

POLITICAL NARRATIVE ABOUT THE FAKE DIPLOMA CONTROVERSY ON AN ONLINE NEWS PORTAL

Narasi Politik dalam Pemberitaan Kontroversi Ijazah Palsu di Portal Berita Daring

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate how political realities are discursively constructed in media texts and to uncover the underlying power relations and ideological frameworks embedded in the narratives of CNN Indonesia's news portal. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach using observation and note-taking techniques applied to six news articles concerning Jokowi's alleged fake diploma. Data analysis adopts Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework: (a) text analysis, (b) discourse practice, and (c) sociocultural practice. The findings suggest that CNN Indonesia, while maintaining a formal and ostensibly objective tone, employs strategic lexical choices, grammatical structures, and rhetorical strategies to legitimize state authority and shift public focus away from the substance of the allegations toward the legal proceedings against the accusers. The news employs a legalistic and institutional tone that appears neutral but implicitly fosters public trust in state institutions and skepticism toward civil criticism. This study highlights that media discourse is never entirely neutral and plays a critical role in reproducing power structures through carefully constructed narratives.

Keywords: political narrative, news portal, CNN Indonesia, CDA

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki realitas politik yang dibangun secara diskursif dalam teks-teks media dan mengungkap hubungan kuasa serta kerangka ideologis yang tertanam dalam narasi-narasi portal berita CNN Indonesia. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik observasi dan pencatatan pada enam artikel berita tentang ijazah palsu Jokowi yang diterbitkan pada Mei 2025. Analisis data penelitian menerapkan tiga kerangka kerja Analisis Wacana Kritis menurut Norman Fairclough: (a) analisis teks, (b) praktik wacana, dan (c) praktik sosiobudaya. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa, meskipun CNN Indonesia mempertahankan nada formal dan tampak objektif, terdapat penggunaan strategi leksikal, struktur gramatikal, dan retorika untuk melegitimasi pemerintah negara dan mengalihkan perhatian publik dari tuduhan yang dibuat ke proses hukum terhadap mereka yang dituduh. Berita tersebut menggunakan nada hukum dan institusional yang tampak netral, tetapi secara tidak langsung meningkatkan kepercayaan masyarakat terhadap institusi negara. Penelitian ini menekankan bahwa diskursus media tidak pernah sepenuhnya netral, dan bahwa itu sangat penting untuk menggambarkan struktur kekuasaan melalui cerita yang direncanakan dengan baik.

Kata-kata kunci: narasi politik, portal berita, CNN indonesia, analisis wacana kritis

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INTRODUCTION

The mass media, especially online media, have become the dominant channel for disseminating information (Nurrohmah & Setiawati, 2025) and play a central role in shaping public understanding and social discourse in the contemporary era (Al-Badawi & Al Najjar, 2021; Juneström, 2022). Rapid digital transformation has fundamentally altered patterns of information consumption, driving increasing reliance on online platforms for news (Mehawesh & AL-Allawi, 2024). News is a report or information about an event, incident, or recent fact that has significant value and interest for the public (Rosita & Jannah, 2020). It is characterized by timeless, factual accuracy, objectivity, and the absence of bias (Iskandar et al., 2023). In essence, news serves as a window to the world, allowing people to stay informed about their surroundings and global developments (Putri et al., 2022; Santoso et al., 2020). This information enables the public to make decisions, form opinions, and understand the social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics around them (Anuar et al., 2025; Sihite et al., 2024).

A clear example of the media's influence is the coverage of Joko Widodo's alleged fake diploma case, which sparked significant controversy in the online public sphere. This issue sparked widespread, multidirectional discourse, often laden with political and ideological interests. Rather than merely presenting facts, online media narratives surrounding the issue helped shape social and political perceptions through strategic choices of language, emphasis on particular issues, and persuasive rhetorical techniques (Afrouzi, 2020; Kabanga et al., 2023). The way news is framed plays a decisive role in influencing public perception: it affects how events are interpreted, which actors are seen as legitimate or not, and who is deemed right or wrong (Gusti & Setiawati, 2025; Kim, 2024; Sari et al., 2024).

One of the prominent online media outlets in Indonesia is CNN Indonesia, a leading online news portal and television news channel that is part of the global CNN network (Naqqiyah, 2020). CNN Indonesia targets a diverse audience, including the general public, political enthusiasts, and government observers (Al-Badawi & Al Najjar, 2021). Its primary demographic comprises the upper-middle class, professionals, and urban communities, reflected in its visual style, topic selection, and formal, analytical presentation of news.

