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The Discourse Network Analysis of Rempang Eco City Policy in the Digital News Media

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Abstract - This study examines how Indonesia's mainstream digital media: Kompas, DetikNews, and CNN Indonesia, constructed policy discourse on the Rempang Eco City development between January 2023 and May 2025. Employing Discourse Network Analysis (DNA), the research maps relational patterns among actors, concepts, and positions extracted from news articles, providing a dual analytical lens: structural and interpretive. The findings reveal two dominant discourse coalitions: one promoting economic development and investment legitimacy, and the other emphasizing human rights, environmental risks, and Indigenous resistance. These coalitions reflect discursive polarization within public debates on national strategic projects. Conceptually, the study contributes to Communication Policy Theory by situating media discourse as a site of symbolic governance, where policy legitimacy is negotiated through competing narratives. Methodologically, it demonstrates the utility of DNA in capturing actor alignments, discursive clusters, and coalition dynamics in fragmented media environments. The study underscores the critical role of digital news platforms not only as information intermediaries but as active agents shaping public perception and policy coherence. This research highlights the need for more communication-centered approaches in analyzing policy controversies and offers a replicable framework for mapping discursive power in development conflicts.

Keywords: Discourse Network Analysis; Communication Policy Theory; Rempang Eco City; Digital News Platforms; Development Conflicts

Introduction

Policy communication plays a pivotal role in shaping public understanding and legitimacy of government initiatives. In communication studies, policies are not merely administrative outcomes, but are discursive processes involving actors, narratives, and contestations over meaning (Braman, 2006; Sarikakis & Rodríguez-Amat, 2017). Therefore, it is crucial to analyze how policy debates are constructed and circulated through digital news media—especially in coverage of strategic national projects with high political, economic, and social stakes. Rempang Eco City is a flagship development project initially included in Indonesia's National Strategic Projects (PSN) under Presidential Regulation (Perpres) No. 79/2023 (Presidential Regulation (Perpres) about the Acceleration of Investment in Batam, Bintan, and Karimun, 2023).

The government positioned Rempang as a future industrial green zone with significant foreign investment. In 2023, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between Indonesia and Xinyi Glass Holdings from China, worth USD 11.6 billion. The state has disbursed a considerable national budget for project execution. Despite ongoing opposition from local and Indigenous communities, relocation processes have already begun.



Figure 1. Rempang Eco City's Spatial Development Plan
Source: BP Batam, 2024

Figure 1 above illustrates the official spatial development plan of Rempang Eco City, covering approximately 17,000 hectares. The map outlines seven designated zones: (1) Industrial; (2) Agrotourism; (3) Commercial and residential; (4) Tourism; (5) Forest and solar power; (6) Conservation, and (7) Cultural heritage areas. This zoning reflects the government's plan to transform Rempang into a multifunctional economic hub under the National Strategic Projects (PSN) framework.

In 2025, a new controversy emerged. On March 12, 2025, BP Batam's spokesperson reaffirmed that Rempang Eco City remained a national strategic project. However, a month later, on April 28, 2025, Member of Parliament Rieke Diah Pitaloka declared that the project was no longer included in the updated list of PSN under the new Presidential Decree Perpres No. 12/2025 on RPJMN 2025–2029 (Presidential Regulation (Perpres) about the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2025–2029, 2025). This contradiction intensified public confusion and raised serious questions about the state's consistency in communicating long-term development policies.

Such discursive instability highlights the urgency of mapping actors, narratives, and conceptual positions in the Rempang controversy. When state institutions, investors, activists, media, and citizens circulate competing messages, the digital public sphere becomes a site of representational struggle—between national development goals, environmental justice, and Indigenous land rights. This struggle cannot be understood merely through content or sentiment analysis; instead, it requires a relational and structural approach to discourse.

Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) offers a powerful methodological tool for such purposes. Combining discourse theory with social network analysis, DNA maps the co-occurrence of concepts and actors within policy debates (Leifeld, 2017). Recent studies in communication policy have successfully employed DNA to examine how government actors, civil society, and media construct narratives around controversial reforms. For instance, Elislah (2023) applied DNA to analyze cynicism in the discourse on Indonesia's delayed election proposal. Yudha & Putri (2024) used DNA to assess digital media ecology and conflicting narratives about Jakarta's special autonomy bill. Internationally, Fergie et al. (2019) utilized DNA to explore public health discourses in digital platforms. These studies show how DNA can reveal both hegemonic alignments and marginal counter-narratives in fragmented digital publics.

This study focuses specifically on mainstream digital news platforms—DetikNews, CNN Indonesia, and Kompas.id—as influential mediators of policy discourse in Indonesia. As key nodes in

the national information infrastructure, these outlets converge government messaging, civic resistance, and investor narratives. Using DNA, this research investigates how these media represented the policy communication surrounding Rempang Eco City between January 2023 and May 2025. It identifies the key actors, discursive positions, and coalition patterns that shape public understanding and institutional credibility.

Although discourse analysis has been increasingly employed in policy studies, the application of DNA to Indonesian development controversies—particularly within the domain of digital news media—remains limited. This study addresses that methodological gap by systematically mapping actor-discourse relations in a high-stakes policy debate. Methodologically, it offers a structured model for applying DNA to policy discourses in Indonesia. Empirically, it reveals shifting narratives that reflect a crisis of coherence in the state's strategic communication. Also, conceptually, it advances Communication Policy Theory within contested development contexts.

Despite the growing popularity of DNA in policy-oriented research, its integration with Communication Policy Theory remains largely unexplored. Most studies using DNA focus on mapping actor networks without anchoring the findings in communication theories that consider policy as discursive governance. This research seeks to bridge that gap by demonstrating how DNA can be theoretically situated within the framework of communication policy, thus offering a dual lens to understand both structural alliances and symbolic power in policy controversies.

By addressing research gaps above, this study offers a theoretically grounded, empirically robust model for analyzing policy discourse in digital media. The following section reviews key developments in both DNA and Communication Policy Theory.

Theoretical Framework

DNA is an integrative methodology that combines the qualitative depth of discourse analysis with the structural rigor of social network analysis. Developed by Philip Leifeld (2013, 2017), DNA emerged to capture how policy debates evolve through interactions among actors and concepts in public discourse. Unlike traditional content analysis, which isolates messages, DNA reveals how policy positions and alliances are constructed through discursive co-occurrence across time and institutional boundaries.

Originally designed for political science and policy studies, DNA has gained traction across disciplines, including communication studies, sociology, and media research. In particular, it is increasingly used to map actor constellations in highly politicized or fragmented debates, such as climate policy (Ingold & Fischer, 2014), education reform (Fergie et al., 2019), and public health campaigns (Matti & Sandström, 2013). In Indonesia, DNA has been adopted more recently. Elislah (2023) used DNA to examine political cynicism in discourses on election delays, while Yudha & Putri (2024) applied it to analyze digital media narratives surrounding the Jakarta Special Region Bill.

While DNA provides a systematic approach to identifying discourse coalitions and polarizations, it is not without limitations. Critics note that DNA's coding process can be labor-intensive and subject to coder bias, particularly when assigning conceptual categories inductively (Fergie et al., 2019; Leifeld, 2017). Furthermore, DNA emphasizes structural relations but does not deeply account for rhetorical nuance or emotional affect, which are crucial in digital communication contexts. Nevertheless, its ability to visualize shifting actor positions and trace narrative trajectories makes DNA an indispensable method for analyzing complex policy controversies.

The theoretical relevance of DNA becomes more pronounced when situated within the framework of Communication Policy Theory. While DNA provides the methodological tools to map actor-concept relations in policy discourse, Communication Policy Theory offers the conceptual lens to interpret these relations as manifestations of power, governance, and symbolic control over communication flows. In this sense, DNA does not merely trace patterns of language use; it becomes a means to uncover how institutional agendas, public interests, and competing narratives shape—and are shaped by—broader policy regimes. The integration of both approaches allows scholars to move beyond static policy texts and instead examine the communicative processes through which legitimacy, consensus, and resistance are constructed in dynamic, media-saturated environments.

