



Framing Justice and Public Perception : A Discourse Analysis of the Agus Salim Donation Controversy in Online Media

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Abstract. This study explores the discourse surrounding the Agus Salim donation controversy, focusing on how media narratives and legal rhetoric shape public perception. Drawing on two primary sources—articles from *Brilio.net* and *KapanLagi.com*—the research employs critical discourse analysis to examine the framing of key events, including allegations of donation mismanagement, legal strategies, and the public's reaction to the case. The findings reveal how media outlets construct competing narratives, emphasizing the roles of public figures, lawyers, and victims in influencing the discourse. By analyzing language use, power dynamics, and ideological positioning, this study highlights the interplay between legal rhetoric and public opinion in cases of social and moral significance. The research contributes to understanding how controversies are framed in digital media and their implications for justice and accountability in contemporary society.

Keywords Critical Discourse Analysis, Donation Controversy, Media Framing, Public Perception, Social Justice

1. INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, public controversies are often amplified through media narratives and legal rhetoric, shaping societal perceptions of justice and accountability. One such case is the donation controversy involving Agus Salim, a victim of an acid attack. What began as an act of public sympathy through crowdfunding transformed into a contentious discourse when allegations of donation mismanagement arose, coupled with lawyers' interventions and the resulting public reactions. Cases like this reveal how media and legal actors frame narratives, often influencing public opinion in significant ways (Fairclough, 2013).

The Agus Salim controversy highlights the intersection of power, language, and ideology, which are critical components of discourse analysis. Media platforms, such as *Brilio.net* and *KapanLagi.com*, have played a pivotal role in framing the events and actors involved. Articles from these platforms not only reported facts but also shaped public discourse by emphasizing specific narratives—such as Agus Salim's apology, the role of lawyers like Hotman Paris, and the accusations exchanged between the involved parties. The representation of this case reflects how “media discourse is constructed to maintain or challenge social hierarchies” (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 249).

Furthermore, lawyers' rhetorical strategies add another layer to the controversy. Legal discourse often operates as a tool to justify, defend, or challenge the actions of individuals or groups (Johnstone, 2008). In this case, lawyers' public statements shifted

focus, influencing the audience's perception of guilt, responsibility, and moral standing. As Fairclough (2013) notes, language used in legal and media settings often constructs power relations and ideologies that shape public understanding of events.

This study, therefore, aims to analyze the Agus Salim donation controversy by examining how media platforms frame the issue and how legal rhetoric further complicates public reactions. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research will identify key themes, power dynamics, and ideological positions present in the texts. By doing so, it will provide insights into the role of media and legal actors in shaping contemporary social controversies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The intersection of media discourse, legal rhetoric, and public perception has been extensively studied in the field of discourse analysis. This section reviews key theoretical frameworks and empirical studies that inform the analysis of the Agus Salim donation controversy.

Media Framing and Public Perception

Media framing theory posits that the way events are presented in the media influences how audiences interpret them (Entman, 1993). Frames are not merely neutral conduits of information; they reflect underlying ideologies and power structures (Van Gorp, 2007). Media platforms often construct narratives that emphasize particular aspects of a story while downplaying others, shaping public opinion and social debates. Fairclough (2013) argues that media discourse operates as a site of power struggle, where competing interests vie to control narratives. In the Agus Salim case, platforms such as *Brilio.net* and *KapanLagi.com* frame the donation controversy in ways that evoke sympathy, outrage, or skepticism, influencing how readers perceive the actions of the involved parties.

Legal Rhetoric and the Construction of Power

Legal discourse plays a significant role in shaping societal perceptions of justice. Lawyers and legal actors employ rhetorical strategies to construct narratives that favor their clients, often appealing to moral, emotional, or logical reasoning (Johnstone, 2008). According to Conley and O'Barr (2005), legal rhetoric extends beyond the courtroom, influencing public discourse through media appearances and press statements. This phenomenon is evident in the Agus Salim case, where lawyers used public platforms to shift the narrative around donation mismanagement and the moral responsibility of

individuals involved. Such practices align with Fairclough's (2013) notion that legal discourse often reproduces and legitimizes power dynamics.

Critical Discourse Analysis as a Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a robust framework for examining the interplay between language, power, and ideology in public controversies (Van Dijk, 1993). CDA emphasizes uncovering the implicit power relations and ideologies embedded in texts and discourses. Wodak and Meyer (2009) highlight that CDA is particularly effective in analyzing contentious issues where multiple stakeholders compete to control the narrative. By applying CDA to the Agus Salim case, this study seeks to uncover how media and legal actors construct competing narratives and how these narratives influence public perception and societal responses.

