

Helmi Hasan's Public Leadership in Budget Efficiency: A Semiotic Analysis of News Media Coverage in Bengkulu

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze how the public leadership style of Governor Helmi Hasan is represented in the context of budget efficiency policies through local media coverage in Bengkulu. Amid national policies that encourage fiscal efficiency, Bengkulu Province is an example of a region that implements budget savings without neglecting development. This study uses a qualitative approach with Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis method, which divides the meaning of signs into three levels: denotative, connotative, and myth. Data were collected through purposive sampling techniques from three local online media news items that explicitly discussed budget efficiency policies and Helmi Hasan's symbolic actions, such as the implementation of joint open houses and support for President Prabowo Subianto's policies. The results showed that the media not only conveyed information, but also constructed meaning about Helmi Hasan's leadership. At the denotative level, he was presented as a leader who implemented budget efficiency without hindering development. At the connotative level, he was portrayed as a strategic, thrifty, and pro-people leader. Meanwhile, at the mythical level, the media shaped the perception that Helmi Hasan was an ideal leader figure who was efficient, nationalist, and humanist. The conclusion of this study shows that the media plays a role in shaping the image and public perception of political figures through narrative and symbols. This representation reflects the idealized style of public leadership in the current socio-political context.

Keywords

Public Leadership, Budget Efficiency, Semiotics, Media, Helmi Hasan.

Introduction

This study aims to analyze how the public leadership style of Governor Helmi Hasan is represented in the context of budget efficiency policies through local media coverage in Bengkulu. In a national policy situation that encourages fiscal efficiency in all regions, Bengkulu Province is an example of a region that implements budget savings strategies without disrupting development priorities. This study uses a qualitative approach with Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis method, which interprets media texts on three levels: denotative, connotative, and myth. Data were obtained through purposive sampling of three main news items from local online media that explicitly discussed Helmi Hasan's efficiency policies and symbolic actions, such as the implementation of joint open houses and support for President Prabowo Subianto's policies.

The results showed that the media did not only convey information, but also constructed Helmi Hasan's public leadership image through symbolic signs and structured narratives. At the denotative level, Helmi Hasan was represented as a leader who implemented budget efficiency without stopping development. At the connotative level, there is a meaning of strategic and thrifty leadership that remains on the side of the people. Meanwhile, at the mythical stage, the media shapes the perception of Helmi Hasan as an ideal public leader—efficient, nationalist, and humanist—who is able to harmonize local and national policies while maintaining social closeness amid bureaucratic efficiency.

This study concludes that local media play an important role in shaping public perceptions of political figures through the construction of layered meanings. The representation of Helmi Hasan in the discourse of budget efficiency not only reflects his leadership style, but also shapes the social reality of the public leader figure expected by contemporary society.

The budget efficiency policy implemented by the central government under the leadership of President Prabowo Subianto is the first step in optimizing the management of state finances (Saputra 2025) both at the central and regional levels, including in Bengkulu Province. The Governor of Bengkulu, Helmi Hasan, considers this step a smart decision that gives local governments flexibility in preparing the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBD) in accordance with local priorities. This allows for more targeted program adjustments, especially in meeting the community's need for infrastructure development (Bengkulu Governor Helmi Hasan Reveals Budget Efficiency of President Prabowo's Smart Move and Actually Helps the Region n.d.)

One of the concrete steps in carrying out budget efficiency in Bengkulu Province is to hold an open house during Eid al-Fitr. The tradition, which is usually carried out separately by the Governor, the Deputy Governor and the Chairman of the Regional Representative Council, is now combined into a single event at the official residence of the Governor of Bengkulu Province. This step is not only to save the budget, but also to strengthen the relationship between the community and regional leaders, especially in Bengkulu Province. Governor Helmi Hasan hopes that this method can be adopted by regional leaders in other regions to support budget efficiency without having to sacrifice tradition and closeness to the community (Supandi n.d.).

Despite the focus on savings, Governor Helmi Hasan emphasized that budget efficiency would not hamper development in Bengkulu. The local government remains committed to implementing various development programs optimally, while maintaining the effectiveness of financial management. Infrastructure projects such as the construction of access roads and educational facilities are continuing according to plan. This shows that budget savings do not have a negative impact on public services, but rather encourage a more wise and targeted use of the budget.