With the tagline "News we can trust," CNN Indonesia uses straightforward language, avoids unnecessary complexity, and strives to present facts as they are (Yulianti & Setiawan, 2022). They are committed to revealing facts without bias, not positioning themselves as 'judges' or "executioners," but simply reporting events worth knowing. As part of a global news network, CNN Indonesia generally has journalistic guidelines emphasizing objectivity and verification. However, it is important to recognize that the media can never be entirely neutral in delivering news, whether intentionally or not (Shalaby, 2024). It is because media outlets intentionally write news for specific purposes (Filzah & Azmin, 2023), influenced by owners, editors, or specific political agendas. Therefore, an analytical approach is needed to uncover hidden meanings and ideologies that may be implied in the news discourse.

In this complex context, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) emerges as a highly relevant and robust method for unraveling the intertwined power, knowledge, and ideology hidden behind media and texts (Hui & Yuanyuan, 2023; Purba et al., 2024). CDA represents a scientific paradigm with social commitment to better understand and socially transform societal conditions (Weiß, 2024). It focuses on how language functions within specific social, cultural, and situational contexts to construct meaning (Hodes, 2018; Lei, 2025), while also exploring the interconnections between power, identity, ideology, and social relations in communication (Dewojati & Arifin, 2024; Putranto, 2024). As an approach, CDA provides a robust theoretical and methodological framework for empirically examining the complex relationship between discourse and socio-cultural development (Baqir et al., 2025; Juneström, 2022). It is inherently critical, aiming to uncover hidden ideologies, misrepresentations, and discrimination embedded in language and communication (Dubský et al., 2025; Prihartono & Suharyo, 2022). This approach goes beyond linguistic analysis alone, integrating insights from various disciplines such as psychology, history, and social sciences, making it a powerful tool for understanding complex social phenomena (Afifah & Rifa'i, 2024; Sutikno et al., 2025).

Numerous studies on critical discourse analysis in news media have been conducted by several researchers (Al-Badawi & Al Najjar, 2021; Albaburrahim & Sujinah, 2017; Bhakti et al., 2023; Nurrohmah & Setiawati, 2025; Shalaby, 2024; Zamzuardi & Syahrul, 2019). These studies focus on discourse ideology, sexual violence, media framing, and other critical perspectives, drawing on the work of Sara Mills, Van Dijk, Robert N. Entman, and Norman Fairclough across different news objects. However, few studies have examined how Indonesian mainstream media construct political legitimacy and power relations when covering highly sensitive state-related issues. Most previous research focused on topics such as corruption, gender, or moral panics, leaving a gap in the study of political narratives that directly test the credibility of national leadership. Moreover, while CNN Indonesia is widely regarded as an objective and credible source, its role in reproducing state ideology through language choices and grammatical structures remains underexplored. This gap highlights the need to analyze how so-called “neutral” media outlets actually reinforce power through discourse.

Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by critically analyzing how CNN Indonesia constructs political narratives in its coverage of Joko Widodo’s alleged fake diploma case. By applying Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional CDA model, this research seeks to uncover the subtle ideological mechanisms embedded in linguistic forms, framing patterns, and institutional voices. The study contributes theoretically to the expansion of Fairclough’s CDA framework within the context of Indonesian media studies and practically to the enhancement of public media literacy, encouraging readers to recognize that objectivity in journalism is always intertwined with ideology and power.

METHOD

This qualitative research focused on critical discourse analysis in news reports on Jokowi’s fake diploma on the CNN Indonesia portal (www.cnnindonesia.com). The primary data source for this study is news reports on Jokowi’s fake diploma, written in May 2025, as seen in the following table.