Social Media and Public Engagement

The rise of digital media has transformed how controversies are discussed and perceived. Social media platforms amplify voices, enabling public participation and creating a dynamic space for discourse (Papacharissi, 2015). In cases like the Agus Salim controversy, public reactions captured through comments, shares, and discussions on social platforms reflect broader societal attitudes toward justice and morality. Studies suggest that these digital engagements often mirror and reinforce the framing provided by traditional media.

Research Gap

While existing studies have explored media framing, legal rhetoric, and the role of public engagement in controversies, limited research examines how these elements converge in cases involving donation mismanagement and victim advocacy. This study fills this gap by analyzing the Agus Salim case through CDA, focusing on the interplay between media narratives, legal strategies, and public responses.

3. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the media narratives, legal rhetoric, and public reactions surrounding the Agus Salim donation controversy. CDA is chosen for its ability to uncover the underlying power relations, ideologies, and framing strategies within texts and discourses (Fairclough, 2013). The research methods are divided into three main stages: data collection, data analysis, and interpretation.

Data Collection

The primary data for this study consists of two articles from online media platforms:

1. *The conflict between Agus Salim, the victim of acid, and Teh Novi has not subsided, Denny Sumargo provides a firm solution ([Brilio.net](#)).*
2. *Agus Salim apologizes and thanks donors, Hotman Paris responds ([KapanLagi.com](#)).*

The two articles were selected based on their relevance to the study's objectives: they provide detailed accounts of the key actors, events, and public responses to the controversy. Both articles are publicly available on reputable online media platforms and represent distinct narrative perspectives.

Data Analysis

The data analysis follows [Fairclough's](#) (2013) three-dimensional framework for CDA:

1. Textual Analysis:

The linguistic features of the articles are analyzed, focusing on word choice, tone, and rhetorical devices. Special attention is given to how the articles describe key figures (e.g., Agus Salim, Teh Novi, and Hotman Paris) and frame their roles in the controversy.

2. Discursive Practice:

This level examines the production, dissemination, and consumption of the texts. It investigates how the media organizations ([Brilio.net](#) and [KapanLagi.com](#)) construct their narratives, the intended audience, and the ideological underpinnings of their framing.

3. Social Practice:

The broader socio-cultural and political context is analyzed to understand how the discourse reflects and reinforces societal attitudes toward justice, accountability, and moral responsibility.

Tools and Frameworks

The analysis utilized thematic coding to identify recurring patterns and themes within the texts, such as victim portrayal, legal defense strategies, and moral evaluations. Key concepts from [Van Dijk's](#) (1993) discourse-cognition-society triangle were applied to understand how media and legal discourse intersect with public perception and power dynamics.

Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis proceeds as follows:

1. **Data Familiarization:**

The articles are read multiple times to identify key themes, recurring patterns, and significant language use.

2. **Coding and Thematic Analysis:**

Using open coding, the texts are segmented into meaningful units that represent framing techniques, rhetorical strategies, and public reactions. Themes such as “victim advocacy,” “donation mismanagement,” and “legal defense strategies” are identified.

3. **Application of CDA Framework:**

Each article is analyzed at the textual, discursive, and social levels to uncover how media and legal actors construct competing narratives and how these narratives influence public perception.

4. **Comparison of Articles:**

The findings from the two articles are compared to highlight differences and similarities in framing and ideological positions.

Ethical Considerations

All data were obtained from publicly accessible online platforms, ensuring transparency and adherence to ethical research practices. Care was taken to analyze the texts objectively and avoid misrepresentation of the individuals or institutions involved.

4. RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the two selected articles, focusing on their textual, discursive, and social dimensions. The analysis reveals distinct strategies employed by *Brilio.net* and *KapanLagi.com* in framing the Agus Salim donation controversy, the role of legal actors, and the public’s perception of the case.

Textual Analysis

1. Framing of Key Actors

- **Brilio.net:** Agus Salim is portrayed as a victim, with language emphasizing his suffering and ongoing conflict with Teh Novi. The article states, “*Denny Sumargo’s firm stance shows his concern for Agus Salim’s predicament as the victim of an acid attack.*” Such language generates public sympathy while positioning Denny Sumargo as a neutral mediator advocating for justice. The use of “firm stance” highlights the urgency and necessity for external intervention.

- **KapanLagi.com:** The framing of Agus Salim is more dynamic. While he is acknowledged as a victim, the article also notes his public apology: *“I apologize if there were misunderstandings and thank all donors who have supported me during this difficult time.”* This acknowledgment frames Agus Salim as taking responsibility for any perceived mismanagement. Meanwhile, Hotman Paris is presented as a decisive legal authority: *“Hotman Paris criticized the lack of clarity in the donation usage and emphasized the importance of transparency.”* Such statements shift the narrative from emotional appeals to procedural accountability.