Communication Policy Theory: A Discursive Governance

Communication Policy Theory offers a conceptual framework to understand how communication is regulated, structured, and contested within institutional systems. It originated from scholarship in political economy and media studies, particularly through the works of Sandra Braman (2006), Raboy & Taras (2006), and later scholars such as Sarikakis and & Rodríguez-Amat (2017). Braman (2006), then conceptualizes policy as a *"force that shapes information flow, influences identity, and organizes power."* This perspective moves beyond viewing policy as merely regulatory—it is also symbolic, cultural, and communicative.

Contemporary scholars have further developed Communication Policy as a theory by articulating how policies emerge from competing discourses rather than from rational deliberation alone (Sarikakis & Rodríguez-Amat, 2017). Communication Policy Theory recognizes that policies are not neutral artifacts; they are shaped by struggles over meaning, legitimacy, and institutional interests. This discursive orientation aligns closely with DNA, as both approaches acknowledge the performative dimension of policy-making and the dynamic interplay between actors and ideas.

Empirical studies using Communication Policy Theory have explored issues such as internet governance (Napoli, 2020), media pluralism (Hintz, 2016), and algorithmic regulation (Van Dijck et al., 2018). In Indonesia, however, explicit use of this theory remains limited. Recent works by Pradana et al. (2023) and Andini (2022) begin to apply communication policy lenses to understand media regulation and public information asymmetry. Yet few have examined how communication policy unfolds in contentious infrastructure or development projects—especially in digital public discourse.

Communication Policy Theory becomes particularly relevant when public policy is no longer confined to official documents but contested through digital media, stakeholder statements, and journalistic framing. In this context, understanding policy as communication—as negotiation, as narrative, as network—is critical to unveiling how power circulates and how publics are constructed or excluded from decision-making.

Material and Methodology

This study employed a qualitative-oriented Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) to examine how Indonesia's mainstream digital news media constructed and circulated narratives surrounding the Rempang Eco City policy. As a hybrid method, DNA combines textual discourse analysis with social network analysis, enabling the mapping of relationships among actors, concepts, and positions. Beyond its qualitative depth, DNA also generates quantitative indicators—such as actor frequency, issue co-occurrence, and coalition density—making it particularly effective for analyzing the structure of contested policy communication.

To ensure relevance and public salience, the study focused on three of Indonesia's most accessed digital news platforms: Kompas, DetikNews, and CNN Indonesia. Based on SimilarWeb (2023) and Katadata (2022), these outlets consistently rank among the country's top ten news sites. Using Google Trends, the researcher identified a spike in public interest for the keyword *"Pulau Rempang"* between August 18 and October 19, 2024. This period—marked by protests, policy debate, and media attention—was chosen as the analytical window.

News articles were gathered using Google's advanced search tool for each media outlet within the specified period. Only articles directly addressing the Rempang Eco City issue were retained; irrelevant reports (e.g., on culinary features, flooding, or tourism) were excluded. The final dataset included: (1) five out of 10 articles from *Kompas;* (2) two out of three articles from *DetikNews;* (3) three out of five articles from *CNN Indonesia*

All relevant articles were manually coded for key variables: actor name, affiliation, policy concept, and stated position (support, oppose, neutral). An inductive coding approach was used to allow categories to emerge from the data.

Three thematic clusters were identified: (1) Economy and Investment – including capital inflows, and state development targets; (2) Environment and Sustainability – addressing land conversion and ecological risk; (3) Human Rights and Relocation – focusing on indigenous rights, forced displacement, and civil resistance.

These categories reflect the multidimensional tensions in the discourse: between economic agendas, environmental narratives, and social justice concerns.

