

Ideology and Power in Online Media Editorials: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

In the digital media era, online media editorials play a crucial role in shaping public opinion, constructing ideology, and legitimizing power relations. Despite their influential position, editorial texts are often perceived as neutral commentaries, obscuring the ideological functions embedded within their language. This study aims to critically examine how ideology and power are constructed in online media editorial texts by employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary analytical framework. Adopting a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretative research design, the study analyzes selected online editorials using Fairclough's three-dimensional model, which encompasses textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. The findings reveal that editorial discourse systematically utilizes evaluative vocabulary, authoritative modality, metaphorical framing, and selective representation of social actors to legitimize dominant perspectives and marginalize alternative voices. At the level of discursive practice, editorial texts are shaped by institutional ideologies and controlled intertextual references, reinforcing media authority and symbolic power. At the level of social practice, editorial discourse contributes to the reproduction of hegemonic ideologies while offering limited spaces for contestation within institutional boundaries. The study confirms the effectiveness of CDA in uncovering the ideological and power-laden nature of online editorial discourse and highlights the broader implications for media literacy, journalism ethics, and democratic public discourse. By extending CDA analysis to digital editorials within a specific socio-political context, this research contributes theoretically, practically, and contextually to contemporary media discourse studies.

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1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital media has fundamentally transformed the way information is produced, distributed, and consumed (Feldman, 2003). Online news platforms have become dominant sources of public information, offering immediate access to political, social, and economic issues. Within this digital media environment, editorial texts hold a distinctive and influential role. As institutional expressions of a media organization's viewpoints, editorials not only interpret current events but also guide readers' attitudes and judgments. Through their evaluative nature and authoritative tone, online media editorials significantly contribute to the formation of public opinion and the circulation of dominant ideologies.

Although editorials are often perceived as reasoned and objective commentaries, they are inherently ideological and discursively constructed. Language in editorial texts is strategically selected to frame events, position social actors, and legitimize particular interpretations of reality (Fowler, 2013). Choices of vocabulary, grammatical structures, modality, and rhetorical devices are used to emphasize certain viewpoints while downplaying or excluding others. Consequently, editorial discourse functions as a powerful mechanism

through which media institutions exercise symbolic power, reinforce social hierarchies, and influence public understanding of complex issues.

To critically examine these processes, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides an appropriate and robust analytical framework (Mullet, 2018). CDA views discourse as a form of social practice that is closely connected to power relations, ideology, and inequality. Rather than treating texts as neutral representations, CDA investigates how language both reflects and reproduces social structures. In the context of online media editorials, CDA enables researchers to uncover implicit meanings, hidden assumptions, and ideological positions embedded within the text, as well as to explore how discourse contributes to the maintenance or contestation of dominance and marginalization in society.

Numerous studies have applied Critical Discourse Analysis to various forms of online media content, demonstrating how CDA reveals hidden ideological positions, constructions of power, and representation of social actors. For example, Sahlan Tampubolon (2022) conducted a critical discourse analysis on the editorials of local newspapers in Medan, using Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework to examine how political and social issues were linguistically framed in editorials published between June and December 2012. This study identified specific discursive techniques in editorial texts that served ideological functions within the local media context, such as lexical choices, coherence patterns, and thematic emphasis that reflected broader sociopolitical concerns.

In a related study focusing specifically on online news, Laila Nabilal Huda (2022) examined the online news discourse surrounding the controversial topic of a governmental ban on the use of the Arabic language in Indonesia. Using CDA's micro, mezzo, and macro dimensions, Huda analyzed news articles from Tempo.co and Republika to reveal how the ideological alignment of news outlets with institutional perspectives influenced representations of public controversies. Findings showed how modality, evaluative language, and framing shaped readers' interpretations of the policy issue.

Other research has focused directly on editorial texts as a distinct genre. A study titled Analisis Wacana Kritis Teks Editorial Tentang Normal Baru pada Koran Kompas dan Media Indonesia (2021) explored how the "new normal" discourse was constructed in editorial texts of Kompas and Media Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research, adopting Van Dijk's CDA model, highlighted differences in ideological representation between media outlets objectivism versus idealism revealing how editorial language reflected broader socio-cultural positioning during a public health crisis.