2. Rhetorical Strategies

- **Brilio.net:** The article employs emotional appeals, using phrases like *“predicament”* and *“victim of acid attack”* to evoke public empathy. Additionally, it highlights Denny Sumargo’s quote: *“We need a solution that works for everyone without prolonging the problem.”* This positions Sumargo as a voice of reason and fairness.
- **KapanLagi.com:** The article uses contrastive language to juxtapose Agus Salim’s conciliatory tone with Hotman Paris’ assertive rhetoric. For instance, Hotman Paris is quoted saying, *“If you’re going to ask for public donations, you must account for every penny.”* This sharp critique underscores the legal and moral expectations surrounding donation management.

Discursive Practices

1. Narrative Construction

- **Brilio.net:** The narrative centers on conflict resolution, with Denny Sumargo portrayed as a mediator attempting to bridge the gap between Agus Salim and Teh Novi. The article mentions, *“Denny Sumargo proposed a firm solution to resolve the dispute amicably.”* This positions the media as an advocate for reconciliation while maintaining neutrality.
- **KapanLagi.com:** The narrative focuses on transparency and accountability, with Hotman Paris as a key figure emphasizing procedural justice. By quoting him extensively, the article aligns its perspective with the values of legal expertise and professional integrity: *“Transparency in donations is not just about law, it’s about public trust.”*

2. Media Ideologies

- **Brilio.net** prioritizes human-interest storytelling, reflecting an ideology that highlights personal struggles and the need for empathy-driven solutions.
- **KapanLagi.com**, however, foregrounds institutional accountability and legal resolution, aligning with an ideology that emphasizes the role of professional systems in addressing disputes.

Social Practices

1. Public Perception of Justice and Responsibility

- The media reflects societal concerns over donation management and the ethical obligations of public figures. *KapanLagi.com* reports Agus Salim's apology: "*I understand the public's concern and hope this issue will not tarnish the spirit of helping those in need.*" This aligns with cultural norms valuing humility and reconciliation, even amid public scrutiny.
- *Brilio.net*, on the other hand, focuses on the broader societal impact of the conflict: "*This case highlights the challenges faced by victims who rely on public goodwill for survival.*" Such framing encourages public empathy and awareness of systemic issues affecting victims of injustice.

2. Power Dynamics and Legal Discourse

- Hotman Paris emerges as a dominant voice shaping the legal narrative. His critique of the donation's management reflects broader societal expectations of transparency and integrity. The statement, "*Accountability must be non-negotiable in cases involving public trust,*" reinforces the power of legal professionals to legitimize certain discourses over others.

3. Reinforcement of Social Norms

- Both articles reinforce cultural and legal norms surrounding donation management. *Brilio.net* appeals to public empathy, while *KapanLagi.com* emphasizes institutional mechanisms to address disputes, reflecting a shift toward procedural resolution in public controversies.

Key Themes

From the analysis, three recurring themes emerge:

1. **Victim Advocacy vs. Accountability:** *Brilio.net* leans toward victim advocacy, while *KapanLagi.com* highlights the need for accountability, creating a balance between emotional and procedural narratives.

2. **Media as an Arbiter:** The media shapes public opinion by selectively presenting narratives that align with their ideological perspectives.
3. **The Influence of Legal Rhetoric:** Legal figures like Hotman Paris play a pivotal role in framing issues, moving public discourse from emotional appeals to institutional expectations.

These findings underscore how media discourse and legal rhetoric intersect to shape public controversies. The results highlight the power of framing and narrative construction in influencing societal attitudes toward justice and accountability.

5. DISCUSSION

This section interprets the findings from the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the two selected articles, exploring how media framing, legal discourse, and societal norms intersect in the Agus Salim donation controversy. The discussion highlights the implications of these narratives for public perception, power dynamics, and broader socio-legal discourses.

Media Framing and Public Perception

The analysis reveals that the two articles employ distinct framing strategies that influence public perception of the controversy. *Brilio.net* adopts a human-interest approach, centering on Agus Salim's struggles as a victim and emphasizing external intervention through Denny Sumargo's mediation. This aligns with [Fairclough's](#) (2013) argument that media often constructs narratives to elicit public empathy and create emotional resonance. By presenting Agus Salim as a victim caught in an unresolved conflict, the article reinforces the perception that victims are reliant on public goodwill and influential figures to navigate their challenges.

In contrast, *KapanLagi.com* shifts the focus to accountability and procedural integrity. By foregrounding Hotman Paris' critique of donation management, the article appeals to societal expectations of transparency and legal oversight. As [Van Dijk](#) (1998) notes, the media's emphasis on accountability reflects broader cultural values that prioritize institutional legitimacy over individual narratives. This framing appeals to readers who view the controversy through a lens of procedural justice rather than emotional engagement.