The coded data were processed using the Discourse Network Analyzer (Leifeld, 2013) to structure actor–concept–position matrices. The resulting data were visualized with Visone, an open-source network analysis tool. These visualizations highlighted discursive coalitions, actor centrality, and ideological polarization within the Rempang policy debate.

Result and Discussion

The following table provides an overview of news articles analyzed in this study, listing the title, publication date, and brief summary. These articles, drawn from Kompas, DetikNews, and CNN Indonesia, cover key narratives related to the Rempang Eco City controversy, including policy communication, human rights, relocation, and investment issues. This dataset in Table 1 the basis for the discourse network mapping that follows.

Table 1. Articles' Summary Brief

Title	Source & Date	Brief Summary
Polisi Kejar Provokator Sebabkan Bentrok di Rempang (*Police Pursue Provocateurs Behind Clashes in Rempang*)	*DetikNews, 9th* Sept (Dahlia, 2024)	Police efforts to pursue provocateurs believed to have instigated clashes in Rempang. The report highlighted the authorities' approach to handling escalating tensions related to the Rempang Eco City project.
Komnas HAM Masih Upayakan Mediasi Kasus Pulau Rempang (*National Human Rights Commission Still Pursues Mediation in Rempang Case*)	*DetikNews, 6th* Sept (Muliawati, 2024)	National Human Rights Commission was continuing its efforts to mediate the Rempang conflict. The article emphasized the commission's call for non-repressive solutions to the ongoing dispute.
Kekerasan terhadap Masyarakat Adat Masih Terjadi, Presiden Didesak Bertindak (*Violence Against Indigenous Communities Continues, President Urged to Intervene*)	*Kompas TV*, 20th Sept (Firdaus, 2024)	A report urging the President to take action amid ongoing violence against the Indigenous community in Rempang. The news underscored persistent human rights concerns and public calls for national leadership.
Pembebasan Lahan Rempang Jadi Tanggung Jawab BP Batam (*Rempang Land Clearance Is BP Batam's Responsibility*)	*Kompas.com*, 17th Sept (Maharani & Alexander, 2024)	BP Batam bears full responsibility for the land clearance in the Rempang Eco City project. The article detailed the government's role in managing relocation and compensation procedures.
Warga Rempang Diteror Spanduk dan Gardu Listrik (*Rempang Residents Terrorized by Banners and Power Station Attacks*)	*Kompas.com*, 31st August (Sirait & Purba, 2024)	A story about residents facing intimidation through anti-project banners and burned electric facilities. The incidents signaled increased hostility toward the development initiative.
Doa Warga Peringati 1 Tahun Bentrok Rempang (*Residents Pray to Mark One Year Since Rempang Clashes*)	*Kompas.com*, 7th Sept (Wiyoga, 2024)	A memorial prayer held by residents to mark one year since the Rempang clashes. The event underscored the emotional and cultural significance of land for the local community.
September Hitam: Rentetan Pelanggaran HAM (*Black September: A Series of Human Rights Violations*)	*Kompaspedia*, 20th Sept (Yuniarto, 2024)	An analysis of multiple human rights incidents during September, including the Rempang case. The piece contextualized the local conflict within Indonesia's broader rights record.
Warga Rempang Diteror, Gardu Dibakar (*Rempang*	*CNN Indonesia* 1st Sept (Arp/dal,	A report about acts of intimidation against Rempang residents, including protest banners and the burning

Residents Terrorized, Power Station Burned)	2024a)	of PLN's power post. The article highlighted heightened tensions surrounding PSN rejection.
Warga Kukuh Tolak Relokasi (*Residents Firmly Reject Relocation*)	*CNN Indonesia*, 10th Sept (Arp/dal, 2024b)	A detail about residents' continued resistance to relocation triggered by the Rempang Eco City project. The news presented citizen perspectives defending ancestral land rights.
Warga Menangis Tolak PSN Rempang (*Residents in Tears Reject Rempang PSN*)	*CNN Indonesia*, 18th August (Arpandi, 2024)	A report about an emotionally charged scenes of residents crying as they voiced opposition to the Rempang Eco City project. The article showcased the deep psychological impact of forced relocation.

