



MEDIA DISCOURSES ON SOUND HOREG: NEGOTIATING CULTURAL IDENTITY, RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY, AND PUBLIC LEGITIMACY

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of *Sound Horeg* as a community-based entertainment practice in Indonesia has generated intense public debate, particularly following the issuance of Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia/MUI) of East Java No. 1 of 2025. Although previous studies have examined this phenomenon from sociological, legal, cultural, and religious perspectives, limited attention has been paid to how online media construct competing meanings underlying the controversy. This study aims to examine how online media in Indonesia negotiate cultural identity, religious authority, and public legitimacy through media discourse. Employing a qualitative approach, this study applies Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to 50 purposively selected online media documents published during the 2025–2026 period. The analysis identifies five dominant discourses: religious, governmental, cultural, academic, and public discourses. The findings demonstrate that online media function not merely as channels for disseminating information but also as discursive arenas in which institutional narratives are circulated, contested, and recontextualized. Public legitimacy emerges through interactions among actors representing diverse discourses rather than being derived solely from the authority of a single institution. This study contributes to the advancement of Critical Discourse Analysis by explaining how competing institutional discourses shape contemporary cultural controversies within Indonesia's digital public sphere.

Keywords: *critical discourse analysis; sound horeg; media discourse; cultural identity; public legitimacy.*

INTRODUCTION

Sound Horeg has emerged as one of the most prominent forms of community-based entertainment in Indonesia, particularly in East Java, where high-powered mobile sound systems are used to accompany village festivals, cultural parades, Independence Day commemorations, New Year celebrations, and various other communal events (Armayanto & Sahidin, 2025; Damayanti, 2025; Wibowo et al., 2025). Beyond serving as a form of entertainment, *Sound Horeg* has evolved into a cultural practice that reinforces social interaction, collective celebration, and local identity (Damayanti, 2025; Wibowo et al., 2025). However, its rapid growth has also generated considerable controversy due to excessive noise, environmental disturbance, traffic congestion, conflicts among community

members, and concerns regarding morality, public health, and public order (Armeyanto & Sahidin, 2025; Damayanti, 2025; Wibowo et al., 2025). Consequently, *Sound Horeg* has become a contested cultural phenomenon situated at the intersection of popular culture, religion, and governmental governance.

The controversy is no longer confined to performances in physical spaces but has also expanded into Indonesia's digital media environment. News portals, social media platforms, opinion articles, and user-generated content continuously disseminate competing interpretations of whether *Sound Horeg* should be recognized as a legitimate form of cultural expression or instead be restricted because it is perceived as disrupting public order (Fatikh, 2025; Prianti & Athique, 2026; Rahmadani et al., 2026). Rather than merely disseminating information, digital media actively construct social reality through the selection of news sources, the framing of events, and the shaping of public interpretation (Fatikh, 2025; Sari & Putra, 2025). Public debate intensified following the issuance of the Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia/MUI) of East Java No. 1 of 2025, which declared that certain forms of *Sound Horeg* practices are inconsistent with Islamic principles (Fikri et al., 2025; Wibowo et al., 2025). Although the fatwa does not possess formally binding legal authority, it nevertheless influences public opinion and political positions through its symbolic and moral legitimacy (Dharta et al., 2025; Menchik, 2022; Mursyidi, 2020). Consequently, the debate surrounding *Sound Horeg* has shifted from issues of noise and entertainment to broader questions concerning who holds the authority to determine which cultural practices are considered legitimate. Supporters regard *Sound Horeg* as a symbol of local identity and an economic opportunity, whereas opponents frame it as a form of moral deviation, a disturbance to public order, and a source of social disorganization (Armeyanto & Sahidin, 2025; Damayanti, 2025; Fikri et al., 2025).

Previous studies have examined the *Sound Horeg* phenomenon from four major perspectives. First, several studies have investigated *Sound Horeg* as a form of local culture and community identity (Damayanti, 2025; Wibowo et al., 2025). Second, research has focused on legal regulation, environmental impacts, public safety, and governmental governance (Armeyanto & Sahidin, 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2025). Third, scholars have analyzed religious responses, particularly debates surrounding the MUI fatwa and the concept of religious moderation in Islam (Fikri, 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2025). Fourth, more recent studies have explored digital media, online participation, and identity construction within Indonesia's contemporary communication landscape (Fatikh, 2025; Prianti & Athique, 2026; Rahmadani et al., 2026). Collectively, these studies have enriched the understanding of the *Sound Horeg* phenomenon from sociological, legal, cultural, religious, and communication perspectives.

