Indonesian Online Media’s Construction of ‘Maritime’: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The concept of maritime (maritime) is frequently discussed among the Indonesian people, a fact that may be attributed to the emphasis that has been given to maritime issues by President Joko Widodo since his candidacy. This article applies Faircloughian approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA) to understand the coverage of ‘maritime’ in Indonesian online media. This paradigm has been selected because the media does not simply act as a neutral medium through its publication and coverage; rather, media have specific ideologies, which can be described and analyzed through critical discourse analysis. This approach focuses on three aspects when analyzing written discourses: representations, relations, and identities. Representation refers to specific words and grammatical structures to construct reality; relations refer to the connections between the subjects as depicted in the discourse; and identity refers to reporters’ positions in their coverage of online media, including their biases. In general, relations and identities in Indonesian online media coverage have been oriented towards the government and society. The government has been constructed ambiguously by online media, but depictions of government have tended to be positive, with a focus on the success of its maritime programs.

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1 Background

Indonesia is one of the countries with the longest coastlines in the world, and is known for its total water area surpassing its total land area; it is thus recognized as having significant maritime potential and wealth [45]. Former Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Rokhmin Dahuri (2001-2004) stated that Indonesia’s 11 maritime sectors could potentially contribute US$1.2 trillion to the national economy while employing more than 40 million people [10]. Research has indicated that only 20 % of Indonesia’s maritime potential is being exploited; the remaining 80 % is untouched. In other words, the government has only taken advantage of 20 % of Indonesia’s maritime potential, with a focus on fisheries. Other aspects, including marine human resources, marine transportation, marine ecotourism, and fish farming, have yet to be maximally utilized. For example, out of the 650,000 fishing boats active in Indonesian waters, only 1.3 % have modern equipment.

As such, fishing is a ‘gamble’, and the processing and storage of caught fish falls short of standards [28].

Indonesia’s maritime potential should be optimized to better realize the nation’s goal of prosperity. However, previous governments have given little attention to maritime development [50], focusing on land-based development instead. The government passed few policies intended to address maritime issues, and lacked assertiveness in overcoming such problems as fish theft, coral destruction, and environmentally harmful fishing methods such as trawling [41]. This must be seen in conjunction with the media, as a medium of governance. The media is an important component of a good democracy, and a lack of media coverage of maritime issues will make a people — such as Indonesians — ‘forget’ that the country’s greatest treasure is its seas.

In 2014, Indonesia undertook legislative and executive elections. During his campaigning, one candidate — Joko Widodo, popularly known as Jokowi — actively discussed
maritime issues [20]. The media widely covered Widodo's plans to restore the faded glory of Indonesia's marine history. When forming his cabinet after being elected, Widodo emphasized the importance of Indonesia as a Global Maritime Axis [3]. This was referenced, for example, in an online news story titled “Di EAS, Jokowi Beberkan Lima Poros Maritim Dunia” (At EAS, Jokowi presents Five Maritime Axes), covering a speech delivered by Widodo at a meeting of East Asian leaders in which he promised to transform Indonesia into a global maritime axis supported by five pillars: First, as Indonesia consists of more than 17,000 islands, its people must recognize that their identity, prosperity, and future is heavily determined by the country's seas. Second, there must be a commitment to preserve and manage maritime resources, with an emphasis on ensuring food security by developing a fishing industry that is built around fishermen. Third, there must be a commitment for developing maritime infrastructure and connectivity through the expansion of sea tolls, deep-sea ports, shipping logistics/industries, and maritime tourism. Fourth is maritime diplomacy, in which all of Indonesia's allies work together in the field of fisheries and oceans. Fifth, given its location between two oceans, Indonesia must protect its maritime security to promote the ideals of the nation [35]. This presentation of Indonesia as a global maritime axis was widely covered by both print and electronic media. As such, maritime issues — long neglected by the media — received further attention, which it maintained as Widodo and his Minister of Fisheries and Oceans sought to realize the global maritime axis doctrine [1].

The mass media plays an important role in the coverage of recent situations and events in society. Although mass media covers books, magazines, newspapers, television, radio, film, recordings, and the internet [9], in recent years the internet has taken a central role in social communications. The interactions between individuals and groups are increasingly mediated by the internet. News, similarly, is no longer presented solely through print media such as newspapers. Newspapers, a form of print media, are frequently referenced in academic studies owing to the legitimization granted to them as important sources of information. Indonesia has thousands of newspapers, both national and local in scope, which serve to convey messages and information to readers and other members of society. Online news portals and websites, meanwhile, have become widely used by the public as sources of information [24]. Seven such sites have become recognized as credible in Indonesia: Detik.com, Kompas.com, Tribunnews.com, Republika.co.id, Okezone.com, Tempo.co, and Antaranews.com. For years, these online media have presented their news stories and been used as sources of information on the economy, politics, lifestyle, health, etc. [25].