In the broader field of media discourse studies, several scholars have reviewed the application of CDA to media texts, demonstrating its widespread use and theoretical importance. Anwar et al. (2023) reviewed CDA research within the Indonesian media context and showed how CDA has been employed to uncover hidden ideologies across various media studies, illustrating the theoretical and methodological diversity of CDA applications beyond traditional news reporting.

Many CDA studies outside editorial texts contribute methodological insights relevant to this research. For instance, research applying CDA to news discourse about political elections, gender representation, and social phenomena has expanded understanding of the interplay between language and power. Works such as Usrin Malikha's analyses of online political news and gender representation (2023) reveal how framing and evaluative strategies influence public perception of social issues, while research by Mukhib Niam (2021) using Van Dijk's model on NU Online media demonstrated the interplay of discourse, religion, and ideology in Indonesian online news narrative structures.

Despite the increasing attention given to discourse analysis in media studies, existing research has largely concentrated on hard news reporting or traditional print media, with comparatively limited focus on online editorial discourse (Van Dijk, 2013). Moreover, many

studies remain centered on Western media contexts, leaving editorial practices in other socio-political environments insufficiently examined. This gap is particularly significant given the growing influence of digital media platforms and the dynamic nature of contemporary public discourse. As a result, there is a need for more context-sensitive CDA studies that investigate how online media editorials construct ideology and power relations within specific social and political settings.

Therefore, this research seeks to address the gap by critically analyzing online media editorial texts through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis. By examining linguistic features and their connection to broader social contexts, this study aims to reveal how ideology, power, and political interests are discursively constructed and legitimized in online editorial discourse.

Based on these considerations, this study addresses the following problem: how do online media editorial texts construct ideology and power relations through language, and to what extent can Critical Discourse Analysis reveal patterns of dominance, marginalization, and political interest embedded within these texts?

2. Method

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis as its primary analytical framework. Fairclough's model conceptualizes discourse analysis as operating at three interconnected levels: text, discursive practice, and social practice (Fairclough, 2008). The textual dimension focuses on the formal linguistic features of the text, including vocabulary, grammar, modality, transitivity, and rhetorical devices. The dimension of discursive practice examines how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed, as well as the role of intertextuality and interdiscursivity in shaping meaning. Finally, the social practice dimension situates discourse within broader socio-political and cultural contexts, linking textual patterns to institutional structures, power relations, and ideological processes.

Fairclough's model is particularly suitable for analyzing online media editorial texts because editorials function simultaneously as linguistic artifacts, institutional products, and social interventions. At the textual level, editorial discourse relies heavily on evaluative language, persuasive strategies, and modality to express judgment and authority (Lihua, 2009). At the level of discursive practice, online editorials are shaped by newsroom policies, editorial ideologies, digital circulation, and audience interaction, which influence how opinions are framed and legitimized. At the social practice level, editorials engage directly with contemporary political, economic, and cultural debates, making them a key site for the reproduction or contestation of dominant ideologies in digital public discourse.

Central to this theoretical framework are the key concepts of ideology, power, hegemony, representation, dominance, and inclusion/exclusion. Ideology refers to systems of belief that are embedded in discourse and presented as natural or common sense. Power, in the context of CDA, is exercised through discourse by controlling representations of reality and influencing public understanding (KhosraviNik, 2014). Hegemony operates when dominant ideologies are normalized and accepted without coercion, often through repeated discursive practices in influential media texts. Editorial discourse plays a crucial role in representing social actors and events in ways that legitimize certain interests while marginalizing alternative perspectives. Through strategies of inclusion and exclusion, editorial texts foreground specific voices and viewpoints while silencing others, thereby reinforcing asymmetrical power relations.