Table 1. The Issue of Jokowi’s Fake Diploma News

News Headline	Date
Update Kasus Ijazah Jokowi di Polda Metro, PN Solo, hingga Bareskrim (https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20250509203511-12-1227916/update-kasus-ijazah-jokowi-di-polda-metro-pn-solo-hingga-bareskrim)	May, 09
Podcaster Michael Sinaga Diperiksa Polisi Terkait Ijazah Palsu Jokowi (https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20250514130145-12-1229031/podcaster-michael-sinaga-diperiksa-polisi-terkait-ijazah-palsu-jokowi)	May, 14

Respons UGM Digugat Bayar Rp69 T Imbas Gaduh Ijazah Jokowi (https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20250515152114-20-1229511/respons-ugm-digugat-bayar-rp69-triliun-imbas-gaduh-ijazah-jokowi)	May, 15
Kader PSI Dian Sandi Pengunggah Ijazah Jokowi Diperiksa Polisi (https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20250519092224-12-1230594/kader-psi-dian-sandi-pengunggah-ijazah-jokowi-diperiksa-polisi)	May, 19
Jokowi Masih Tunggu Hasil Uji Labfor Ijazah UGM yang Dituding Palsu (https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20250520162716-12-1231241/jokowi-masih-tunggu-hasil-uji-labfor-ijazah-ugm-yang-dituding-palsu)	May, 20
Eks Penggugat Jokowi Resmi Ditahan Kasus Dugaan Pemalsuan Surat (https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20250522103544-12-1231920/eks-penggugat-jokowi-resmi-ditahan-kasus-dugaan-pemalsuan-surat)	May, 22

Source: www.cnnindonesia.com

This study employs the observation method combined with the read-and-note technique for data collection. This technique involved systematically reading, identifying, and recording linguistic, cultural, and contextual elements in each article. Each text was then classified based on thematic and linguistic patterns related to power, ideology, and representation. This approach systematically gather, filter, and categorize relevant discourse data from CNN Indonesia's news reports. The data analysis technique used in this study is critical discourse analysis, which is based on Norman Fairclough's approach.

Fairclough views discourse not only as a linguistic structure but also as a social practice that is interrelated with cultural, economic, and political contexts. This approach emphasizes the importance of understanding texts in depth, including how they are produced, distributed, and consumed within a particular power framework (Fairclough, 2013). Fairclough developed a three-dimensional model in CDA, namely: (1) text analysis, which includes the study of linguistic structures such as word choice, grammar, and style; (2) discourse practice analysis, which examines how texts are produced and interpreted by social actors; and (3) socio-cultural practice analysis, which links discourse to broader social structures, including power relations and ideologies hidden within the text. These three aspects are intertwined to reveal how language creates and shapes social reality (Dewojati & Arifin, 2024; Hui & Yuanyuan, 2023). The following figure is Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis.

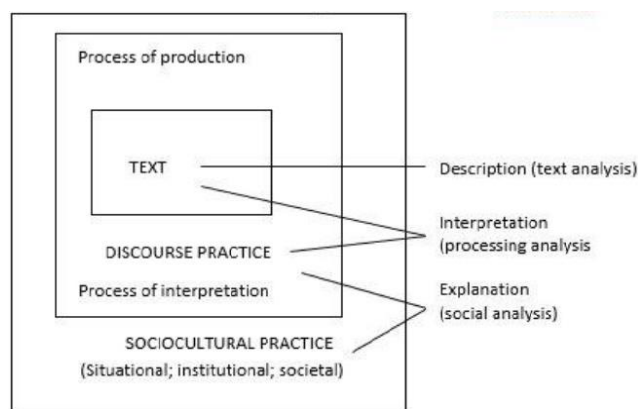


Figure 1.
Norman Fairclough's CDA

Based on the description, this study aims to examine the political narrative in news reports about the controversy surrounding Jokowi's fake diploma on the CNN Indonesia news portal.

RESULT AND DISSCUSSION

Based on research conducted on the coverage of Jokowi's fake diploma case on the CNN Indonesia portal, it was found that written discourse not only serves to convey news, but also

reflects the politics of discourse in news writing. This discussion is divided into text analysis, discursive practice analysis, and social practice analysis.

Text Analysis

Word and Phrase Selection

A word is a basic unit of language that carries meaning. Meanwhile, a phrase is a combination of two or more words that convey a single meaning and lacks a predicate (Khumairoh & Zahara, 2022). In discourse studies, words and phrases are important elements because lexical choice reflects the ideology, attitudes, and social position of the writer or speaker (Afrouzi, 2020). Phrase structure can also structure social representations and obscure the perpetrators of actions.

The following table of words and phrases can be analyzed based on the news text.