Nevertheless, two important gaps remain in the existing literature. First, previous studies have tended to examine *Sound Horeg* from the perspective of individual disciplines or institutions, thereby providing limited explanation of how diverse actors simultaneously construct competing meanings within the same media environment. Consequently, the discursive interactions among religious institutions, government agencies, journalists, academics, cultural communities, and the public have received relatively little scholarly attention. Second, although previous studies have shown that the MUI fatwa continues to influence public opinion despite lacking formally binding legal authority (Dharta et al., 2025; Menchik, 2022; Zuhri et al., 2023), and that digital media increasingly function as spaces for negotiating identity and legitimacy (Fatikh, 2025; Pujiati et al., 2025; Rahmadani et al.,



2026), these two perspectives have rarely been integrated to explain how religious authority, cultural identity, and public legitimacy are jointly constructed through competing media discourses. Therefore, scholarly attention to the processes through which legitimacy is negotiated among multiple discursive actors within Indonesia's contemporary digital public sphere remains relatively limited.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides an appropriate analytical framework for addressing these gaps because it conceptualizes discourse as a social practice through which power, ideology, and identity are produced and reproduced (Fairclough, 1992, 1995, 2003). Rather than treating media texts as neutral representations of reality, CDA examines how linguistic choices, discursive practices, and broader sociocultural contexts interact in constructing particular versions of reality. Previous CDA studies in Indonesia have demonstrated that online media coverage reflects ideological interests and institutional positions rather than merely providing objective reporting (Mantasiah, 2025; Purwaningrum & Harmoko, 2024; Veronika et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the controversy surrounding *Sound Horeg* has not yet been systematically examined as a discursive arena in which competing institutional discourses collectively negotiate legitimacy through digital media.

Against this background, this study applies Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how online media in Indonesia construct competing representations of *Sound Horeg* and negotiate cultural identity, religious authority, and public legitimacy. Specifically, this study addresses three research questions: (1) How is *Sound Horeg* represented across different online media in Indonesia? (2) How do competing discursive actors construct cultural identity and religious authority through media discourse? (3) What ideological struggles emerge from these competing representations? By comparatively analyzing the discourses produced by religious institutions, government actors, journalists, academics, cultural communities, and public voices within an integrated analytical framework, this study extends the application of Critical Discourse Analysis to the context of contemporary cultural controversies in Indonesia. Furthermore, this study contributes to the field of media discourse by demonstrating that online media play an active role in constructing competing public meanings, while also enriching scholarship on religion and popular culture by explaining how legitimacy is continuously negotiated within Indonesia's digital public sphere.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach by applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how online media in Indonesia construct meaning, negotiate authority, and reproduce ideological positions related to the *Sound Horeg* controversy. The study adopted Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis framework, comprising text, discursive practice, and social practice, because it conceptualizes discourse as a social practice through which power, identity, and legitimacy are constructed within broader sociocultural contexts (Fairclough, 1992, 1995, 2003; Pernecky, 2016; Roscoe, 2019; Wajid et al., 2025; Xing, 2024).

The research corpus consisted of 50 online documents purposively selected and published during the 2025–2026 period following the issuance of the Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia/MUI) of East Java No. 1 of 2025. The corpus included online news articles, official statements, opinion articles, academic commentaries,

the MUI fatwa document, and government responses (Armeyanto & Sahidin, 2025; Fikri et al., 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2025; Wibowo et al., 2025). The documents were selected based on four criteria: (1) they explicitly addressed *Sound Horeg*, the MUI fatwa, or related government responses; (2) they were published during the 2025–2026 period; (3) they were publicly accessible and available in their complete form; and (4) they represented one of the predetermined discourse genres (Lim, 2025; Yayin & Yi, 2023). This sampling strategy enabled a comparative analysis of the principal actors involved in the controversy.