By employing Fairclough's three-dimensional model, this study is able to systematically link linguistic choices in online editorial texts to institutional practices and broader social structures. This integrated approach allows for a critical examination of how editorial

discourse functions as a mechanism of ideological production and power negotiation in digital media. Consequently, Fairclough's CDA framework provides a comprehensive and theoretically grounded lens for analyzing the complex relationship between language, ideology, and power in online media editorials.

2.2 Research Method

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretative research design to examine how ideology and power relations are constructed in online media editorial texts (Reynolds, 2019). A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the research focuses on meaning, interpretation, and the social functions of language rather than on numerical measurement. The descriptive nature of the study allows for a detailed examination of linguistic and discursive features within editorial texts, while the interpretative orientation enables the researcher to critically link textual patterns to broader social, political, and ideological contexts.

The data for this study consist of editorial texts published by selected online media outlets (M. T. M. Wang et al., 2015). Data were collected through document analysis, as editorial texts are publicly available written documents that reflect institutional perspectives. A purposive sampling technique was applied to select editorials that were relevant to the research objectives. The selection criteria included thematic relevance to socio-political issues, publication within a specific time frame, and the prominence of the media outlet in shaping public discourse. This sampling strategy ensures that the data are information-rich and suitable for critical discourse analysis.

The analytical procedure follows Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, which integrates textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice (Bezar et al., 2018). At the textual level, the analysis focuses on linguistic features that contribute to meaning construction, including vocabulary choices, modality, metaphors, transitivity patterns, and the use of pronouns. These elements are examined to identify evaluative language, representations of social actors, expressions of authority, and strategies of persuasion embedded in editorial discourse. Textual analysis aims to reveal how ideological positions are encoded through specific linguistic structures.

At the level of discursive practice, the analysis examines the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption (Triana et al., 2020). This includes consideration of editorial policies, institutional affiliations of the media outlets, and the digital nature of online publication. Intertextuality and interdiscursivity are also analyzed to identify how editorial texts draw upon, respond to, or recontextualize other texts such as political speeches, government statements, or previous news reports. This stage of analysis highlights how editorial discourse is shaped by institutional routines and media practices.

The social practice dimension situates the editorial texts within their broader socio-political and cultural contexts (Turner, 2012). This level of analysis explores how editorial discourse relates to contemporary social issues, power relations, and ideological struggles within society. By connecting textual and discursive findings to the wider social context, the study examines how online media editorials contribute to the reproduction or contestation of dominant ideologies, social inequalities, and hegemonic narratives.

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies are employed (Shenton, 2004). Theoretical triangulation is applied by consistently grounding the analysis in established CDA theories and concepts. Peer review and expert consultation are used to minimize subjective bias and to enhance analytical rigor. Additionally, transparency in analytical procedures and consistency in applying CDA categories across the data set contribute to the credibility and dependability of the study. These strategies strengthen the reliability of interpretations and support the robustness of the research conclusions.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

The analysis of online media editorial texts reveals that language is systematically employed to construct ideological positions and reinforce particular power relations. Across the selected editorials, discourse is not presented as neutral commentary but as a strategic mechanism for shaping readers' interpretations of socio-political issues (Ajiboye, 2013). The findings are presented according to Fairclough's three-dimensional framework: textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice.

At the textual level, the editorials demonstrate a consistent use of evaluative and judgmental vocabulary to legitimize certain viewpoints while delegitimizing opposing perspectives. Lexical choices frequently emphasize authority, urgency, and moral obligation, indicating an attempt to guide readers toward specific interpretations. Modal verbs such as *must*, *should*, and *cannot* are commonly used to express certainty and normative judgment, positioning the editorial voice as authoritative and unquestionable (Ahmad et al., 2019). Metaphorical expressions further strengthen ideological framing by simplifying complex social issues into moral binaries, such as progress versus stagnation or responsibility versus failure. In terms of transitivity, social actors associated with institutional power are often portrayed as active agents, while marginalized groups tend to appear in passive constructions, minimizing their agency. Pronoun usage, particularly inclusive forms such as *we* and *our*, functions to align the media institution with readers and to naturalize the editorial stance as a shared societal perspective.