Table 2. The Use of Words and Phrases in News Reports

News Headline	Code	Words/Phrase	Code
Update Kasus Ijazah Jokowi di Polda Metro, PN Solo, hingga Bareskrim	A	Kasus ijazah Jokowi	A1
		Deadlock	A2
		Menolak	A3
		Bersikeras	A4
		Mengadukan	A5
		Dilaporkan	A6
Podcaster Michael Sinaga Diperiksa Polisi Terkait Ijazah Palsu Jokowi	B	Dipanggil	B1
		Diperiksa polisi	B2
		Ditangani Polda Metro Jaya	B3
		Pengadilan tidak terima	B4
		Klarifikasi	B5
Respons UGM Digugat Bayar Rp69 T Imbas Gaduh Ijazah Jokowi	C	Legal standing	C1
		Presiden ke-7 RI Joko Widodo	C2
		Kolaps	C3
		Rupiah anjlok	C4
Kader PSI Dian Sandi Pengunggah Ijazah Jokowi Diperiksa Polisi	D	Kader PSI	D1
		Terlapor	D2
		Pelapor	D3
		Barang bukti	D4
		Pengunggah ijazah Jokowi	D5
		Fitnah	D6
		UU ITE	D7
		Pasal 310 KUHP	D8
Jokowi Masih Tunggu Hasil Uji Labfor Ijazah UGM yang Dituding Palsu	E	Penyidik	E1
		Penyelidikan	E2
		Masih tunggu hasil uji Labfor	E3
Eks Penggugat Jokowi Resmi Ditahan Kasus Dugaan Pemalsuan Surat	F	Tersangka	F1
		Pemalsuan surat	F2
		Penahanan	F3
		KUHAP	F4
		Gelar perkara	F5
		Selalu absen	F6

Based on Table 2, there is the use of words such as “*deadlock*”, “*bersikeras*”, “*mengadukan*”, and “*terlapor*” (codes A2, A4, A5, and D2). “*Bersikeras*” means being stubborn or obstinate (KBBI V). In the context of the news, Joko Widodo's legal counsel was utterly unwilling to show his client's diploma. According to Mahkamah Agung RI, “*terlapor*” is an alleged offender, a person accused of having committed a criminal act but not yet found guilty in a court of law (MA RI, 2024). In this context, the alleged offenders are Joko Widodo, UGM, Zaenal, and Michael Sinaga. These individuals are listed as alleged offenders because each party has reported the others to the police. Based on these statements, there is an indication of conflict and tension between the complainant and the alleged offender.

In addition, there are also the words “*dipanggil*” (B1), “*klarifikasi*” (B5), and “*barang bukti*” (D4). The word “*klarifikasi*” refers to a method or attitude of explaining the truth, based on information that is slightly incorrect and has already been circulated (Martoni et al., 2019). Meanwhile, “*barang bukti*” refers to evidence that can be used to prove a case (Darizta et al., 2023). Based on these definitions, the words indicate that the issue of Jokowi's fake diploma is framed as a formal and legitimate legal process, not merely a rumor or public opinion.

The news narrative combines legal and rhetorical language to reinforce the lawsuit's legitimacy. Term such as “*legal standing*” (C1), “*UU ITE*” (D7), “*Pasal 310 KUHP*” (D8), “*penyidik*” (E1), “*tersangka*” (F1), and “*penahanan*” (F3) construct the event as something serious, legal, and systematic. In addition, there is the phrases “*kasus ijazah Jokowi*” (A1), “*ditangani Polda Metro Jaya*” (B3), “*pengadilan tidak terima*” (B4), “*diperiksa polisi*” (B2), and “*pengunggah ijazah Jokowi*” (D5). These phrases reflect that the news focuses on the legal aspects and the official investigation process into Jokowi's alleged fake diploma. The choice of words and phrases emphasizes objectivity and caution, avoiding emotional language that could give the impression of taking sides.

The phrases “*gelar perkara*” (F5), “*kader PSI*” (D1), and “*masih tunggu hasil uji Labfor*” (E3) also signal that there is no emotional impression. The choice of words and phrases seems neutral and informative. Using these terms shows the media's efforts to convey information objectively without giving judgment or opinion.

Grammatical Structure

The grammatical structure in the news text is analyzed from the sentence form. The most commonly used sentence structure is passive sentences. Based on the data from the titles with codes B through F, namely “*Michael Sinaga diperiksa polisi*”, “*Respons UGM digugat bayar Rp69 T*”, “*Dian Sandi diperiksa polisi*”, “*ijazah yang dituding palsu*”, and “*Eks penggugat Jokowi resmi ditahan*”, it can be explained that the sentence form used is a passive sentence. It is in accordance with the definition of a passive sentence, which is a sentence that begins with the prefix (di-) (Fadila et al., 2023). The subjects affected by the action in the predicate, namely Michael Sinaga, Dian Sandi, and Eks penggugat Jokowi, are written at the beginning of the sentence to emphasize the individuals being investigated and subject to legal action.