Data were analyzed using Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). At the textual analysis stage, the study focused on lexical choices, modality, evaluative expressions, news headlines, quotation patterns, and the representation of social actors within the texts (Wajid et al., 2025; Yayin & Yi, 2023). Subsequently, the discursive practice analysis examined text production, source attribution, intertextuality, and the circulation of discourses across different media genres (Lim, 2025; Wajid et al., 2025; Yayin & Yi, 2023). Finally, the social practice analysis was employed to interpret these findings in relation to broader issues of cultural identity, religious authority, public legitimacy, and the ideological contestation surrounding the *Sound Horeg* phenomenon (Fikri et al., 2025; Lim, 2025; Wajid et al., 2025).

The coding process was conducted iteratively through the stages of open coding, axial coding, and theme development, employing the constant comparison technique across documents (Bingham, 2023; Lim, 2025; Nowell et al., 2017). To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed, including source triangulation, an audit trail, a quotation bank, and cross-document comparison. These strategies were implemented to ensure the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings (Bingham, 2023; Khalid et al., 2024; Lim, 2025; Morgan, 2024; Nowell et al., 2017; Shenton, 2004).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis identified five dominant discursive representations employed by online media in Indonesia to construct the *Sound Horeg* controversy. Although each discourse reflects the perspectives of different institutional actors, the five discourses collectively demonstrate that public legitimacy is negotiated through competing claims, including moral, administrative, cultural, epistemic, and participatory claims. Table 1 presents a summary of the principal characteristics of these discursive representations as an introduction to the more in-depth analysis that follows.

Table 1. Discursive Representations of Sound Horeg and Their Forms of Legitimacy

Discursive Representation	Dominant Actors	Dominant Representation	Discursive Strategy	Form of Legitimacy
Religious	MUI, Islamic scholars	Moral and religious threat	and Moral evaluation	Moral legitimacy
Governmental	Government institutions	Public order and governance	and Administrative regulation	Administrative legitimacy
Cultural	Local communities	Cultural identity and heritage	Symbolic recognition	Cultural legitimacy



Discursive Representation	Dominant Actors	Dominant Representation	Discursive Strategy	Form of Legitimacy
Academic	Scholars	Evidence-based interpretation	Scientific mediation	Epistemic legitimacy
Public	Citizens	Digital participation	Public deliberation	Public legitimacy

As summarized in Table 1, each discourse constructs a distinct source of legitimacy, which collectively contributes to the negotiation of the meaning of *Sound Horeg* within Indonesia's digital public sphere. Each discursive representation reflects the interests, values, and positions of different institutional actors in interpreting the phenomenon. Accordingly, the following sections provide a more detailed discussion of the characteristics, discursive strategies, and ideological implications of each identified discourse.

1 Constructing *Sound Horeg* as a Moral and Religious Threat

The religious discourse emerged as the dominant representation of *Sound Horeg* throughout the research corpus, framing the phenomenon as a moral and religious threat rather than merely a form of community-based entertainment. This representation became increasingly prominent following the issuance of Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia/MUI) of East Java No. 1 of 2025, which shifted public debate from concerns over excessive noise to broader issues of cultural legitimacy and religious authority.

This discourse was constructed through the use of evaluative lexical choices such as *haram*, *mafsadah*, *kemungkaran*, *mudarat*, disrupting public tranquility, and violating the rights of the community. These lexical choices were reinforced by deontic expressions such as obligatory, must, and must not, which positioned religious institutions as legitimate authorities in determining acceptable behavior within the public sphere. These meanings were reproduced through the dissemination of the MUI fatwa across news reports, official statements, and public responses, in which religious arguments were frequently combined with Qur'anic verses, hadith, classical *fiqh* scholarship, scientific evidence concerning the effects of noise exposure, recommendations issued by the World Health Organization (WHO), and Indonesian legal regulations. This intertextuality reinforced the symbolic authority of the fatwa while simultaneously transforming *Sound Horeg* into an object of moral contestation rather than merely a cultural performance.

