

Critical Discourse Analysis of Online News on the Sibolga Flood in CNN Indonesia and Liputan6

Esra Delima Hutabarat¹, Vercelly Hot Taruli Manik², Kesmi Veronika Manik³, Partohap Sihombing⁴

Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar, Pematangsiantar, Indonesia^{1,2,3,4}

Email Korespodensi: esradelimahutabarat@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how the Sibolga flood is represented in Indonesian online news media by applying Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Using a qualitative approach, the data consist of two online news articles reporting the same flood event, published by CNN Indonesia and Liputan6 within the same time period. The analysis follows Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, encompassing textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. The findings reveal notable differences in the linguistic and discursive strategies employed by the two media outlets. CNN Indonesia tends to emphasize severity, casualties, and urgency through evaluative lexical choices and dramatic headlines, positioning the flood as a major humanitarian crisis. In contrast, Liputan6 focuses more on infrastructural recovery and institutional responses, framing the disaster within a narrative of control and normalization. These differing representations reflect distinct ideological orientations and power relations, particularly in relation to state institutions and public audiences. The study concludes that online disaster reporting is not neutral but functions as a discursive site where meaning, responsibility, and social reality are constructed. This research contributes to Critical Discourse Analysis and media studies by highlighting how language shapes public understanding of disasters in Indonesian online news.

Keyword: Critical Discourse Analysis; Disaster Representation; Flood Reporting; Online News Media

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INTRODUCTION

Advances in information and communication technology have significantly transformed the way information is produced, distributed, and consumed in contemporary society. The rapid development of the internet and digital platforms has positioned online media as one of the primary sources of public information. News can now be accessed instantly, enabling media institutions to shape public understanding of social events in real time. Recent studies emphasize that online news media not only function as information providers but also play a central role in constructing social meanings through language and framing practices (Olausson, 2020; Zelizer, 2022).

Natural disasters are among the social events that receive extensive media coverage due to their significant humanitarian, social, and economic impacts. Floods, in particular, are frequently framed in ways that influence how suffering, responsibility, and recovery are interpreted by the public. Houston, Pfefferbaum, and Rosenholtz (2020) argue that disaster reporting affects public perceptions of risk and institutional accountability. Similarly, Olausson (2020) notes that media representations of disasters often prioritize certain narratives, such as control and recovery, while marginalizing structural vulnerability and long-term social consequences. The flood that struck Sibolga and its surrounding areas attracted wide attention from national online media because it resulted in fatalities, infrastructural damage, and disruptions to transportation and daily activities.

However, media coverage of disasters is not neutral or uniform. Different media outlets may represent the same event in different ways depending on editorial policies, institutional interests, and ideological orientations. Fowler (1991) states that news language is ideologically structured, meaning that linguistic choices such as headlines, lexical selection, and thematic emphasis play a significant role in shaping readers' interpretations. In line with this view, Richardson (2007) highlights that media discourse actively constructs social reality by privileging certain perspectives while marginalizing others. These insights underline the importance of examining how language is used in news reporting to frame disaster events. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides an appropriate framework for investigating these representational differences. Fairclough (1995) conceptualizes discourse as a form of social practice that is closely connected to power relations and ideology. Wodak (2001) further emphasizes that discourse both reflects and reproduces social inequalities within specific historical and social contexts, while Van Dijk (2009) argues that media discourse plays a central role in shaping public cognition and opinion. Together, these perspectives suggest that disaster reporting in online media functions as a site where power, ideology, and institutional interests are discursively negotiated.

This study adopts Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, which consists of text analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. Although recent studies have examined media discourse and disaster reporting, limited attention has been given to comparative analyses of how the same disaster is represented differently by Indonesian online news media. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how the Sibolga flood is represented in online news published by CNN Indonesia and Liputan6. Specifically, it seeks to examine the linguistic features employed in the news texts, explore the discursive practices underlying their production, and explain the broader social and ideological implications of the differing representations of the Sibolga flood.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the main analytical approach. A qualitative method is appropriate because the study aims to interpret meanings, representations, and ideological constructions embedded in media texts rather than to quantify data. The analytical framework is based on Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, which conceptualizes discourse as a form of social practice closely related to power relations and ideology. This framework

allows the researcher to examine linguistic features of the text as well as the institutional and social contexts in which the news is produced.

The data of this study consist of two online news articles, each representing one media outlet, namely CNN Indonesia and Liputan6. The decision to analyze one article from each media outlet was made to enable a comparative analysis of how the same flood event was represented by different online news institutions. The selected articles were chosen because they reported the same disaster event but emphasized different aspects of the flood, allowing for a focused and in-depth discourse analysis. The articles were published during the active period of flood coverage in late November 2025, which ensured that both texts addressed the same socio-temporal context of the disaster. Data were collected through documentation techniques by accessing the official websites of CNN Indonesia and Liputan6.

Data analysis was conducted by applying Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis in a systematic and operational manner. First, headline identification was carried out to examine how each media outlet framed the flood event at the initial level of representation. Second, lexical analysis was conducted by identifying key vocabulary, evaluative words, and numerical expressions used to describe the flood and its impacts. Third, thematic analysis was applied to identify dominant themes emphasized in each news article, such as humanitarian crisis, infrastructure damage, or recovery efforts. Finally, ideological interpretation was performed by relating the linguistic and thematic findings to broader discursive practices and social contexts, including institutional priorities, power relations, and disaster discourse in Indonesian online media. Through these analytical steps, the study aims to reveal how language is used to construct different representations of the Sibolga flood by CNN Indonesia and Liputan6.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings of this study are derived from two online news articles reporting the Sibolga flood published by CNN Indonesia and Liputan6. Although both articles report the same disaster event, they construct different representations through distinct linguistic choices and thematic emphases.