Source: Researcher Data

The positionality of media platforms is crucial in shaping the contours of public understanding during policy controversies, particularly in fragmented and contested information environments. In the case of Rempang Eco City, Indonesia's mainstream digital news outlets—Kompas.id, DetikNews, and CNN Indonesia—did not merely transmit information; they actively structured public discourse through selection, framing, and narrative emphasis. This aligns with the perspective that news media are not neutral conveyors but institutional actors embedded within political and economic contexts (Entman, 2007; McCurdy, 2011).

DetikNews exhibited a reactive, incident-focused editorial approach. Coverage centered on law enforcement operations, provocations, and conflict events, which resonated with what Bennett (2012) describes as "indexing," where news closely follows elite cues. Detik's framing consistently emphasized public order and state legitimacy, echoing securitization logics. Its minimal coverage of relocation trauma or environmental risk created a discourse vacuum that limited the articulation of oppositional claims. Within the DNA visualization, DetikNews appears weakly connected to grassroots actors and is discursively aligned with state institutions and economic rationale.

In contrast, Kompas.id functioned as a pluralistic arena that hosted diverse perspectives, from governmental spokespersons to displaced residents and civil society groups. Its reports highlighted contradictions between policy narratives and lived experiences, particularly around the issue of forced relocation. Kompas's role is consistent with previous observations of it acting as a "semi-deliberative platform" in other policy debates (Nugroho & Syarif, 2021). Its centrality in the DNA graph reflects its editorial willingness to frame Rempang Eco City as a contested space, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of the *Human Rights and Relocation* discourse coalition.

CNN Indonesia occupied a more ambivalent position. Its coverage was broader in scope, often contextualizing Rempang within Indonesia's strategic industrial policy or international investment agenda. Although occasionally quoting protesting voices, CNN primarily elevated formal sources, including ministries and state agencies. This "elite pluralism" (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) contributed to a technocratic tone that underrepresented the emotional and cultural stakes of the conflict. In the DNA structure, CNN linked both sides of the coalition but with limited frequency and thematic depth.

The differentiated editorial stances of these media outlets illustrate that media do not merely reflect policy debates—they help constitute them. Their discursive choices influence actor visibility, narrative salience, and public legitimacy (Carvalho, 2007). By shaping which themes dominate public consciousness—economic promise, human rights abuse, or environmental risk—these media platforms become part of the discourse coalition itself. In policy communication -when controversy is high, media can function as *strategic nodes* that stabilize, polarize, or blur competing claims (Fischer & Leifeld, 2015).

Discourse Network Visualizations

The following visualization in Figure 2 below illustrates the relational patterns among actors and concepts extracted from the selected news articles.

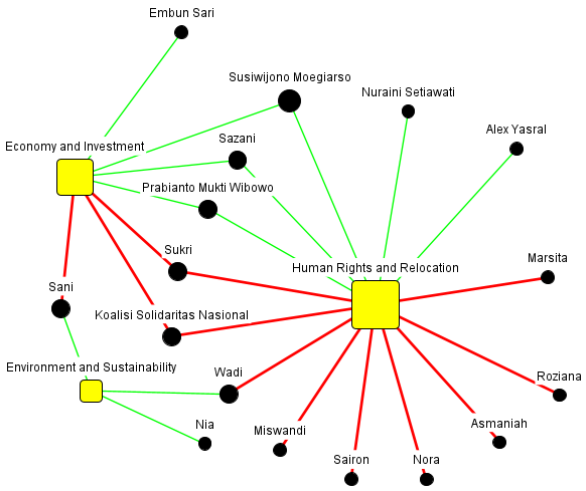


Figure 2. Actor's Bipartite Network
Source: Researchers DNA Data

Figure 2 visualizes the person-level bipartite discourse network, mapping individual actors to the dominant conceptual frames present in the Rempang Eco City debate. The square nodes represent key issue categories—Economy and Investment, Human Rights and Relocation, and Environment and Sustainability—while circular nodes represent named individuals quoted in the news articles. Green edges indicate support or alignment, while red edges reflect opposition or resistance.

