style to attract readers, the article was also published online and repackaged for Instagram content.

Another informative feature not directly tied to Indonesian pilgrims but still highly relevant was titled: [Dzakwan, Penerjemah Khotbah Jumat di Masjid Nabawi Ini Berasal Dari Karanganyar](#) (*Dzakwan, the Friday Sermon Translator at the Prophet's Mosque, Is from Karanganyar*). Published on June 6, 2024, this story explained how pilgrims can access live translations of Friday sermons at Al-Masjid an-Nabawi—typically delivered in Arabic—through FM radio or streaming, with available translations in multiple languages, including Indonesian. The article was shared with pilgrims via group leaders to enhance their religious experience.

To Educate

One of the goals of communication in the Hajj implementation is to educate the pilgrims and the wider public. This is carried out not only through straight news but also via feature stories. There are many topics that pilgrims not only need to know, but also must understand—particularly considering the diversity of their backgrounds. An example of an educational feature is an article published by *Disway Daily* on May 31, 2024, titled: [Sehari, Lebih 100 Jamaah Tersesat](#) (*Over 100 Pilgrims Get Lost in a Day*). This story described the daily work of Hajj officers in the special sector at the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, who regularly assist pilgrims who

become disoriented. The Prophet's Mosque complex covers nearly 40 hectares (400,000 square meters) and has 40 entrances with similar architectural designs. Pilgrims may enter through one gate and exit through another, often getting confused, especially since many nearby hotels look similar. To add to this, most directional signs are written in Arabic. Many pilgrims also leave their sandals at the mosque entrance—as they would in Indonesia—but then exit through a different gate, leading them to believe their footwear is missing.

Hajj officers in the special sector are well-acquainted with the signs of lost pilgrims and are always ready to assist. They even carry spare sandals for those who lose theirs. This is crucial, as the marble floors surrounding the mosque can become dangerously hot and burn bare feet.

The feature also offered practical tips to avoid getting lost, such as memorizing the nearest mosque and hotel gates, carrying the hotel's name card, and always bringing a shoe bag. The article was written during the third week of pilgrims' stay in Madinah, a period marked by frequent incidents of pilgrims getting lost—even though their hotels were only 50 to 450 meters away from the mosque. This article served as an important educational tool to address this recurring issue. Another educational feature published by *Disway Daily* was titled: *(Some Pilgrims Fall Ill Due to Fear of Urinating and Avoiding Water on the Plane)*, released on May 14, 2024, during the departure phase of the Hajj season. The story was based on reports from the Hajj Health Clinics

(KKHI) in Makkah and Madinah. Many pilgrims required medical treatment due to dehydration. Being first-time flyers, some pilgrims were afraid to use the aircraft toilet and held their urine for up to 8 hours. Others deliberately avoided drinking to prevent needing the toilet. By sharing these stories, the article aimed to educate future pilgrims about the dangers of such behavior and the importance of staying hydrated for their health.

To Entertain

One example of a feature that serves to entertain is an article titled : *(Not Believing That We Could Both Go to Hajj This Year)*. This article was published in *Harian Disway* on May 26, 2024. The story tells of a fortunate husband and wife. Irpan Hilmi and Saptaria Suciani were not supposed to go on Hajj this year. However, good fortune led them to the Holy Land, even though they departed from different regions and on separate flights. The two accidentally met at Gate 338 of the Nabawi Mosque, known as the romantic gate. Suciani had never registered for Hajj. She went to replace her father, who passed away five months before their departure, and also to accompany her mother. The family decided that Suciani should go. Suciani and her mother departed from the Sukabumi group. Meanwhile, Irpan had already registered for Hajj, but was expected to leave in ten years. His elderly father also had plans to go. In the 2024 Hajj season, there was an acceleration program for elderly people. Irpan's father was prioritized to go

because of his age, and as a condition, a companion was required. Eventually, Irpan was also fast-tracked to accompany his father. Irpan and his father left from Ciamis.