Legal Rhetoric and Power Dynamics

The role of legal discourse, particularly as articulated by Hotman Paris in *KapanLagi.com*, underscores the power dynamics at play in public controversies. Legal professionals are often positioned as authoritative voices, capable of reframing narratives

and legitimizing certain perspectives over others. Hotman Paris' statements, such as "*Accountability must be non-negotiable in cases involving public trust,*" reflect the use of legal rhetoric to shift the narrative focus from personal conflict to systemic concerns about governance and transparency.

This aligns with Wodak's (2001) perspective on the discursive power of legal actors, who often dominate public narratives by invoking institutional norms and values. By emphasizing the legal aspects of the controversy, *KapanLagi.com* constructs a narrative that privileges professional authority over individual grievances, thereby reinforcing existing power hierarchies.

The Role of Media as Arbiter

Both articles illustrate how media outlets act as arbiters of public controversies, shaping societal attitudes and influencing discourse through selective framing and narrative construction. While *Brilio.net* seeks to generate empathy for Agus Salim by portraying him as a victim in need of resolution, *KapanLagi.com* positions itself as a platform for legal accountability, reflecting its commitment to procedural justice.

This divergence highlights the media's dual role as both an observer and a participant in public controversies. As Hall (1980) notes, media narratives are not neutral; they are shaped by ideological stances and serve to reinforce or challenge societal norms. The human-interest angle in *Brilio.net* aligns with cultural values of compassion and solidarity, whereas the legalistic approach in *KapanLagi.com* reflects a shift toward institutional mechanisms for resolving disputes.

Socio-Legal Implications

The findings underscore the broader socio-legal implications of the Agus Salim controversy. The emphasis on transparency and accountability reflects societal concerns about the ethical management of public donations, particularly in cases involving vulnerable individuals. The public apology reported in *KapanLagi.com* demonstrates the cultural importance of humility and acknowledgment in restoring trust, while Denny Sumargo's mediation in *Brilio.net* highlights the societal expectation that influential figures should play a role in resolving conflicts.

The contrasting narratives also reveal tensions between emotional and procedural approaches to justice. While *Brilio.net* appeals to empathy and the moral imperative to support victims, *KapanLagi.com* emphasizes the need for institutional oversight and the professionalization of public disputes. This tension reflects broader societal debates about the balance between personal accountability and systemic justice.

Emerging Themes

Three key themes emerge from the discussion:

1. **Intersection of Media and Legal Discourses:** The media's reliance on legal actors like Hotman Paris to frame narratives underscores the interplay between journalistic and legal discourses in shaping public opinion.
2. **Empathy vs. Accountability:** The contrasting approaches of the two articles highlight a societal divide between emotional and procedural responses to public controversies.
3. **Reinforcement of Norms:** Both articles reinforce societal norms regarding ethical obligations in donation management and the role of influential figures in conflict resolution.

6. LIMITATION

While this study provides valuable insights into the discourse surrounding the Agus Salim donation controversy, it is not without its limitations. These limitations primarily stem from the scope of the data, methodological constraints, and contextual factors:

1. Limited Data Sources

The analysis relied on two online media articles and their associated public comments as primary data. While these sources offer a snapshot of the discourse, they may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives present in the broader public sphere. Including additional media outlets, social media platforms, or interviews with key stakeholders could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.

2. Focus on Written Discourse

This study exclusively analyzed written texts from media articles and comments, neglecting other forms of communication such as televised debates, interviews, or video content. These modalities could offer richer insights into the tone, delivery, and nonverbal cues that contribute to meaning-making in discourse.

3. Cultural and Contextual Factors

The findings are situated within the Indonesian cultural and social context, which may limit their generalizability to other contexts. Cultural norms, legal practices, and media ethics unique to Indonesia play a significant role in shaping the discourse, and the results may not be directly applicable to controversies in other countries or settings.

4. Subjectivity in CDA

As with any qualitative approach, Critical Discourse Analysis involves a degree of

subjectivity in interpreting the data. While efforts were made to ensure rigor and transparency, different analysts may draw varying conclusions from the same data, reflecting the interpretive nature of the methodology.

5. Temporal Scope

The data collection focused on a specific period during the controversy's coverage. As public discourse is dynamic, the findings may not account for how narratives and public perceptions evolve over time. A longitudinal approach could better capture these shifts and provide a more nuanced understanding.

Addressing Limitations in Future Research

Future studies can address these limitations by incorporating a broader range of data sources, such as video interviews, press releases, or legal documents, and by adopting multimodal analysis to explore nonverbal aspects of discourse. Comparative studies across different cultural or legal contexts could also shed light on how such controversies are discursively constructed worldwide.

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