Viewed through Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis framework (1992, 1995, 2003), these findings indicate that linguistic choices, media circulation, and broader sociocultural contexts collectively shape institutional authority. Accordingly, the controversy surrounding *Sound Horeg* is fundamentally not merely a matter of excessive noise but rather a contest over competing claims to the authority to define which cultural practices are considered legitimate within the public sphere. These findings are consistent with previous studies demonstrating that the MUI continues to exercise strong symbolic influence despite the absence of formally binding legal authority for its fatwas (Dharta et al., 2025; Menchik, 2022; Mursyidi, 2020). Furthermore, the present findings reinforce previous research linking the *Sound Horeg* controversy to issues of morality,

religious authority, and cultural legitimacy (Armayanto & Sahidin, 2025; Damayanti, 2025; Fikri et al., 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2025; Wibowo et al., 2025).

These findings are also consistent with the literature on the mediatization of religion, which argues that religious authority in the digital era increasingly depends on media visibility and public engagement rather than solely on institutional position (Andok, 2024; Berger & Golan, 2024; Cheong, 2016; Ding et al., 2025; Giorgi, 2019; Hjarvard, 2026). Accordingly, the MUI fatwa functions not only as a religious ruling but also as a media event, through which moral legitimacy is continuously produced, negotiated, and contested within Indonesia's digital public sphere. This moral framing subsequently constitutes the first layer of legitimacy, which is further renegotiated through governmental, cultural, academic, and public discourses.

2 Constructing *Sound Horeg* as an Issue of Public Order and Governmental Governance

Governmental discourse emerged as the second dominant representation in media constructions of *Sound Horeg*, framing the controversy primarily as an issue of public order, governmental governance, and risk management, rather than merely a question of whether the practice is permissible under Islamic teachings. Throughout the research corpus, government institutions, local governments, law enforcement agencies, and online media consistently positioned *Sound Horeg* as a public activity requiring regulation to balance cultural expression with public safety, environmental protection, and social stability. This representation was constructed through the use of administrative vocabulary such as regulation, public safety, traffic management, noise control, licensing, coordination, and public welfare. These lexical choices were reinforced by procedural expressions such as must comply, should be regulated, requires coordination, and needs supervision. In contrast to the religious discourse, which derives its legitimacy from moral authority, the governmental discourse constructs legitimacy through bureaucratic rationality.

These meanings were reproduced through official government statements, regional regulations, police press conferences, ministerial responses, and media coverage, in which religious concerns were translated into policy narratives centered on public safety, environmental management, and administrative responsibility. Consequently, the *Sound Horeg* controversy was reconstructed as an issue of governmental governance, the legitimacy of whose resolution depends on the state's regulatory capacity rather than solely on theological judgment.

Viewed through Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (1992, 1995, 2003), the governmental discourse demonstrates how institutional authority is constructed through language use, media circulation, and broader sociopolitical practices. Administrative vocabulary, policy communication, and intertextual references to legal regulations, environmental standards, and the governance of public event management collectively legitimize state intervention while positioning government institutions as neutral regulators. These findings are consistent with the perspective of Discursive Institutionalism, which explains that policy legitimacy is constructed through discourse that both coordinates institutional ideas and communicates them to the public (Schmidt, 2008). The findings also reflect the concept of governmentality, which conceptualizes governance as acquiring legitimacy through the management of public risks rather than through direct coercion (Yang



et al., 2020). Furthermore, the present findings support previous studies highlighting the close relationship between governance discourse, risk communication, and regulatory legitimacy (Bhuller & Trevithick-sutton, 2024; Boholm, 2019; Kaufmann & Wiering, 2024; Xu, 2025; Zhao & Zhang, 2025).

Furthermore, these findings confirm previous studies indicating that government responses to the *Sound Horeg* phenomenon have focused primarily on environmental disturbance, infrastructure, public safety, and regulatory enforcement rather than on theological judgment (Armayanto & Sahidin, 2025; Damayanti, 2025; Fikri et al., 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2025; Wibowo et al., 2025).

Overall, the governmental discourse constitutes the second layer of legitimacy by positioning the state as the institution responsible for governing cultural practices through regulation and administrative accountability. Rather than replacing religious legitimacy, this discourse coexists with it and, at times, competes with it, demonstrating that the *Sound Horeg* controversy is negotiated simultaneously through moral authority and the rationality of governmental governance. This administrative perspective subsequently provides the foundation for the next discourse, in which legitimacy is once again negotiated through claims concerning cultural identity and the recognition of local culture.