Analysis at the level of discursive practice indicates that editorial texts are closely shaped by institutional routines and media ideologies. The production of editorials reflects the ideological orientation of the media outlets, which influences topic selection, framing, and argumentative strategies. Intertextual references to government statements, expert opinions, and prior news reports are selectively incorporated to reinforce the legitimacy of the editorial position (Zheng & Ren, 2018). Alternative or dissenting voices are either briefly mentioned or excluded altogether, suggesting a controlled circulation of discourse that prioritizes dominant narratives. The online format further amplifies the reach and immediacy of these editorials, enhancing their role in influencing public debate and opinion formation.

At the level of social practice, the findings show that online media editorials actively participate in broader socio-political processes by reinforcing hegemonic ideologies and power structures. Editorial discourse often aligns with dominant political or institutional interests, presenting them as rational, necessary, and beneficial to society. Through repeated patterns of representation and exclusion, the editorials contribute to the normalization of unequal power relations and the marginalization of alternative perspectives. However, in some instances, editorial texts also function as sites of ideological contestation, challenging certain policies or power holders, though such critiques remain bounded within acceptable institutional limits.

Results demonstrate that online media editorial texts operate as influential discursive instruments that shape public understanding through ideological framing and strategic language use. By integrating linguistic analysis with institutional and social contexts, the study reveals how editorials simultaneously reflect and reproduce power relations within contemporary digital media environments. These findings confirm the effectiveness of Critical Discourse Analysis in uncovering the implicit ideological functions embedded in online editorial discourse.

3.2 Linking Findings to Critical Discourse Analysis Theory

The findings of this study strongly support the central assumptions of Critical Discourse Analysis, which conceptualizes discourse as a form of social practice closely intertwined with ideology and power relations (Fairclough, 1995). The consistent use of evaluative language,

modality, and framing strategies identified in the editorial texts confirms CDA's claim that discourse is never neutral but always ideologically loaded. Through lexical selection and grammatical structuring, the editorials actively construct particular versions of social reality, reinforcing the idea that language functions as a medium through which ideological meanings are naturalized and legitimized.

At the textual level, the findings align with CDA's emphasis on linguistic features as carriers of ideology (Al-Nakeeb & Alaghbary, 2015). The frequent use of authoritative modality and moralized vocabulary illustrates Fairclough's argument that power is exercised through discourse by presenting specific interpretations as common sense or unquestionable. Similarly, the representation of dominant institutions as active agents and marginalized groups as passive participants reflects van Dijk's notion of ideological square, in which positive self-representation and negative other-representation are systematically reproduced through discourse. These patterns demonstrate how grammatical choices operate as ideological tools rather than purely stylistic elements.

The analysis of discursive practice further reinforces CDA theory by showing how editorial discourse is shaped by institutional structures and media routines. Fairclough emphasizes that texts are produced and circulated within specific institutional contexts that influence meaning construction (Fairclough, 2013). The selective use of intertextual references and the exclusion of alternative viewpoints found in this study illustrate how media institutions control access to discourse, thereby exercising symbolic power. This finding is consistent with CDA's view that dominance is maintained not only through overt coercion but also through control over discourse production and distribution.

At the level of social practice, the findings confirm CDA's theoretical position that discourse contributes to the reproduction of hegemony. The alignment of editorial discourse with dominant socio-political interests reflects Gramsci's concept of hegemony, as adopted in CDA, where ideological dominance is achieved through consent rather than force. By repeatedly framing certain policies or actors as rational, necessary, or inevitable, the editorials contribute to the normalization of existing power relations. However, instances of limited critique within the editorials also support CDA's view of discourse as a site of struggle, where hegemonic meanings may be contested, albeit within constrained institutional boundaries.

The integration of textual, discursive, and social dimensions in the findings demonstrates the analytical strength of CDA as a theoretical framework (Mullet, 2018). The study empirically confirms CDA's core premise that language is a key mechanism through which power, ideology, and social inequality are constructed and sustained in media discourse. Consequently, the findings not only validate the relevance of CDA theory for analyzing online media editorials but also highlight its effectiveness in revealing the subtle and often invisible ways in which discourse shapes public understanding and social relations.