The visualization reveals that many individuals—such as Roziana, Sairon, Miswandi, and Asmaniah—are discursively aligned against the Human Rights and Relocation frame, signifying strong grassroots resistance. Conversely, figures like Suswiyono Moegiarso, Embun Sari, and Prabianto Mukti Wibowo express positive alignment with either Economy and Investment or Environment and Sustainability, suggesting institutional support or diplomatic justification. Notably, the centrality of the Human Rights and Relocation concept and the intensity of opposition it attracts underline its role as the most emotionally and ethically charged frame in the conflict.

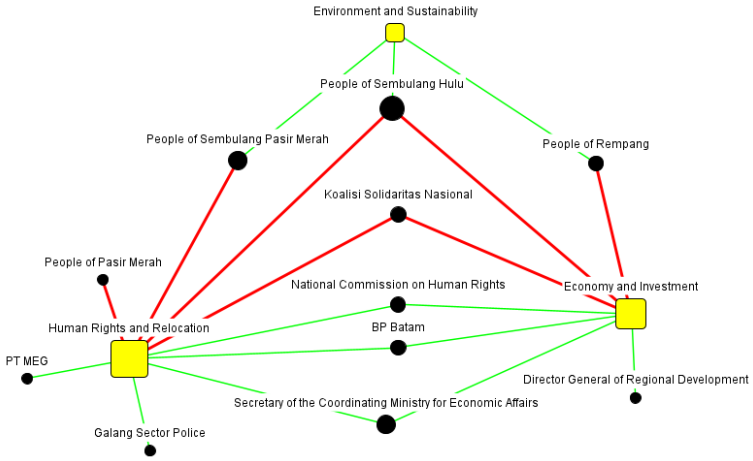


Figure 3. Actor's Organization Bipartite Network
Source: Researchers DNA Data

Above Figure 3 maps the connections between actors' organization and the core conceptual categories that dominate the Rempang policy discourse. The figure reveals that state organizations, such as BP Batam and the Secretary of the Coordinating Ministry, are positively linked to the Economy and Investment frame. Conversely, community actors and civil organizations are predominantly aligned with Human Rights and Relocation, often in opposition to economic imperatives. The Environment and Sustainability category appears to function as a bridge frame, supported by both sides to varying extents, reflecting its ambiguous rhetorical value. This structure

evidences the discursive contestation over legitimacy, progress, and justice in the public communication surrounding Rempang.

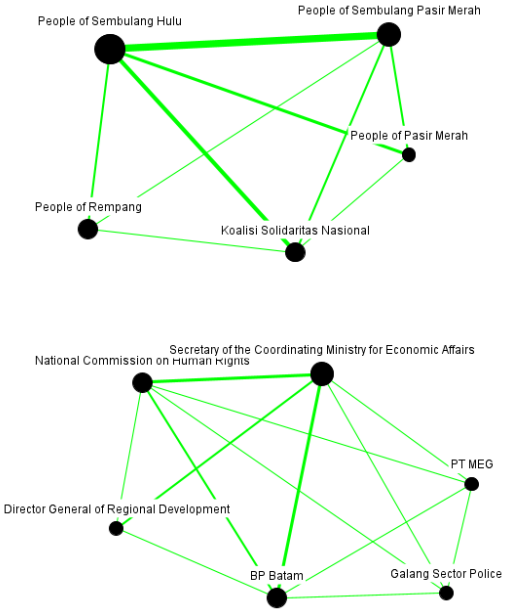


Figure 4. Actor's Organization Co-occurrence Network
Source: Researchers DNA Data