3 Constructing *Sound Horeg* as Cultural Identity and Local Legitimacy

The cultural discourse emerged as the third dominant representation in media constructions of *Sound Horeg*, framing it as an expression of local identity, communal solidarity, and cultural legitimacy. In contrast to the religious discourse, which emphasizes moral regulation, and the governmental discourse, which prioritizes administrative governance, cultural actors consistently portray *Sound Horeg* as a collective tradition embedded in village festivals, Independence Day commemorations, cultural parades, and various other community activities. This representation is constructed through the use of positive lexical choices such as local culture, cultural pride, community traditions, local wisdom, togetherness, and cultural heritage, all of which associate *Sound Horeg* with collective identity rather than merely individual entertainment. These meanings are reinforced through media coverage, community-generated content, digital storytelling, the use of hashtags, and public participation, thereby enabling cultural legitimacy to be reproduced collaboratively through digital media. Consequently, the *Sound Horeg* controversy is reframed as a struggle for the recognition of local culture rather than merely a debate over entertainment or environmental disturbance.

Viewed through the perspective of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (1992, 1995, 2003), cultural legitimacy is constructed through the interaction of linguistic representations, media circulation, and broader sociocultural practices. Rather than merely reflecting local traditions, digital media actively amplify community voices and transform *Sound Horeg* into a symbolic resource through which local identity is both articulated and sustained. These findings support Hall's perspective that cultural identity is an ongoing process of representation rather than a fixed cultural essence (González, 2019; Platonov, 2016; Radja & Sunjaya, 2024). Furthermore, the findings are consistent with Bourdieu's perspective, which argues that cultural legitimacy is constituted through symbolic power and social recognition rather than deriving solely from the inherent value of culture itself (Mahbub, 2016). Moreover, the present findings confirm previous studies that conceptualize

Sound Horeg as a form of community identity and local culture (Damayanti, 2025; Wibowo et al., 2025), while also aligning with scholarship on cultural heritage and popular culture, which argues that grassroots cultural practices acquire legitimacy through collective participation and public recognition (Bai & Tuzovsky, 2025; Dewi et al., 2025; Duncombe, 2002; Haenfler, 2004; Hintz, 2021; Nasyirudin, 2025; Supriyanto et al., 2020; Taufik, 2025; Wang & Aoki, 2021).

Overall, the cultural discourse constitutes the third layer of legitimacy by positioning *Sound Horeg* as a symbol of local identity whose value is grounded in the community's collective recognition rather than in institutional approval. This perspective both complements and challenges the religious and governmental discourses by demonstrating that legitimacy is negotiated not only through moral authority or administrative regulation but also through cultural belonging and symbolic recognition. The following section explains how these competing claims to legitimacy are subsequently mediated through the academic discourse, in which legitimacy is constructed through scientific evidence and epistemic authority.

4 Academic Mediation through Evidence-Based Discourse

The academic discourse emerged as a distinctive representation in media constructions of *Sound Horeg* by positioning academics as mediators who interpret the controversy on the basis of scientific evidence rather than through moral judgment or administrative authority. Unlike religious institutions, which derive legitimacy from theological foundations, and governmental actors, who rely on regulatory rationality, academics consistently framed the issue through empirical research, critical analysis, and evidence-based recommendations. This representation was reflected in the use of analytical expressions such as evidence, research findings, public health, social impact, risk assessment, and collaborative policy, reinforced by epistemic modality markers such as suggests, indicates, and requires further investigation. These meanings were reproduced through academic commentaries, expert interviews, scholarly opinion articles, and media coverage, in which religious, governmental, cultural, and public perspectives were interpreted within an integrated analytical framework. Consequently, the academic discourse constructs legitimacy through scientific credibility rather than solely through institutional authority.