Representation in CNN Indonesia

The CNN Indonesia article, titled "*Banjir Tapanuli Tengah Terparah, 47 Orang Tewas, Akses Terputus Total*", represents the Sibolga flood as a severe humanitarian crisis. This representation is evident in the headline through the use of evaluative and dramatic lexical choices such as "*terparah*" (worst), "*47 orang tewas*" (47 people died), and "*akses terputus total*" (access completely cut off). These expressions immediately foreground the magnitude of the disaster and position it as an extraordinary and urgent event. Within the body of the text, the repeated emphasis on fatalities, isolation, and emergency conditions further reinforces this crisis-oriented framing. The frequent use of numerical data and negatively connoted vocabulary functions to intensify the sense of danger and loss. Linguistically, such lexical choices construct the flood as a catastrophic event that requires immediate attention and intervention. As a result, the CNN Indonesia article directs readers to perceive the flood primarily in terms of human suffering, infrastructural collapse, and urgency.

Representation in Liputan6

In contrast, the Liputan6 article titled "*Terdampak Banjir Sumatera, Ruas Jalan Tarutung–Sibolga Kembali Pulih*" constructs a different representation of the same flood event. Rather than emphasizing casualties or destruction, the headline highlights recovery and normalization through the lexical choice "*kembali pulih*" (has recovered). This phrase signals a shift from disaster impact to post-disaster management and institutional response. The body of the article predominantly focuses on infrastructure restoration, particularly road access and mobility. Lexical items related to functionality and improvement suggest that the situation is under control and gradually returning to normal. By prioritizing information

about repaired infrastructure and transportation access, Liputan6 frames the flood as a temporary disruption that has been effectively managed. This representation minimizes the humanitarian dimension and instead emphasizes stability and recovery. Overall, the findings demonstrate that CNN Indonesia and Liputan6 represent the Sibolga flood through contrasting discursive strategies. CNN Indonesia foregrounds crisis and devastation, while Liputan6 emphasizes recovery and institutional effectiveness. These differences indicate that media representations of disasters are shaped by editorial focus and communicative goals rather than merely reflecting objective reality.

Discussion

The differing representations of the Sibolga flood can be interpreted through Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework, which highlights the interrelationship between language, ideology, and power. At the level of textual analysis, the contrasting lexical choices used in the two headlines reveal how language functions ideologically. CNN Indonesia's use of evaluative and dramatic vocabulary constructs a discourse of crisis and emergency, positioning the flood as a severe humanitarian disaster. In contrast, Liputan6 employs solution-oriented and neutral vocabulary that promotes a discourse of recovery and normalization.

From the perspective of discursive practice, these differences reflect distinct institutional orientations and assumptions about audience needs. CNN Indonesia's emphasis on death tolls and isolation aligns with a journalistic practice that prioritizes urgency and public awareness, potentially encouraging accountability and state response. Liputan6, on the other hand, adopts a service oriented reporting style by highlighting infrastructure restoration and mobility, which aligns with institutional discourses of stability and control. This suggests that news production is influenced by media routines and institutional priorities in framing disaster events.

At the level of social practice, these representations are embedded within broader ideological and power relations. CNN Indonesia's crisis framing may implicitly highlight state responsibility and expose vulnerabilities in disaster management, positioning the public as victims requiring urgent intervention. Conversely, Liputan6's recovery focused framing aligns with dominant institutional ideologies that emphasize resilience, effectiveness, and order, thereby reinforcing trust in authorities and institutional competence. As Van Dijk (2009) argues, media discourse plays a crucial role in shaping public cognition by emphasizing certain aspects of reality while downplaying others. In the context of disaster reporting, such discursive choices influence how responsibility, urgency, and power relations between the state, media institutions, and the public are understood. In line with Fairclough's view of discourse as social practice, this study demonstrates that online news media do not merely report natural disasters but actively construct social meanings through language. The representation of the Sibolga flood in CNN Indonesia and Liputan6 reflects broader ideological orientations and power relations that shape public perceptions of disasters and institutional authority.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzes the representation of the Sibolga flood in online news published by CNN Indonesia and Liputan6 using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis. The findings indicate that although both media outlets reported the same disaster event, they constructed different representations through distinct linguistic choices and framing strategies. CNN Indonesia predominantly framed the flood as a severe humanitarian crisis by emphasizing fatalities, isolation, and infrastructural damage, while Liputan6 highlighted recovery efforts and infrastructure restoration, presenting the flood as a situation moving toward normalization.

These findings contribute academically to Critical Discourse Analysis and media studies by demonstrating how disaster news is shaped by ideological orientations and institutional priorities rather than neutral reporting. Practically, the study emphasizes the importance of responsible disaster journalism and critical media literacy, encouraging both journalists and readers to be more aware of how language

influences public perception during disaster situations. However, this study is limited by the small data set, which consists of only two online news articles from two media outlets. Future research is encouraged to include a larger corpus of news texts, additional media platforms, or different disaster contexts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of disaster discourse in online media.

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