

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF IMAGE-MAKING IN DEDI MULYADI'S YOUTUBE CHANNEL

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Abstract

This study analyzes the political image-building strategies employed by Dedi Mulyadi through his YouTube video titled “INI PENJELASAN KDM PADA REMAJA YANG KECEWA KARENA RUMAHNYA DIBONGKAR.” The research aims to explore how Dedi Mulyadi constructs and manages his public image as a populist leader through discourse and media representation. The study adopts Teun A. Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, which integrates three analytical dimensions: text structure, social cognition, and social context. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research examines how linguistic choices, narrative organization, and rhetorical strategies contribute to shaping perceptions of power, empathy, and leadership. The findings reveal that Mulyadi strategically frames his authority as both rational and compassionate by employing paternalistic language and rhetorical questions that emphasize moral and social responsibility. His discourse transforms issues of structural inequality such as housing evictions into narratives of individual morality and gratitude. Through controlled media presentation on his personal YouTube channel, Mulyadi redefines potential criticism into opportunities for moral teaching and image reinforcement. The study concludes that YouTube functions not merely as a communication platform but as a tool of narrative control, allowing political figures like Mulyadi to recontextualize social conflicts and strengthen their image as pro-people leaders.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Political Image, YouTube Communication

1. Introduction

In the digital era, social media has become an essential medium for political communication and image construction. Political figures increasingly use platforms such as YouTube to reach a wider audience, shape public perception, and influence discourse surrounding their leadership. One prominent figure in Indonesia who adopts this strategy is Dedi Mulyadi, a public official known for his populist and cultural approach in addressing social and political issues through online media. His YouTube channel often features direct interactions with citizens, portraying his accessibility and empathy while reinforcing his authority as a rational and moral leader.

Previous studies on political discourse and image construction, including those conducted by Kartikasari et al. (2024) and Prihartono & Suharyo (2022), show that Teun A. Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model provides an effective framework for examining the relationship between language, ideology, and power in media narratives. These studies have successfully identified ideological mechanisms behind political communication in various contexts, from televised debates to digital media. However, most previous research focuses on formal political settings or elite media interactions, leaving limited exploration of how political identity is constructed through informal and populist communication on personal social media platforms such as YouTube.

This study aims to fill that gap by applying Van Dijk's CDA model to analyze Dedi Mulyadi's video titled “INI PENJELASAN KDM PADA REMAJA YANG KECEWA KARENA RUMAHNYA DIBONGKAR.” The research examines how textual, cognitive, and contextual strategies are used to frame political authority and moral legitimacy while transforming public criticism into narratives of compassion and leadership. By focusing on this case, the study provides insight into how YouTube functions as a medium for narrative control and political branding in the context of Indonesian digital populism.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to understanding how modern political discourse operates within social media environments. By identifying the mechanisms of self-representation and narrative management, this study strengthens comprehension of digital-era political communication and offers a framework for future analyses of political media practices and their societal impacts.

2. Literature Review

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) has proven to be an effective approach for uncovering communication strategies and the construction of political images, as highlighted by Dian (2024) in her article "Analisis Wacana Politik Prabowo Subianto Bicara Gagasan dalam Chanel YouTube Najwa Shihab."

Similarly, Prihartono and Suharyo (2022) employ Teun A. van Dijk's CDA model in their research on the #DebatKeren Papua debate, focusing on themes of nationalism and separatism and analyzing the macro structure, superstructure, and discourse strategies involved.

Hermawan, Nurohman, and Widiastuti (2022) also apply Teun A. van Dijk's model in their study of the song "Dapur Keluarga" by Feast, examining social critique related to Corruption, Collusion, and Nepotism (KKN) through text structure, social cognition, and social context. These studies collectively demonstrate the value of CDA in analyzing how political figures and public figures, like Dedi Mulyadi, use discourse to construct and communicate their public image. This aligns with my paper, Critical Discourse Analysis of Image-Making in Dedi Mulyadi's YouTube Channel, which aims to investigate how Kang Dedi Mulyadi's videos strategically build his political and public persona through similar discourse mechanisms.

3. Methods

The research method used is descriptive qualitative with a **critical discourse analysis (CDA)** approach by Teun A. Van Dijk. The selection of this theory model over other discourse analysis models is due to its frequent use and its ability to integrate various elements of discourse while maintaining coherence.