The use of passive sentences is a discourse strategy that is not neutral, but ideological. Passive sentences indicate an attempt to obscure the agent or main perpetrator of the action (Fairclough, 2013). In this grammatical structure, active subjects such as state officials, plaintiffs, or complainants are often omitted or placed in a less prominent position. As a result, the reader's focus is directed toward the process or institution as the object of the action, rather than the power relations or actors making the decisions (Albawendi, 2022). This strategy obscures who controls the political-legal process and creates the impression that all processes proceed procedurally and neutrally. However, in a broader social context, these passive sentences contribute to reproducing the dominant ideology that positions the state as rational and professional (Budhiono, 2018; Pertiwi et al., 2020). At the same time, criticism or civil opposition is reduced to lawbreakers or disseminators of unauthorized information. Thus, passive sentences are not merely a linguistic choice but a discursive tool that reinforces hegemony and reshapes public perceptions of authority and truth.

Language Style and Semiotic

Language style is the unique way a person or writer expresses their thoughts and feelings through language (Syamsiyah & Rosita, 2020). This style includes word choice, sentence structure, and the used of specific figurative language or expressions to create aesthetic, emotional, or rhetorical effects. The style of the news presented by CNN Indonesia tends to be formal, objective, and informative, as seen in the following quotations.

- L1 *Hari ini kita sudah serahkan semuanya kepada pihak **Bareskrim** untuk ditindaklanjuti, untuk dilakukan **uji Laboratorium Forensik**.* (CNN Indonesia, May 20, 2025)
- L2 *UGM mempelajari dan **mencermati secara seksama** dan siap **menghadapi gugatan** tersebut.* (CNN Indonesia, May 15, 2025)
- L3 *Kader Partai Solidaritas Indonesia (PSI), Dian Sandi Utama **dijadwalkan diperiksa** terkait laporan **Presiden ke-7 RI Joko Widodo** (Jokowi) soal tuduhan ijazah palsu di **Polda Metro Jaya**.* (CNN Indonesia, May 19, 2025)

These three quotations, semiotically, show how language is used as a sign system to build legitimacy, authority, and institutional image in the public sphere (Lei, 2025; Sari et al., 2024). In the first quotation, phrases such as “*diserahkan ke Bareskrim*” and “*uji Laboratorium Forensik*” in code L1 convey procedural facts and indicate the seriousness, objectivity, and legality of the actions. Institutions like Bareskrim and Laboratorium Forensik (Labfor) are symbols of legal trust and professionalism, which connotatively reinforce that the issue is being handled legitimately and neutrally.

Similarly, in the UGM and PSI quotes, the use of terms such as “*mencermati secara seksama*” and “*siap menghadapi gugatan*” in code L2 and “*dijadwalkan diperiksa*” (L3) serve as markers of caution, transparency, and institutional readiness to face symbolic crises. On the other hand, using the full name “*Presiden ke-7 RI Joko Widodo*” in code L3 carries a symbolic weight that is not neutral, depicting a state figure associated with honor and power. Using the words “UGM” (L2) and “kader PSI” (L3) in the quotes also emphasizes that this issue is related to institutions, academic symbols, and political affiliations. Thus, through careful word choice and sentence structure, each quote conveys information and forms a symbolic representation that reinforces the position, image, and legitimacy of the institutions or figures mentioned (Aristi et al., 2021; Gusti & Setiawati, 2025).

This research data found several words that used metonymy, personification, metaphor, and hyperbole in language style. The data on figurative language shown in the following table.