Viewed through Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (1992, 1995, 2003), the academic discourse demonstrates how expertise is discursively constructed through the interaction of language, institutional communication, and broader sociocultural contexts. Rather than aligning with any single institutional position, academics integrate religious documents, government regulations, scientific evidence, environmental studies, and community experiences to contextualize competing claims. These findings support the concept of epistemic authority, which holds that expertise becomes influential only when the knowledge it produces is recognized as credible and legitimate (Bartsch et al., 2024; Keren, 2025). The findings are also consistent with Gieryn's theory of boundary work, which explains that scientific authority is constructed through the demarcation of evidence-based reasoning from other forms of knowledge (Gieryn, 1999; Rogińska, 2022). Furthermore, the present findings reinforce the literature on evidence-informed policymaking and knowledge brokering, which highlights the role of academics in translating research findings into policy recommendations and public communication that can be understood by diverse stakeholders



(Bandola-gill, 2023; Duncan et al., 2020; Gluckman et al., 2021; Juhola et al., 2024; Lavazza et al., 2020; Suazo-galdames et al., 2025).

Overall, the academic discourse constitutes the fourth layer of legitimacy by grounding public debate in scientific evidence and analytical reasoning. Rather than replacing the religious, governmental, or cultural perspectives, this discourse serves as a mediator that bridges these perspectives through evidence-based interpretation. In doing so, the academic discourse contributes to reducing polarization while fostering a more rational and informed process of public deliberation. This epistemic perspective subsequently provides the foundation for the following section, which examines how legitimacy is negotiated more openly through digital participation and public interaction.

5 Negotiating Public Legitimacy through Digital Participation

The public discourse emerged as the fifth and most dynamic representation in media constructions of *Sound Horeg*, in which legitimacy is negotiated through digital participation rather than deriving solely from institutional authority. Through comments on online news articles, opinion pieces, social media discussions, and media coverage, public responses reveal a wide range of often conflicting positions. Some members of the public support the MUI fatwa as a moral guideline, others defend *Sound Horeg* as an expression of local culture, while another group conditionally accepts government regulation as a means of balancing cultural rights with the broader public interest. From a linguistic perspective, the public discourse combines moral, cultural, administrative, and personal narratives, accompanied by expressions relating to rights, freedom, tradition, respect, and tolerance. Symbolic responses, such as the use of the label halal to challenge the attribution of the label haram, further demonstrate how the public actively reinterprets the claims advanced by different institutions. Through news comments, reposts, the use of hashtags, videos, and interactive discussions, digital media enable the public not only to become consumers of institutional narratives but also to act as their producers, disseminators, and critics. Consequently, legitimacy becomes an ongoing process of public negotiation.

Viewed through Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (1992, 1995, 2003), these findings demonstrate that public legitimacy is discursively constructed through the interaction of language, media participation, and broader sociocultural practices. Rather than functioning as passive audiences, members of the public become active participants whose interpretations help determine whether religious, governmental, cultural, and academic claims are accepted or rejected. These findings support the literature that conceptualizes legitimacy as an ongoing relationship between institutions and the public, rather than as a fixed attribute inherently possessed by an institution (Haggart & Iglesias, 2021; Schoon, 2022). The findings are also consistent with the theory of the networked public sphere, which argues that digital media expand opportunities for public participation while simultaneously increasing ideological diversity and the complexity of deliberative processes (Cohen, 2023; Dahlberg, 2001, 2006; Mahmood et al., 2022). Consistent with research on digital participation, the present findings indicate that public engagement strengthens processes of civic deliberation without necessarily producing consensus, as legitimacy is continuously negotiated through interactions among institutions, media organizations, and citizens interconnected within the digital sphere (Aagaard, 2022; Masip et al., 2019; Ralph, 2021; Ramjit, 2025).

Overall, the public discourse constitutes the fifth layer of legitimacy by positioning the public as active participants in defining the social meaning of *Sound Horeg*. Rather than merely responding to institutional authority, digital participation also reshapes how religious, governmental, cultural, and academic discourses are recognized, contested, and reinterpreted within Indonesia's digital public sphere. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that public legitimacy is not inherited from any single institution but instead emerges through an ongoing process of negotiation among multiple discursive actors. These findings provide the foundation for the integrative discussion presented in the following section.