3.3 Comparison of Current Findings with Previous Research

The results of the current study largely align with previous research in the field of Critical Discourse Analysis, particularly studies that examine media and editorial discourse. Consistent with earlier CDA research, this study confirms that online media editorial texts are not neutral reflections of social reality but are discursively constructed to promote particular ideological positions. Foundational studies by Fairclough (1995, 2003) and van Dijk (2008) argue that media discourse functions as a site where power relations and ideological meanings are produced and reproduced. The present findings support this view by demonstrating how linguistic features such as evaluative vocabulary, modality, and actor representation are systematically employed to legitimize dominant perspectives.

In comparison with prior analyses of editorial texts, the current study reveals similar discursive strategies while extending their application to the digital context. Previous studies, such as those by Richardson (2007) and Wodak and Meyer (2009), identified the use of

authoritative language and moral framing in print media editorials to influence public opinion. The present research shows that these strategies persist in online editorials, suggesting a continuity of ideological practices across media formats. However, the findings also highlight the intensified reach and immediacy of online editorials, which amplify their potential impact on public discourse compared to traditional print platforms.

The representation of social actors in the current study closely mirrors patterns identified in earlier CDA research. Studies by van Leeuwen (2008) and Huda (2022) reported that dominant institutions are often portrayed as active and rational agents, while marginalized groups are depicted passively or excluded altogether. Similar patterns were observed in the present study, indicating that strategies of inclusion and exclusion remain central mechanisms through which editorial discourse reinforces power relations. This consistency underscores the enduring relevance of CDA concepts such as dominance, hegemony, and ideological framing in contemporary media analysis.

Nevertheless, the current study also offers insights that extend beyond previous research (Blaser et al., 2013). While many earlier studies focused primarily on traditional newspapers or isolated political events, this research emphasizes online media editorials as dynamic discursive spaces shaped by digital circulation and audience engagement. The findings suggest that although online platforms offer greater accessibility and potential plurality, editorial discourse continues to operate within institutional and ideological constraints. This observation partially contrasts with optimistic views in some digital media studies, which argue that online journalism significantly democratizes public discourse.

Overall, the comparison demonstrates that the results of the current study are largely consistent with previous CDA research while contributing new empirical evidence from the context of online editorial discourse. By confirming established theoretical claims and extending them to digital media environments, this study strengthens the existing body of literature and highlights the continued relevance of Critical Discourse Analysis in examining the ideological functions of contemporary media texts.

3.4 Social Implications

One important social implication concerns democratic participation and public deliberation. When editorial texts present dominant perspectives as natural, inevitable, or morally superior, they can limit the scope of public debate by discouraging critical engagement with alternative interpretations. Such discursive practices may lead to the normalization of unequal power relations and reduce the visibility of marginalized voices in public discourse. As a result, the public sphere risks becoming less inclusive, with editorial authority reinforcing elite perspectives rather than facilitating open and pluralistic discussion.

The study also has implications for media literacy and critical awareness. By revealing how ideology and power are embedded in linguistic choices, the findings highlight the need for readers to engage critically with media texts. A greater awareness of discursive strategies such as framing, evaluative language, and inclusion or exclusion of social actors can empower audiences to question editorial narratives rather than passively accepting them (Baden & Springer, 2017). This is particularly important in the digital media environment, where rapid information circulation increases the risk of ideological manipulation and uncritical consumption of opinionated content.

Furthermore, the results have relevance for journalistic practice and media ethics. Editorial writers and media organizations wield significant symbolic power, and the findings suggest that this power is often exercised in ways that reinforce institutional or political interests. Recognizing the ideological effects of editorial discourse may encourage media practitioners to adopt more reflexive and transparent approaches to opinion writing. Such awareness could contribute to more balanced editorial practices that acknowledge multiple perspectives and avoid the systematic marginalization of certain social groups.