Based on this, the leadership style of Governor Helmi Hasan, which emphasizes efficiency without compromising public services, reflects a visionary and responsive approach to the needs of the community. Amidst the demands for efficiency, he directs the use of the budget strategically so that it continues to support priority development programs. By balancing fiscal management and concern for regional progress, Helmi Hasan's leadership style exemplifies an effective model of leadership in local governance.

In this context, a semiotic analysis of local media coverage in Bengkulu is important to understand how this leadership style and efficiency policy are constructed in public discourse. Roland Barthes' semiotic theory offers an approach to analyzing how signs in media texts work on two levels of meaning: denotative (literal meaning) and connotative (symbolic or ideological meaning) (Jayanti, Yanto, and Dianthi 2024). For example, news about a joint open house not only represents the fact of the event being combined (denotation), but also forms a symbolic narrative about simplicity, togetherness, and the leader's closeness to the people (connotation).

Furthermore, according to Barthes, connotative signs can form "myths", which are social constructions that appear natural or reasonable. In this case, the media can shape the myth that budget efficiency is a characteristic of an ideal leader—thrifty, down-to-earth, and concerned with local values. Thus, the way local media represents Governor Helmi Hasan's efficiency policy is not merely conveying information, but also shaping social reality and public perception of the leadership style that is emphasized.

Through Barthes' semiotic analysis, this study aims to reveal how the discourse on budget efficiency and Helmi Hasan's leadership is constructed in local media coverage in Bengkulu. This is important as an effort to understand how the representation of Helmi Hasan's public leadership as Governor of Bengkulu in dealing with budget efficiency policies is constructed through media coverage in Bengkulu.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis method. This approach is used to explore the meaning in media news texts that not only convey information literally, but also contain symbolic and ideological meanings behind the representation of Helmi Hasan's public leadership in the context of budget efficiency. Roland Barthes divides the meaning of signs into three layers, namely denotation (literal meaning), connotation (cultural/psychological

meaning), and myth (socially legitimized ideological meaning) (Rohmadi 2021).

The type of data used in this study is qualitative data, in the form of news texts taken from local online media in Bengkulu such as *Rakyat Bengkulu*, *Bengkuluekspress.com*, and *Radar Bengkulu*. Data collection was carried out through purposive sampling, which is choosing news items that explicitly report on Helmi Hasan's leadership and budget efficiency policies in a certain period (for example 2023–2024). The selected news will be analyzed in terms of narrative, word choice, and visual elements (if available) to find the structure of meaning in the text.

The analysis process is carried out using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, with the following stages: First, identifying the denotative meaning, which is the literal meaning of the text and images in the news; second, interpreting the connotative meaning, which is the additional value or meaning embedded based on the social and cultural context; and third, revealing the myths or ideological messages that are implicitly formed and conveyed by the media (Afriana et al. 2024) (JASMINE 2014). The purpose of this analysis is to understand how the media shapes the image of public leadership, as well as how policy messages (budget efficiency) are constructed as narratives that support or criticize a particular leader figure.

Results and Discussion

Results

NEWS 1:

News Title: *Helmi Emphasizes that Budget Efficiency Does Not Interfere with Development in Bengkulu*

Source: Bengkulu News

Denotative meaning

Denotatively, this news conveys factual information regarding the statement of the Governor of Bengkulu, Helmi Hasan, who emphasized that even though the Bengkulu Provincial Government is implementing a budget efficiency policy, this will not interfere with or hinder the development process in the region. The news article explains that strategic projects, especially infrastructure such as road construction and other public facilities, will continue. This shows that the local government is maintaining its development priorities despite a tight and challenging fiscal situation. In other words, efficiency is being achieved without cutting back on development needs.

Connotative Meaning

Connotatively, this news builds a symbolic and ideological meaning regarding the image of Helmi Hasan's leadership. The term "budget efficiency" is not only interpreted as an effort to save funds, but also contains a message about the wisdom, accuracy, and ability of a leader to manage finances in a planned and responsible manner. This shows that Helmi Hasan is portrayed as a leader capable of making rational and strategic decisions in the face of limited resources. Meanwhile, the phrase "not disrupting development" means that the leadership is able to maintain a balance between efficiency and sustainable development. In other words, the media

implicitly represents Helmi Hasan as a leader who not only focuses on budget savings, but also pays attention to the interests of the people. In Barthes' semiotic perspective, this is part of the construction of connotative meaning that reinforces the narrative of the ideal leader - efficient, wise, and pro-people.