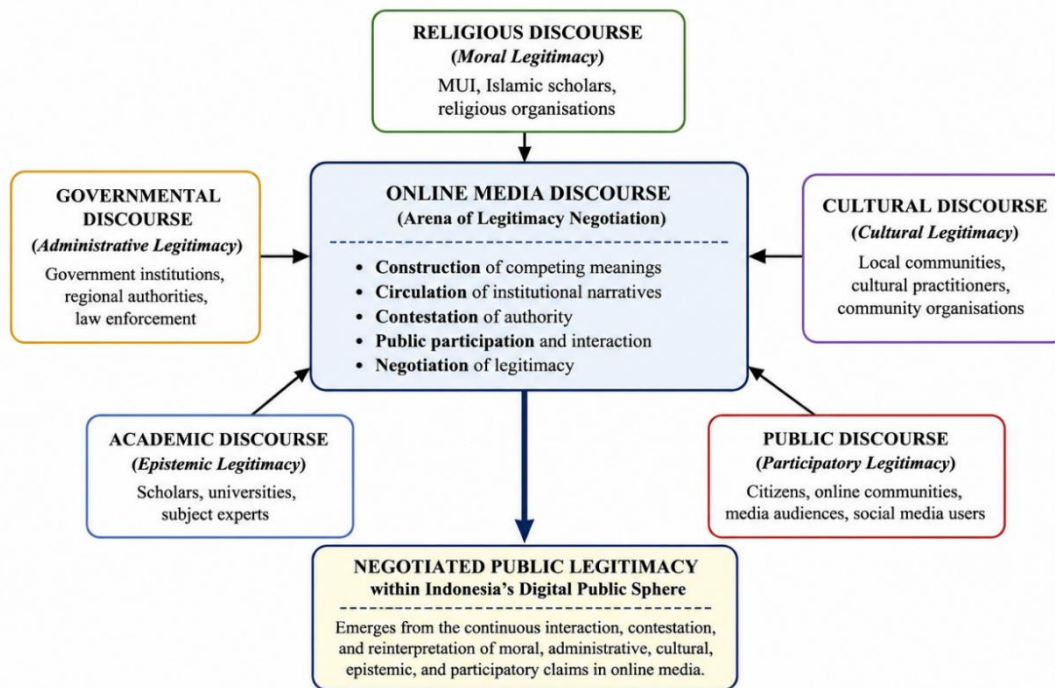


Figure 1. Negotiation of Public Legitimacy Across Competing Media Discourses.

Source: Developed by the authors based on the study findings.

As illustrated in Figure 1, online media function as the primary arena in which competing institutional discourses converge, circulate, and interact with one another. Rather than originating from a single institutional authority, public legitimacy is continuously negotiated through the interaction of moral, administrative, cultural, epistemic, and participatory claims. This integrated perspective provides the foundation for the discussion in the following section.

6 Negotiating Legitimacy through Competing Media Discourses

Overall, the five discursive themes identified in this study demonstrate that the *Sound Horeg* controversy extends beyond debates over entertainment, environmental noise, or the permissibility of the practice from a religious perspective. Rather, the controversy represents a broader struggle over how legitimacy is constructed, negotiated, and contested within Indonesia's digital public sphere. Rather than producing a single dominant interpretation, religious institutions, governmental actors, cultural communities, academics, and the public



each construct distinct forms of legitimacy based on their respective institutional roles, values, and communicative objectives. In this context, online media function as the primary arena in which these competing perspectives converge, interact, and influence one another.

Viewed through Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework (1992, 1995, 2003), the findings demonstrate that discourse operates simultaneously across three dimensions: text, discursive practice, and social practice. At the textual dimension, linguistic choices frame *Sound Horeg* from different evaluative perspectives. At the discursive practice dimension, media disseminate and recontextualize diverse institutional narratives. Meanwhile, at the social practice dimension, broader sociocultural contexts influence whether competing claims to legitimacy are accepted or rejected. Accordingly, online media do not merely reflect reality objectively; rather, they actively construct social meaning by amplifying particular voices, connecting diverse institutional discourses, and providing space for public participation. The *Sound Horeg* controversy demonstrates that discourse functions as a social practice through which authority and legitimacy are continuously produced, reproduced, and renegotiated.