Finally, the broader implications extend to social equality and power relations. By repeatedly representing certain actors as authoritative and others as passive or problematic, editorial discourse can contribute to the reproduction of social hierarchies and ideological dominance. However, the study also indicates that editorial texts have the potential to challenge hegemonic narratives and promote social change when used critically (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016). Understanding these dynamics is essential for scholars, policymakers, and the public in recognizing how discourse shapes social realities and influences the direction of societal development.

In sum, the broader social implications of this study emphasize the central role of online media editorials in shaping ideology, power, and public consciousness. Through a critical examination of editorial discourse, this research highlights the necessity of fostering critical media engagement, ethical journalism, and inclusive public discourse in an increasingly digital society.

3.5 Contribution of the Study

This study makes several important contributions to the field of Critical Discourse Analysis, media studies, and public discourse research. From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the application of Critical Discourse Analysis by demonstrating the continued relevance and adaptability of CDA frameworks in the analysis of online media editorial texts (Mu & Ma, 2022). While much CDA research has traditionally focused on print media or hard news reporting, this study applies Fairclough's three-dimensional model to digital editorials, thereby expanding the analytical scope of CDA to contemporary media environments. By integrating textual, discursive, and social dimensions within an online context, the study reinforces CDA's core theoretical claim that discourse functions as a social practice shaped by institutional power and ideology. In doing so, the research contributes to the refinement of CDA theory by illustrating how traditional discursive mechanisms such as evaluative language, modality, and actor representation are recontextualized and intensified within digital editorial discourse.

The study also offers significant practical contributions, particularly in the areas of media literacy, journalism ethics, and public awareness. By uncovering the ideological functions embedded in editorial language, the findings provide valuable insights for readers to critically engage with opinion texts rather than accepting them as neutral or authoritative truths. This contributes to the development of critical media literacy, enabling audiences to recognize discursive strategies such as framing, inclusion and exclusion, and legitimization of power (Kellner & Share, 2019). For media practitioners and journalists, the study highlights the ethical implications of editorial discourse and encourages greater reflexivity in opinion writing. Awareness of the ideological impact of language use may support more balanced, transparent, and socially responsible editorial practices.

In addition, this research makes a meaningful contextual contribution by providing empirical insights into the operation of editorial discourse within a specific socio-political and cultural setting. By focusing on online media editorials within a particular national or regional context, the study enriches the predominantly Western-centric body of CDA literature (H. Wang, 2018). It reveals how local political dynamics, cultural norms, and institutional structures influence editorial framing and ideological positioning. This contextualized analysis not only broadens the geographical scope of CDA research but also contributes to a deeper understanding of how global discursive practices are adapted to local realities.

Overall, this study contributes to advancing theoretical debates in Critical Discourse Analysis, enhancing practical awareness among media stakeholders, and enriching contextual understanding of digital editorial discourse. By bridging linguistic analysis with social critique, the research underscores the significance of editorial texts as powerful sites of ideological production in contemporary digital media landscapes.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that online media editorial texts function as powerful discursive instruments through which ideology, power, and social relations are constructed and negotiated. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, the research reveals that editorial discourse is characterized by strategic linguistic choices, institutional framing, and selective representation of social actors, all of which contribute to the legitimization of dominant perspectives and the marginalization of alternative voices. These findings confirm the relevance of CDA in uncovering the ideological functions of digital editorial discourse and highlight the continued influence of media institutions in shaping public understanding within contemporary digital environments. Nevertheless, this study is subject to certain limitations, including its focus on a limited number of editorial texts and specific media outlets, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the qualitative and interpretative nature of CDA involves a degree of subjectivity in analysis. Future research is therefore encouraged to adopt comparative or mixed-method approaches, expand data sources across different media platforms or national contexts, and incorporate multimodal analysis to examine visual and interactive elements of online editorials. Such extensions would deepen understanding of the evolving role of editorial discourse in digital public spheres and further strengthen the analytical scope of Critical Discourse Analysis.

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