Table 3. Figurative Language

Figurative Language	Word/Phrase	Code
Metonymy	“ <i>Meja hijau</i> ”	M1
Personification	“ <i>Cicilan membengkak</i> ”	P1
	“ <i>Rupiah anjlok</i> ”	P2
Metaphor	“ <i>Menggiring opini</i> ”	T1
	“ <i>Supaya tidak menjadi gaduh di negara ini</i> ”	T2
	“ <i>Semuanya terang benderang di pengadilan</i> ”	T3
	“ <i>Fitnah dan pencemaran nama baik</i> ”	T4
	“ <i>pengungkapan itu membuat kegaduhan di media sosial</i> ”	T5
	“ <i>dicacar 22 pertanyaan</i> ”	T6
Hyperbole	“ <i>Nilai dolar terhadap rupiah bisa Rp20 ribu, kalau sudah Rp20 ribu, itu negara kolaps itu</i> ”	H1
	“ <i>Akibat negara ini menjadi gaduh, nilai rupiah kita anjlok</i> ”	H2

Metonymy is a type of figurative language in which the name of an entity closely associated with a particular concept is used to represent that concept itself (Syamsiyah & Rosita, 2020). In this context, the phrase “*meja hijau*” (M1) serves as a metonym for the court or judicial process. Historically, courtroom tables in Indonesia were covered in green cloth, which gave rise to the association between the color and legal proceedings.

Meanwhile, the phrases “*cicilan **membengkak***” (P1) and “*rupiah **anjlok***” (P2) are examples of personification. The word “anjlok” (to fall suddenly, usually referring to objects or people) is used to describe the exchange rate, which is abstract. It personifies the currency by at-

tributing it with human-like physical behavior. Similarly, “*membengkak*” in “*cicilan membengkak*” (P1), which denotes physical swelling, is used to describe increasing debt installments, thus ascribing bodily characteristics to a financial phenomenon.

Based on Table 3, the phrases “*menggiring opini*” (T1), “*supaya tidak menjadi gaduh di negara ini*” (T2), and “*dicacar 22 pertanyaan*” (T6) are metaphors. The word “*menggiring*” is typically used for animals (e.g., *menggiring sapi*), but here it is used for opinions, which are not concrete objects. It implies an implicit comparison, meaning to direct public thinking in a specific direction, not to herd physically. The word “*gaduh*” does not explain the literal meaning (chaos), but is a metaphor for social/public chaos caused by the diploma controversy. Meanwhile, the word “*dicacar*” is usually used to describe being intensely questioned, emphasizing the pressure during an examination.

The use of hyperbole based on data is found in the phrase “*nilai dolar terhadap rupiah bisa Rp20 ribu, kalau sudah Rp20 ribu, itu negara kolaps itu*” (H1) and “*akibat negara ini menjadi gaduh, nilai rupiah kita anjlok*” (H2). The phrase “*negara kolaps*” constitutes an exaggerated projection of economic disaster, amplifying the perceived consequences of political instability. Additionally, the continued use of *anjlok* contributes to the dramatization through metaphor, reinforcing a sense of urgency and crisis within the discourse.

However, such figurative language is often considered commonplace because it is widely used in the media. It strengthens the narrative and dramatically affects the issue at hand, particularly the controversy surrounding President Jokowi's diploma. These figures of speech are used to describe social unrest, economic impacts, and legal pressures with greater emotional impact and persuasiveness. It shows that even though it is in the form of news text, the choice of language style still plays an important role in framing public opinion and reinforcing ideological positions in discourse (Afrouzi, 2020; Shalaby, 2024).

Discourse Practice Analysis

The discourse practices in the polemic surrounding Joko Widodo's (Jokowi) diploma, as reflected in CNN Indonesia's news, reveal complex dynamics in the production, distribution, and consumption of discourse. In terms of discourse production, these texts are composed by professional media institutions. As a news producer, CNN Indonesia occupies a strategic position in the national media landscape as a mainstream media outlet known for its neutral and fact-based reporting style (LinkedIn, 2025). This institutional character contributes to shaping CNN Indonesia's identity as a credible information source, particularly in politics and law (Yulianti & Setiawan, 2022).

This institutional character contributes to shaping CNN Indonesia's identity as a credible information source, particularly on political and legal issues. It can also be seen from CNN Indonesia's social media, which has 14.8 thousand followers on Instagram, 4.6 million followers on Twitter (X), and 20 thousand followers on Facebook. Such an audience is not only passive information seekers but also a group that tends to link news narratives to broader socio-political dynamics, including power relations, institutional roles, and state legitimacy.