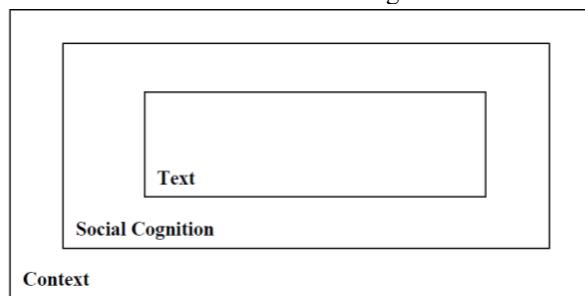


Figure 1. Van Dijk's Model of Critical Discourse Analysis

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

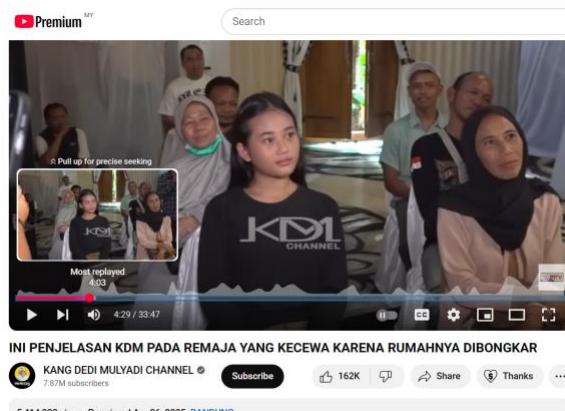


Figure 2. Kang Dedi Mulyadi YouTube Channel

The analysis of political image construction in Dedi Mulyadi's YouTube content titled "*INI PENJELASAN KDM PADA REMAJA YANG KECEWA KARENA RUMAHNYA DIBONGKAR*" focuses on how discourse strategies are used to build his public persona as a rational, empathetic, and authoritative leader. The results are summarized based on three dimensions of Teun A. Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis: text structure, social cognition, and social context.

The findings show that Dedi Mulyadi applies discursive strategies that highlight moral reasoning and paternalistic communication to reinforce his credibility and empathy. His language choices, tone, and rhetorical framing shift the discussion from structural problems, such as forced evictions, to personal moral values such as gratitude and humility. This redirection transforms criticism into moral reflection and reduces public resistance. The results also indicate that YouTube functions not merely as a communication platform but as a tool of narrative control, where content is edited and framed to maintain positive public perception.

Compared to previous studies by Prihartono and Suharyo (2022) and Kartikasari et al. (2024), this study extends the application of Van Dijk's model to a more informal, digital-populist context. While prior research centered on debates or institutional discourse, this study demonstrates how individual political figures use digital storytelling and performative empathy to construct authority within public consciousness.

The analysis confirms that Dedi Mulyadi's YouTube discourse integrates elements of authority, morality, and populism, forming a persuasive strategy that appeals to emotional and rational dimensions simultaneously. This finding contributes to a deeper understanding of how political narratives evolve within personalized media spaces.

Textual Structure

The textual analysis reveals that the main theme of the video is not the clarification of eviction policies but the justification of those policies through moral argumentation.

The macrostructure of the discourse transforms social criticism into moral education. The superstructure of the narrative follows a deliberate sequence: introduction of the issue, confrontation, justification, resolution, and closure.

Microstructural features such as rhetorical questions "*Rumah aja enggak punya, (apalagi) bayar perpisahan*" ("How can you speak up when you do not even have a house?") and paternalistic expressions "*Sebagai saya ini kan orang tua nih...*" ("As an older person, I only want to advise you") reinforce Dedi's role as a guiding and authoritative figure.

Table 1. Textual Structure Analysis

ASPECT OF ANALYSIS	TEXTUAL EVIDENCE (KEY QUOTATION)	FUNCTION IN THE IMAGE-BUILDING STRATEGY
Macrostructure	<i>"Anda miskin tapi jangan sok kaya. Orang miskin tuh prihatin..."</i> ("You're poor, so don't pretend to be rich. Poor people should be humble...")	Shifts the topic from "eviction" to a "critique of the residents' mentality."
Superstructure	<i>"...10 juta kita beri bantuan untuk kontrak rumah..."</i> ("...We'll give 10 million as assistance for renting a house...")	Positions himself as a "heroic figure" who resolves the problem at the end of the story.
Microstructure	<i>"Sebagai saya ini kan orang tua nih..."</i> ("Well, I'm an older person, you see...")	Creates an image of closeness or <i>fatherly (paternalistic)</i> authority to legitimize his advice.
Rhetorical	<i>"Rumah aja enggak punya, (apalagi) bayar perpisahan. Gimana speak upnya?"</i> ("We don't even have a house, let alone money for the graduation event. How can we speak up?")	Uses a rhetorical question to undermine the opponent's argument.

Social Cognition

In the video, Dedi Mulyadi (KDM) appears to use discursive strategies to construct certain social representations. KDM positions himself as a figure of authority who is "*reasonable*" and *realistic*, yet still appears close to the people.