The message from Irpan and Suciani's story is that Hajj is a call from Allah SWT. Even if it's not your time to go, or you haven't registered yet, if Allah calls, a way will open for you to go to the Holy Land. On the other hand, even if you've registered and it's your time to depart, there could still be obstacles preventing your departure. That is the unique nature of Hajj. This feature is not only entertaining but also educates the public not to lose hope while waiting for their turn to perform Hajj. Unexpected things may happen that could accelerate the departure of pilgrims. There are several similar features about the acceleration of Hajj departures.

For example, a feature about Indonesian national football team player Witan Sulaiman, who went on Hajj in 2024. Witan had registered for Hajj five years ago, before he got married. After his marriage, his wife was due to go on Hajj as well, having registered long ago with her parents. The Ministry of Religious Affairs also has a program to accelerate departures for those accompanying a mahram. The condition is that those requesting acceleration for accompanying a mahram must have registered at least five years in advance. Witan met the requirement and requested an accelerated departure to accompany his wife. He departed from the Makassar embarkation point in South Sulawesi. Another feature that entertains pilgrims is the story of a

Hajj officer who participated in a graduation ceremony while on duty in the Holy Land. The article titled *Jadi Petugas Haji, dr Nana Wisuda S2 di UMY dari Tanah Suci* (*Being a Hajj Officer, Dr. Nana Graduated with a Master's Degree from UMY from the Holy Land*) was published in *Disway* on June 11, 2024. This article tells the story of Dr. Hafidlotul Muawanah, known as Dr. Nana, who received two titles at once: Hajjah and Master of Hospital Administration (MARS). Dr. Nana had to attend the graduation ceremony at UMY on June 6, 2024, which had been scheduled two months prior. However, a month before the ceremony, Dr. Nana was assigned to be a health officer for Hajj in group 83 from the Solo embarkation point (SOC-83), where he accompanied pilgrims from Rembang Regency.

The rector of UMY allowed Dr. Nana to attend the graduation online. Saudi Arabia's time is ahead of Indonesia, and the graduation ceremony in Yogyakarta began at 8:00 AM, meaning Dr. Nana had to be ready by 4:00 AM Saudi time, which is precisely at dawn in Mecca. Of course, he had to prepare for the ceremony like any graduate an hour before, at 2:00 AM. The feature about the Hajj officer's graduation can entertain the public following the Hajj news. The flow of the feature writing makes the readers feel as if they are part of the excitement and joy of the subject.

To Influence

One of the goals of communication is to influence. In relation to the Hajj pilgrimage, features are expected to influence public opinion about the organization of Hajj 2024. The services provided to Hajj pilgrims must be communicated to the public so that they perceive that the pilgrims have been maximally served by the Hajj officers. *Harian Disway* journalist wrote a feature titled *Haji Ramah Lansia Bukan Sekadar Slogan, Ini Faktanya (Elderly-Friendly Hajj Is Not Just a Slogan, This is the Fact)*. This article was published online at <http://disway.id> on May 25, 2024. The article describes how Hajj officers, especially those in the elderly and disability services section, care for elderly pilgrims. In the 2024 Hajj season, there are approximately 45,000 elderly pilgrims, not all of whom have companions. These Hajj officers become companions for these elderly pilgrims, helping with tasks such as bathing, feeding, escorting them to the mosque, pushing wheelchairs, and even carrying them.

It also tells the story of how the elderly pilgrims were touched by the services provided by the Indonesian Hajj officers. These officers treated the elderly pilgrims as if they were their own parents. This awareness was instilled in all Hajj officers during their technical guidance. "Elderly-Friendly Hajj" was the tagline launched by the Hajj Pilgrimage Organizing Committee (PPIH) for the 2024 season. Many features about services for elderly pilgrims were produced by the Hajj Media Center (MCH). Almost every day,

articles, photos, and videos about the services for elderly pilgrims were produced and published in various media. This article is a compilation of several articles produced by MCH about elderly services.