This analysis further reveals that legitimacy is multidimensional, rather than a fixed attribute inherent in any single institution. Religious institutions construct moral legitimacy through theological authority; governmental actors establish administrative legitimacy through regulation and public governance; cultural communities cultivate cultural legitimacy through collective identity and symbolic recognition; academics generate epistemic legitimacy through evidence-based reasoning; while the public constructs public legitimacy through participation in digital media. These different forms of legitimacy do not replace one another; rather, they coexist, overlap, and at times compete as institutional narratives circulate through media reports, official statements, academic commentaries, and user-generated content.

These findings extend previous studies that have generally examined the *Sound Horeg* phenomenon from cultural, legal, religious, or sociological perspectives in isolation (Armayanto & Sahidin, 2025; Damayanti, 2025; Fikri et al., 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2025; Wibowo et al., 2025). By integrating these perspectives within a single analytical framework, this study demonstrates that the *Sound Horeg* controversy cannot be adequately understood through any single institutional perspective alone. Instead, media discourse serves as the arena in which religious authority, governmental governance, cultural identity, scientific expertise, and public participation interact in constructing competing claims to legitimacy.

Furthermore, the findings of this study contribute to broader discussions on the mediatization of religion, governance discourse, cultural identity, epistemic authority, and the networked public sphere. Consistent with previous scholarship, institutional authority in the digital era increasingly depends not only on formal status but also on media visibility, intertextual circulation, and public engagement (Bourdieu, 1991; Cohen, 2023; Gieryn, 1999; Haggart & Iglesias, 2021; Hall, 1996; Hjarvard, 2026; Schmidt, 2008). The *Sound Horeg* controversy demonstrates how digital media transform public controversies into discursive arenas in which institutional authority is continuously evaluated, negotiated, and reconstructed.

Overall, this study demonstrates that public legitimacy surrounding *Sound Horeg* is not determined by the authority of any single institution but instead emerges through ongoing interactions among multiple discursive actors within Indonesia's digital media ecosystem.

Accordingly, online media function not merely as channels for disseminating information but also as arenas in which cultural identity, religious authority, and public legitimacy are simultaneously produced, contested, and redefined.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how online media in Indonesia construct competing representations of *Sound Horeg* by applying Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to a corpus of fifty online documents published during the controversy surrounding Fatwa No. 1 of 2025 issued by the East Java branch of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI). The findings demonstrate that *Sound Horeg* is represented through competing discourses that negotiate cultural identity, religious authority, and public legitimacy, rather than being shaped by a single dominant narrative.

The analysis identified five interconnected forms of legitimacy. The religious discourse constructs moral legitimacy, the governmental discourse establishes administrative legitimacy, cultural communities construct cultural legitimacy, academics generate epistemic legitimacy, while the public negotiates public legitimacy through digital participation. These forms of legitimacy do not operate in isolation; rather, they interact within online media, where institutional narratives are continuously disseminated, reinterpreted, and contested. Accordingly, the legitimacy surrounding the *Sound Horeg* phenomenon is constructed through the interaction of multiple discursive actors rather than deriving solely from the authority of any single institution.

This study also demonstrates the analytical value of Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (1992, 1995, 2003) in explaining how language, media practices, and broader sociocultural contexts collectively shape public controversies. By integrating perspectives on the mediatization of religion, governance discourse, cultural identity, epistemic authority, and the networked public sphere, this study extends scholarship on media discourse while contributing to a broader understanding of how competing institutional actors negotiate legitimacy within Indonesia's contemporary digital media environment.

This study has several limitations. It is based exclusively on publicly available online documents published during a specific period of the *Sound Horeg* controversy. Consequently, the analysis focuses on media-mediated representations rather than audience reception or the lived experiences of the actors involved. Future research could complement these findings through interviews, ethnographic observation, or analyses of social media interactions to examine how media discourse influences public perceptions and cultural practices over time. In addition, comparative studies of similar cultural controversies across different regions or countries would further enrich our understanding of the processes through which legitimacy is negotiated within digital media environments.

Overall, the *Sound Horeg* controversy demonstrates that public legitimacy in the contemporary era is no longer determined solely by religious, governmental, cultural, or academic authority. Rather, it emerges through ongoing interactions among institutional actors, media organizations, and digitally connected publics. Accordingly, online media serve as the primary arena in which cultural identity, religious authority, and public legitimacy are simultaneously constructed, negotiated, and contested.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

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