To residents living along the riverbanks, he shifts the focus from empathy to legality by emphasizing that the land belongs to the state, not inherited property. This reflects the state's ideology regarding space and property, which is presented as fair and logical, even though it disadvantages the poor. Dedi Mulyadi (KDM) also positions himself as a wise and principled authority, whose actions are motivated by concern for the real conditions of society. This is shown when he reframes his policy of banning graduation ceremonies not as a restriction, but as an effort to protect people from financial burdens, referring to the issue of loans from *Bank Emok* (loan sharks) and the total amount of unpaid diploma fees in West Java, which has reached 1.3 trillion rupiah.

Table 2. Social Cognition Analysis

ASPECT OF ANALYSIS	TEXTUAL EVIDENCE (KEY QUOTATION)	FUNCTION IN THE IMAGE-BUILDING STRATEGY
Self-Representation (Pro-People Leader)	<i>"Berapa coba total tagihan... 1,3 triliun."</i> ("Do you know how much the total debt is... 1.3 trillion. ")	Frames his policy as an action grounded in data and a deep concern for the real conditions of the people.
Representation of the 'Other' (Citizens Need Guidance)	<i>"..anak muda harus kritis. Kritis itu pada hal yang positif gitu."</i> ("...Young people must be critical. But be critical about positive things. ")	Positions the citizens as individuals whose thinking needs to be guided, thereby making KDM's dominance in the dialogue appear natural or justified.
Minimization Strategy	<i>"Enggak punya rumah, enggak punya tanah ya, tapi masih punya nyawa. Masih punya sehat."</i> ("You don't have a house, you don't have land, but you still have life. You're still healthy. ")	Diverts the focus from material loss (losing one's home) to non-material aspects (gratitude), in order to soften or suppress potential criticism of the eviction policy.

Social Context

Van Dijk emphasizes that discourse is always embedded within structures of power. In this video, KDM holds symbolic and bureaucratic power, while the residents are directly affected by the policy. The recording process, conducted in a closed room but broadcast publicly, demonstrates full narrative control by KDM. The residents speak, but only within a dialogue framework and control predetermined by him. YouTube as a platform provides KDM with the space to manage his image as a present, open, and communicative leader, even though the narrative remains within an asymmetrical power relationship.

YouTube is used as an arena to display both power and generosity simultaneously. By inviting and documenting interactions with those who criticize him, KDM projects an image of a leader who is open and receptive to critique. However, this process also reinforces his authority, as he ultimately "resolves" issues by providing assistance through CSR from Bank Jabar Peduli—an action that strengthens his image as a strong, connected facilitator, rather than just an individual. This context illustrates how digital media can be leveraged to manage political image, transforming potential conflicts into a controlled performance of resolution.

Table 3. Social Cognition Analysis

ASPECT OF ANALYSIS	TEXTUAL EVIDENCE (KEY QUOTATION)	FUNCTION IN THE IMAGE-BUILDING STRATEGY
Power Relations (Dominant & Generous)	<i>"Mana ada orang lain dikritik orang yang ngritiknya diundang."</i> ("Who else gets to invite the person who criticizes them?")	This statement demonstrates his superior position , being able to both invite and even assist those who criticize him.
Media Function (Narrative Control)	<i>The entire video uploaded on KDM's personal YouTube channel.</i>	KDM's use of his own platform to present a narrative favorable to himself, without filters or involvement of traditional media, is a form of narrative control .

4.2 Discussion

The findings indicate that the political image of Dedi Mulyadi is constructed through consistent use of moral narratives and paternalistic rhetoric that frame social issues as personal virtues. This differs from prior research, which mostly examined institutional discourse rather than personalized digital media. The study confirms that political figures now use participatory digital platforms to reframe conflict into controlled and emotionally resonant narratives.

These findings emphasize the growing significance of YouTube as a site for symbolic power, where political authority is maintained through empathy performance, storytelling, and selective visibility. The research provides valuable insights into how digital populism redefines leadership representation in Indonesia and suggests further studies explore how audience reception contributes to sustaining these political narratives.

5. Conclusion

This study analyzed how Dedi Mulyadi constructs his political image through discourse in his YouTube content "*INI PENJELASAN KDM PADA REMAJA YANG KECEWA KARENA RUMAHNYA DIBONGKAR*." Using Teun A. Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis model, the research identified three dimensions of image-building: textual, cognitive, and contextual strategies. The findings reveal that Dedi Mulyadi employs moral reasoning, paternalistic rhetoric, and narrative control to strengthen his image as a populist and compassionate leader.

The study concludes that YouTube functions not only as a platform for public communication but also as an arena for managing symbolic power and legitimizing political actions. Through selective framing, rhetorical emphasis, and emotional appeal, political figures can transform potential criticism into narratives of empathy and moral virtue.

These findings can be applied to the broader understanding of digital political communication, particularly in the context of Indonesian populism. Future studies are encouraged to examine audience perception and interactivity in shaping or reinforcing such political images. The integration of discourse analysis with audience-based methods could provide a more comprehensive view of how online narratives influence public opinion and political legitimacy.

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