News 2

News Title: Bengkulu Governor Helmi Hasan Reveals that the Smart Budget Efficiency Measures of President Prabowo are Actually Helping the Regions

Source: Radarcom

Denotative Meaning

Denotatively, this news conveys a statement by Bengkulu Governor Helmi Hasan, who welcomes the budget efficiency policy as a smart and strategic move. In his statement, Helmi said that the efficiency policy was part of President Prabowo Subianto's direction, and that this policy had a positive impact on regional financial management. Budget efficiency is seen as a systematic approach to maintaining fiscal stability while supporting sustainable regional development. In this news item, it appears that Helmi Hasan not only supports the policy, but also integrates it into the context of provincial government work.

Connotative Meaning

Connotatively, this news implies a political communication strategy that reinforces Helmi Hasan's image as a leader who is in tune with and loyal to national policies. By mentioning President Prabowo directly, Helmi not only conveyed a positive view of budget efficiency, but also created the impression that he shared a vision with the state leader. In this context, "President Prabowo's smart move" is not just praise, but a form of symbolic alignment between local and national policies. This provides the effect of political legitimacy, where Helmi Hasan frames his regional policies as a continuation of central policies—a strategy to increase authority and public trust.

In addition, words such as "helping the regions" imply that efficiency policies are not only beneficial from the central perspective, but also provide real benefits for local governments. In Barthes' semiotic framework, this connotative meaning forms the narrative of the rational and visionary leader, who understands the national power structure and is able to integrate it for the benefit of the local community. Budget efficiency, in this discourse, is not merely a technocratic act, but also a symbol of modern leadership that is strategic, effectiveness-oriented, and in favor of national stability and regional progress.

NEWS 3

News Title: How Governor Helmi Hasan of Bengkulu Continues to Hold Open House Amid Budget Efficiency

Source: Tribunnews Bengkulu

Denotative Meaning

Denotatively, this news conveys that the Governor of Bengkulu, Helmi Hasan, is still holding an open house at his official residence for Eid al-Fitr, even though the provincial government is implementing a budget efficiency policy. The news explains that this activity is still being carried out in a more economical way, namely by combining the open houses of regional leaders into one joint event. This shows that despite cost-cutting efforts, public and symbolic social activities are still being held. This action shows that government activities that are in direct contact with the community remain a priority, even in a limited fiscal situation.

Connotative Meaning

Connotatively, Helmi Hasan's action in continuing to hold an open house has a strong symbolic meaning. Behind the implementation of the budget efficiency policy, the message is that social closeness to the community is maintained. An open house as a symbol of tradition and togetherness represents the values of openness, warmth, and humanity in leadership. In this context, the media portrays Helmi Hasan as a leader who not only focuses on bureaucratic efficiency, but also remains emotionally and socially present in society.

The phrase “keep holding open houses” conveys the message that austerity is not a reason to distance oneself from the people. In Barthes' semiotic framework, this is a form of connotative narrative that conveys the image of a leader who is popular, caring, and able to maintain a balance between budget management and fulfilling the emotional needs of the community. This action also reflects wisdom in maintaining social and cultural values amid efficiency, forming the impression that Helmi Hasan is a leader who has not lost his humanist side amid rational policies.

Discussion

In Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, the myth stage is the third phase in the sign system after denotation and connotation. Myth in Barthes' context is not just a legend, but a construction of social meaning that has undergone naturalization, so that it is considered natural and true in the collective consciousness of society. Myth works by transforming connotative meaning into something that appears natural, unquestioned, and believed to be “inevitable”. In this context, the media's representation of Governor Helmi Hasan's leadership in the three news items analyzed has shaped the myth of the ideal public leader—efficient, nationalist, humanist, and down-to-earth.

In the first news item, *“Helmi Affirms Budget Efficiency Does Not Interfere with Development in Bengkulu”*, the myth that is formed is that of leadership that is able to balance fiscal efficiency and sustainable development. Media representation presents Helmi Hasan as a leader who not only prioritizes budget savings, but also ensures that development projects run as they should. This gives birth to the myth that great leaders are those who can deal with budget constraints without compromising the public interest. In this context, “efficiency” no longer has a technical meaning, but becomes a symbol of a leader's competence, assertiveness, and moral responsibility.