Figure 4 above illustrates the co-occurrence network among actors's organization involved in the Rempang Eco City policy discourse. Nodes represent actors mentioned in the analyzed news articles, while edges indicate co-appearance within the same article or discursive statement. Two distinct clusters are clearly observable. The first cluster, located in the upper section of the graph, comprises civil society actors and affected communities such as People of Rempang, People of Sembulang Pasir Merah, and the Koalisi Solidaritas Nasional. The second cluster, situated below, includes institutional and governmental actors, such as BP Batam, PT MEG, the National Commission on Human Rights, and the Secretary of the Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs. The intra-group density indicates tight coordination within each bloc, while limited inter-group links suggest discursive fragmentation and polarization in the public debate.

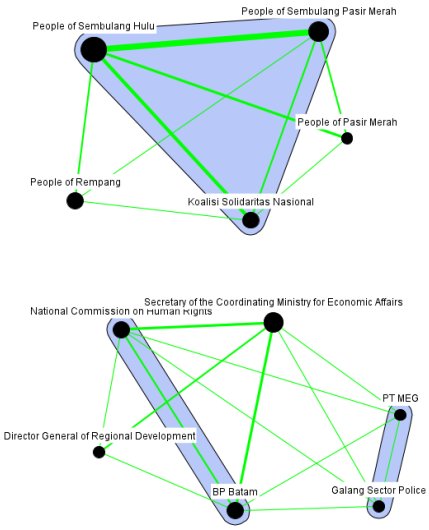


Figure 5. Group of Actor's Organization Co-Occurrence Network
Source: Researchers DNA Data

This visualization Figure 5 extends the actor's organization co-occurrence network by highlighting coalitional alignments among actors. Shaded polygons represent clusters of actors that share consistent discursive positions and frequently co-occur in similar narrative frames. The upper coalition, shaded in blue, includes grassroots and advocacy-based actors who oppose the relocation and development process, emphasizing rights-based discourse.

In contrast, the lower coalition comprises bureaucratic institutions and project proponents, bound by shared narratives emphasizing economic justification and state-led coordination. This configuration underscores a clear discursive bifurcation, where each coalition circulates largely within its own echo chamber, reinforcing ideological cohesion internally while remaining rhetorically disconnected from the opposing bloc.

Thematic Interpretation: Economy, Environment, and Human Rights

The discourse surrounding the Rempang Eco City policy reveals a contested terrain shaped by three dominant thematic clusters: Economy and Investment, Environment and Sustainability, and Human Rights & Relocation. These categories emerged inductively from the discourse data and were substantiated through DNA, which allows researchers to link actors with concepts and map ideological alignments within public communication structures (Leifeld, 2017; Maags & Leifeld, 2021).

The Economy & Investment theme was predominantly promoted by state-affiliated actors such as BP Batam and pro-development political elites. This coalition projected Rempang Eco City as a strategic opportunity to attract foreign direct investment, exemplified by the 2023 MoU with Chinese Xinyi Glass valued at USD 11.6 billion. Similar to other developmentalist discourses examined using DNA (Ingold & Fischer, 2014), these actors portrayed economic modernization as a national imperative while marginalizing dissent. Within the news texts, economic narratives were linked with notions of progress, competitiveness, and global positioning—thus reproducing what Hajer (1995) would term a "discursive hegemony" in policy framing.

Conversely, the Human Rights & Relocation discourse was driven by civic actors and advocacy groups. Their framing focused on land dispossession, historical neglect, and cultural erasure. Studies such as Heikkila et al. (2019) show how DNA can visualize the fragmentation of grassroots resistance into relational networks of moral claim-making. In this study, personal testimonies—such as public tears and mourning rituals—operated as affective signifiers that challenged the bureaucratic rationality of relocation. Red edges in the DNA graph confirmed a polarized environment, where these actors systematically positioned themselves against state-endorsed development narratives.