From a discourse practice perspective, CNN Indonesia's reporting on allegations that Joko Widodo holds a fake diploma demonstrates strong intertextuality and interdiscursivity. Intertextuality is evident in how the news links to various official sources and state institutions, such as the police, legal authorities, Jokowi, Pengadilan Negeri, UGM, and Laboratorium Forensik. It reinforces the narrative that the information presented does not stand alone but relies on an established network of authority and legality. Meanwhile, interdiscursivity emerges from the overlap of legal discourse (investigation and examination processes), political discourse (the

complainant's affiliation with anti-Jokowi groups and the PSI), and educational discourse (UGM's academic authority as the institution mentioned). This mix of discourses creates a complexity of meaning that broadens the interpretation of the news (Al-Badawi & Al Najjar, 2021)

The news is structured in a formal journalistic style, using direct quotations to maintain objectivity and credibility (Albaburrahim & Sujinah, 2017), for example, as in the following quotation.

- L4 *Kuasa hukum Jokowi, Yakup Hasibuan, menyatakan, "Belum ada. Kita belum disampaikan sama sekali informasi itu, ya kami juga masih menunggu." (CNN Indonesia, May 09, 2025)*

The quote refers to the results of Jokowi's diploma examination by the Laboratorium Forensik. Other data that also uses direct quotes are as follows.

- L5 *"Gugatan balik merupakan upaya yang dapat dilakukan UGM, namun untuk saat ini UGM masih fokus terhadap substansi gugatan yang diajukan oleh penggugat," kata Kepala Biro Hukum dan Organisasi UGM, Veri Antoni. (CNN Indonesia, May 15, 2025)*

This quote was made by Veri Antoni, Kepala Biro Hukum dan Organisasi UGM, when expressing his opinion regarding the Rp69 trillion lawsuit against UGM. The production of this discourse portrays the state (in this case, Pengadilan and Universitas) as institutions with the authority to clarify issues, reflecting the power relations between the media, the state, and the public.

Regarding the distribution of the discourse, the news was disseminated through mainstream media outlets, namely CNN Indonesia (www.cnnindonesia.com). The six news items used as data in this study were reposted on other platforms, such as YouTube videos and CNN Indonesia's social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter). This discursive construction generates a viral effect, rapidly shaping public perception. The spread of this content is reinforced by digital algorithms that amplify news about sensitive issues, such as alleged fake diplomas or academic identity fraud, to reach audiences with diverse ideological backgrounds.

From a discourse consumption perspective, public engagement with these news narratives is far from passive; it is active, interpretive, and ideologically charged. For example, some members of the public who are part of groups critical of the government interpret these news stories as a form of civil courage in challenging authority. It is evident in figures like Komardin, who is suing UGM for Rp69 trillion, alleging that the university was not transparent in providing information regarding Jokowi's diploma and thesis. On the other hand, some members of the public view this legal process as an attempt to weaken the symbols of the state, especially when former President Jokowi was grilled with 22 questions from investigators about his academic journey from elementary school to UGM.

Furthermore, news discourse also contains hidden assumptions that reinforce certain positions without explicitly stating them (Mehawesh & AL-Allawi, 2024). For example, by emphasizing the legal process against the reporter or by mentioning the involvement of the Forensic Laboratory and the Criminal Investigation Unit, the news implicitly conveys that the allegations of diploma forgery lack a solid basis. The focus on the reporter and the legal process creates the impression that the problem lies with the reporter rather than the substance of the allegations. Furthermore, such reporting builds the assumption that the legal process in Indonesia is objective and fair, as if there is no need for personal defense from the accused because the state has already acted through its institutions. In this context, CNN Indonesia's discourse not only reports the events but also subtly reproduces the state's legitimacy and reinforces Joko Widodo's position as a figure who does not need to intervene directly to address the allegations.

The interaction among production, distribution, and consumption shows that discourse is not neutral but is rather laden with interests, ideologies, and power relations (Filzah & Azmin,

2023; Shalaby, 2024). This process creates a discursive arena which various social actors—including the media, law enforcement agencies, academics, and civilians—negotiate the meanings of truth, legality, and political legitimacy.

Sociocultural Practice Analysis

CNN Indonesia's coverage of Joko Widodo's fake diploma lawsuit cannot be separated from social practices that shape the relationship among the media, discourse, and power. In the context of the situation, this case emerged in a political atmosphere rife with suspicion and criticism of the legitimacy of power. Within this context, society navigates a complex tension between maintaining trust in institutional symbols and participating in a growing culture of critical engagement with political elites. An example of this can be seen in the following quote.