Another article aimed at influencing public perception is a feature about the successful mobilization of pilgrims from Arafah and Muzdalifah to Mina. The article published on June 15, 2024, is titled *(Smooth Mobilization, All Hajj Pilgrims Have Left Muzdalifah for Mina on Sunday Morning)*. In the 2023 Hajj season, there were difficulties in mobilizing pilgrims from Muzdalifah to Mina, causing heavy traffic and delays in picking up the pilgrims, with many stranded for up to 12 hours and left hungry. The Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) conducted an evaluation to prevent a repeat of the Muzdalifah issue in 2023. Various measures were taken, including for sick pilgrims, who were given special transport from Arafah to Mina. In Mina, they were immediately taken to pre-arranged care facilities, and Hajj officers represented them in the ritual of throwing stones. A new innovation introduced by Kemenag was the "Murur" or "passing through" system. Some pilgrims were given the chance to participate in this system, allowing their buses to pass through Muzdalifah without stopping. This program received support from all Islamic organizations, and the demand for it was high. As a result, mobilization at Muzdalifah was very smooth. By 7:37 AM, no Indonesian pilgrim was left behind in Muzdalifah. Everyone had been transported to

Mina. This became a major success story for the organization of Hajj 2024.

The article about the successful mobilization of pilgrims at Muzdalifah had a significant impact on public perception of the success of the 2024 Hajj organization. The success story could be directly compared to the issues that occurred in 2023, especially with the added new facilities for pilgrims in Arafah, Muzdalifah, and Mina (Armuzna). In contrast to the previous Hajj season, where pilgrims did not receive meals in Armuzna due to distribution difficulties, the 2024 Hajj season saw Kemenag's innovation of providing ready-to-eat meals for five days, ensuring pilgrims received 15 meals. The food was specially packaged and ready to be consumed. Rice was provided by the officers at Armuzna. An article titled *Ini Makanan Jamaah Haji Selama di Armuzna, Ada Nasi Rendang (Here's the Food for Hajj Pilgrims in Armuzna, with Rendang Rice)* was published on June 11, 2024, just a few days before the peak of Hajj.

Short video features about Hajj pilgrims were also produced by MCH and distributed via social media platforms, including Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) by *Harian Disway*. Numerous feature contents were produced, telling success stories and showing the joy of pilgrims. There were also visuals of Hajj officers assisting pilgrims, such as carrying elderly pilgrims, feeding sick pilgrims, and pushing wheelchairs. All these contents are not fabricated; they reflect the facts on the ground. However, MCH made efforts to disseminate these contents widely,

ensuring that the stories of human interest and the joy of the Hajj pilgrims were well communicated to the public.

CONCLUSION

The communication goals of the 2024 Hajj organization—informing, educating, entertaining, and influencing—have been translated by the Hajj Media Center into various journalistic products. These include articles, photos, and videos published across multiple platforms such as print, television, websites, and social media. The content includes both straight news and feature articles. The human interest features published by *Harian Disway* in print, e-paper, and on the website align with the communication objectives of PPIH 2024. These features generally illustrate the success of the 2024 Hajj organization with its various dynamics. Human interest features have become part of the communication strategy for the 2024 Hajj organization. The light writing style of these features makes it easier for communicators to convey their message to the audience. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, in this case, PPIH, can embed their messages within the human interest stories written by media outlets within the Hajj Media Center (MCH). As soft news, features are effective in shaping public perception naturally because feature stories are timeless, not bound by time. Thus, human interest stories about the Hajj can be presented at any time without worrying about them becoming outdated. Moreover, compelling feature stories are often

shared by the public, which shows that feature news is an effective tool for building public communication indirectly (without forcing information).

In the 2024 Hajj season, there was a political movement by the Indonesian Parliament (DPR) that attempted to cast a negative perception of the Hajj pilgrimage. However, this effort failed due to the massive production of articles and content by MCH. This includes feature content in *Harian Disway*, which successfully influenced public perception because the communicator's message reached the audience in a softer, more understandable way.

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