The second news item, entitled *“Bengkulu Governor Helmi Hasan Reveals Budget Efficiency, President Prabowo's Smart Move and Actually Helps the Region”*, displays a different mythological

dimension. In this news item, Helmi Hasan explicitly links his budget efficiency policy to that of President Prabowo Subianto. The mention of the President's name is not just a statement of fact, but builds a narrative of alignment between local and national leaders. In the mythical stage, this emphasizes the construction of a regional leader who is faithful, loyal, and thinks on a national scale. Thus, Helmi Hasan is not only positioned as a local leader, but as part of the state power structure, which carries out the central mandate strategically and wisely. The myth formed here is that a good leader is obedient and able to align the local vision with national policies, so that the region is not a separate entity, but an integral part of the ideals of national development.

Meanwhile, in the third news item, *"How Bengkulu Governor Helmi Hasan Continues to Hold Open Houses Amid Budget Efficiency"*, a more cultural and emotional myth emerges. In a situation of limited budget, Helmi Hasan continues to hold open houses—a tradition that has high symbolic value in Indonesian society. Mythologically, this builds the image that Helmi Hasan is a leader who has not lost his humanity and cultural side amid bureaucratic pressures and technocratic efficiency. Despite the austerity measures, closeness to the people has not been sacrificed. In this context, the open house is not just a ceremonial event, but a symbol of togetherness, inclusiveness, and the leader's presence in the social space of society. The myth that is being built is that true leaders are those who do not distance themselves from the people, even in limited situations.

If these three news items are read as a unified discourse, it can be seen that the media has formed a myth of public leadership of Helmi Hasan as a complete leader figure: budget-efficient (news item 1), politically strategic and nationalist (news item 2), as well as humanist and populist (news item 3). In this mythological construction, a leader is not only measured by his technical performance, but also by his symbolic ability to convey moral, social, and ideological messages to society. The media, through the choice of diction, titles, and narratives in news texts, has played a role in shaping Helmi Hasan's image as a representation of the contemporary version of the ideal leader: adaptive, loyal, efficient, and down to earth.

Thus, a reading at the mythical stage shows that these media texts do not merely convey information, but rather construct social reality through a layered process of meaning. This interpretation shapes people's perceptions of who is a worthy leader, how leaders should act, and what values should be inherent in a public leader. In the theoretical framework of Roland Barthes, this is evidence that the media not only functions as a channel of information, but also as a cultural agent that constructs the meaning of leadership in the socio-political landscape of society.

Conclusion

Based on the results of research using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach to three local media reports in Bengkulu, it can be concluded that the media has formed a certain representation of Helmi Hasan's leadership style through the construction of signs that reflect three layers of meaning: denotative, connotative, and mythical. The three news items analyzed show that Helmi Hasan is represented as an efficient public leader, siding with the people, and in line with national policies.

At the denotative level, the media explicitly reported Helmi Hasan's statements and actions

in the context of budget efficiency, such as the affirmation that development was still ongoing, support for President Prabowo's policies, and the continuation of open houses despite austerity measures. This information was presented as a factual report on the steps taken by the governor in running the regional government.

At the connotative level, a deeper symbolic meaning was found in each of Helmi Hasan's actions. The term "budget efficiency" was interpreted as competence in financial management, while actions such as mentioning the president's name or holding open houses had meanings about legitimacy, social closeness, and adaptive leadership. The media framed Helmi Hasan as a figure who was not only rational in policy-making but also empathetic to the emotional and cultural needs of the community.

Meanwhile, at the level of myth, the construction of Helmi Hasan's leadership transcends the personal context and is transformed into a symbol of the ideal leader that society expects. The myth that is formed is that true leaders are those who are efficient in the use of the budget, in line with central policies, and maintain social closeness with the people despite limitations. The media indirectly shape the public perception that good leadership is fiscally stable, politically strong, and socially warm.

Thus, the media not only conveys information, but also plays a strategic role in shaping the meaning and public perception of political figures. This study shows that in the discourse of news reporting, leadership style can be constructed through signs that represent the values, ideology, and expectations of the public towards a public leader.

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