L6 *“Perkara ini berangkat dari laporan publik dan konten yang tersebar di media sosial, termasuk video dan unggahan yang menuding ijazah palsu.”* (CNN Indonesia, May 20, 2025)

This quote shows that this case came to light not because of internal findings by the institution, but because of growing unrest among public opinion on social media, which created a highly pressured situational context. In addition, a quote suggests public unrest as a social situation that drives the legal process and reflects the public's need for institutional transparency. The quote is as follows.

L7 *Komardin, pelapor kasus terhadap UGM, menyatakan bahwa “ijazah palsu... sekarang supaya tidak menjadi gaduh di negara ini ya kita buktikan lewat pengadilan”* (CNN Indonesia, May 15, 2025)

In this case, state institutions with legal and academic authority became involved. UGM, for example, was sued for being considered non-transparent in its information provision, which in Fairclough's view, could be interpreted as a crisis of trust in academic institutions. In response, UGM publicly declared its willingness to investigate the matter thoroughly and to face the legal process. It illustrates how academic institutions are increasingly implicated in the political domain, extending their influence beyond purely scientific or educational functions. Meanwhile, the police's actions in investigating and even detaining actors involved, such as Zaenal Mustofa, also show that law enforcement and educational institutions appear dominant in this discourse. They respond to pressure through formal procedures—forensic laboratory testing, legal clarification, and the detention of key figures—while demonstrating power dynamics and institutional defense dynamics.

At a broader sociocultural level, this case is intertwined with issues of public trust, the politicization of official documents, and the proliferation of anti-elite discourse in digital spaces. Ideologically, this discourse implies a conflict between the state's narrative, which seeks to maintain symbolic authority (by proving the authenticity of diplomas through forensic laboratory testing), and the counter-narrative of civilians who raise doubts as a political issue.

In this context, the media does not merely function as an information channel; it also acts as a discursive agent that shapes, reflects, and reproduces societal power relations (Aristi et al., 2021; Sihite et al., 2024). As a mainstream media outlet known for its credibility, CNN Indonesia holds significant symbolic authority in producing “truth.” When CNN repeatedly reported that institutions such as Bareskrim, UGM, and the Forensic Laboratory had confirmed the authenticity of Jokowi's diploma, this narrative not only validated Joko Widodo's administration but also strengthened his political legitimacy amid a public increasingly skeptical of the ruling elite.

The discourse constructed by CNN reinforces the dominant ideology, trust in state authority. The emphasis on legal channels and enforcing formal processes, such as forensic examinations or educational institutions' official stance, shows that the state is positioned as the sole source of valid truth.

Within this discourse structure, anyone criticizing the state, even in civil lawsuits or social media posts, tends to be constructed as a threat to the order or truth determined by state institutions. Criticism is not framed as part of deliberative democracy, but as a violation that must be dealt with legally. Thus, this reporting neutralizes the issue and regulates discursive boundaries—what can be discussed, who has the right to speak, and how that voice should be framed.

CNN Indonesia, through its reporting, subtly but systematically directs public opinion. A stabilizing effect is created by the repeated narrative about the validity of Jokowi's diploma—namely, that the public no longer needs to question the issue because “the legal process is already underway” and “credible institutions have spoken.” This narrative calms public unrest while reinforcing trust in the status quo. However, this effect also leads to the delegitimization of the opposition, as news coverage shifts from examining the substance of the allegations to who is making them and how they are being processed legally. It creates an important symbolic effect, namely that the focus of the news is no longer Joko Widodo's academic documents or diploma, but the plaintiffs who have been arrested, investigated, or even made examples of, showing that spreading “slander” is an act that must be punished. At this point, the political narrative in discourse becomes a tool for domesticating public opinion, as discourse shapes not only perceptions but also the boundaries of public courage to voice criticism (Anuar et al., 2025; Bhakti et al., 2023; Dubský et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that CNN Indonesia's coverage of Jokowi's alleged fake diploma controversy constructs political narratives that legitimize state authority while marginalizing opposing voices. Through lexical choice, grammatical structures, and formal tone, the news reproduces the image of the state as rational, objective, and trustworthy. Meanwhile, criticisms are reframed as disruptive or legally questionable acts. The findings reaffirm that media discourse is never entirely neutral. It serves as an instrument that both reflects and reinforces power dynamics. However, this study is limited by its focus on a single media outlet and a narrow time frame. Future research should include cross-media comparisons or multimodal discourse analysis to explore how visual and digital elements contribute to the construction of political legitimacy in online journalism.

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