The Environment & Sustainability theme functioned as a site of convergence and contestation. State narratives framed Rempang as a model of green industrialization, echoing the "sustainable development" discourse often seen in state-led megaprojects (Adelle, 2012). In contrast, environmental watchdogs and independent scientists questioned the ecological feasibility of the project, warning of biodiversity loss and greenwashing. As Pülzl et al. (2019) note, DNA is useful in tracking how sustainability claims are mobilized strategically to legitimize controversial infrastructure agendas.

These three thematic coalitions show Rempang Eco City as an economic initiative and a discursive battleground. Thematic differentiation reveals various stakeholders use symbolic repertoires to assert legitimacy, negotiate governance, and resist erasure. This aligns with previous DNA studies that frame policy debates as arenas of discursive competition rather than linear decision-making processes (Fischer & Leifeld, 2015).

Bridging DNA and Communication Policy Theory

This study contributes theoretically by demonstrating the analytical compatibility between Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) and Communication Policy Theory (CPT) in examining policy controversies in digitally mediated public spheres. While DNA is often positioned as a methodological innovation for mapping actor–concept relations over time (Leifeld, 2017), its conceptual foundation remains under-theorized within communication studies, particularly in the context of policy-making as discursive governance.

Communication Policy Theory posits that public policy is not merely a regulatory output but a communicative process involving negotiations of meaning, power, and legitimacy among competing

stakeholders (Freedman, 2014; Raboy & Taras, 2006). In this view, policy emerges through communicative interactions among state actors, civil society, and media institutions—each articulating claims, frames, and values that vie for dominance in the public sphere (Hintz, 2016). By situating DNA within this theoretical lens, the study shows how actor positions in policy debates are not only structurally determined, but also symbolically constituted through discourse.

The Rempang case illustrates this integration. DNA's graphical outputs make visible the discursive coalitions around economic nationalism, environmental justice, and indigenous rights, while CPT enables us to interpret these coalitions as symbolic configurations of power and authority. For instance, the proximity of media actors to state institutions in the discourse network graph reveals not only alliance structures but also the institutional logics that underlie agenda control. This reinforces CPT's argument that media are not external observers of policy, but embedded agents within communicative governance (Freedman, 2014).

Furthermore, the combined use of DNA and CPT allows for a multi-layered analysis of strategic communication in policy settings—capturing both the relational architecture of discourse (who speaks, aligns, or opposes) and the ideological grammar of policy framing (how meaning is constructed and circulated). This theoretical bridge is particularly relevant in Global South contexts, where the digital public sphere is shaped by asymmetries in voice, infrastructure, and political risk (Nisbet et al., 2020).

By anchoring DNA within the communication policy framework, the study contributes to a more integrative model for policy communication research—one that transcends the binary of qualitative/quantitative or structure/agency. It opens pathways for future studies to explore not only who dominates a discourse, but how media, civil society, and state actors co-construct legitimacy in the process of governing through communication.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates how Discourse Network Analysis, when theorized through the lens of Communication Policy Theory, offers a robust framework for unpacking the dynamics of policy communication in contested development projects. By mapping actor-concept relations within mainstream digital news coverage of Rempang Eco City, the research reveals the formation of polarized discourse coalitions—those legitimizing economic development narratives and those resisting on the basis of human rights and environmental justice. The findings underscore that policy is not only formulated through formal institutions but is continuously negotiated in media-saturated public arenas, where symbolic legitimacy and discursive alliances shape public understanding.

Beyond methodological innovation, this research advances theoretical integration in communication studies by bridging structural mapping tools (DNA) with interpretive frameworks (CPT). It highlights the role of news media not as passive intermediaries but as strategic actors shaping agenda, visibility, and legitimacy. Future studies could expand this approach by including non-mainstream media, local language platforms, or social media datasets to capture grassroots narratives and counter-discourses. Additionally, longitudinal DNA tracking may uncover how actor alignments shift in response to institutional change or policy reversals. Such work is essential to build a more inclusive and reflexive model of policy communication in the digital era.

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