The word *maritime* (in Indonesian, ‘maritim’) is closely linked to the ocean, including sailing and trade [30]. Indonesia’s Global Maritime Axis doctrine harkens back to the Majapahit Era, when the archipelago was one of the world’s major maritime powers. The idea that Indonesia was a maritime nation had existed even before the country's independence was proclaimed on August 17, 1945. However, it seemingly vanished under the Soeharto regime, which prioritized a "green revolution" that focused on development projects that promoted food self-sufficiency. Only decades later, under President Soesilo Bambang Yudhoyono, did signs of a “blue revolution” begin to emerge. It was this blue revolution that Widodo underscored through his Global Maritime Axis doctrine and its five pillars [8]. At this time, the mass media — both online and offline — began to cover maritime issues widely. The mass media is used for social and political communications. Its content, in essence, constructs reality through language. However, language is not simply a tool for representing reality: it also shapes how reality is perceived. As a result, the mass media has the opportunity to considerably influence the meanings and perspectives of the reality it constructs. As such, it is integrally linked to the discursive activities of the dominant power. Persons with specific interests can utilize the mass media to promote their goals [39].

The coverage of maritime issues in Indonesian online media appears to have focused primarily on the development of maritime infrastructure, defense and security, and international collaborative efforts. The writing of news stories, in essence, involves the formulation of specific realities into meaningful stories and discourses. As such, all media content may be understood as part of a constructed reality [12]. Particular viewpoints and perspectives, thus, determine which facts are highlighted, which elements are emphasized or marginalized, and in what direction coverage is taken. As part of a meaningful discourse, media coverage of maritime issues thus shapes and provides meaning to socio-cultural reality. In practice, media represent a reality, rather than reflecting it. The lack of a strong national consciousness about maritime issues, historically, has significantly influenced public concern for them. This can be seen, for example, in the limited scholarship on maritime sociology, industry, law, rights, politics, communications, and history [6].

The discourses presented in online media’s news coverage cannot be considered neutral discourses that simply provide information on the situations and conditions of Indonesia and its seas. These discourses present conflicting interests, which are manifested through language. This, as argued by Fairclough, shows that language is a practice of power. Socially and historically, language use places one in a dialectic relationship with the social structure [33]. Language users convey certain ideological values, and as such the discourses they produce cannot be accepted at face value; this includes the news stories that are published online. This is part of the media's power to shape the mindsets of society through its news coverage. As such, the coverage of maritime issues in online media does not simply present the reality experienced by society, but rather frames specific realities in accordance with
specific ideologies. This article seeks to take this phenomenon as its research object by conducting critical discourse analysis at the textual level. Its research problem is as follows: how are maritime issues constructed through the coverage of online media, as understood from a critical discourse analysis perspective.

2 Research Method

2.1 Research Design

This research applies a Faircloughian critical discourse analysis perspective, relying on a sociocultural change approach [16], [17]. Discourse, in this context, is understood as social practice. There is a dialectic relationship between discursive practice, identity, and social relations. Discourse is also closely linked to specific situations, institutions, and social classes. Understanding discourses, thus, helps explain how discourses can produce and reproduce the status quo — or even transform it [46]. Critical discourse analysis is part of the qualitative method, and is applied explanatorily. It focuses on linguistic elements of discourse and their contexts, in this case understood as linguistic purposes and practices [14]. For this study, critical discourse analysis has been conducted by descriptively analyzing existing news stories (texts). For this critical discourse analysis, which is conducted solely at the textual level, the descriptive approach is considered sufficient. However, critical discourse analysis can be improved further by recognizing the historical, social, cultural, economic, and political context of the text being analyzed [36].

This article takes as its material object news stories on maritime issues that were published in online media. Data collection involved searching for news stories on maritime issues that were published on Indonesian websites. Data was collected online because Indonesians consider online media to credibly present current situations and conditions. Fairclough links textual analysis at the micro level to higher-level social analysis, i.e. sociocultural practice [13]. At the analytical level, all three levels are considered in conjunction.

Table 1 Comparison of Level and Method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Critical linguistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse practice news room</td>
<td>In-depth interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociocultural/historical practice</td>
<td>Library research, literature review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Fairclough (1992) processed by authors

Three levels of analysis are involved. First is description, namely the presentation and descriptive analysis of the text and its content. At this level, the text is described without linking it to its extratextual context. It focuses on the contents of the text as well as the language used. Second is interpretation, in which the text is connected to discursive practices. At this level, the text is not analyzed descriptively, but rather interpreted within the context of its production. Third is explanation, in which the researcher seeks a means of explaining the results of the textual interpretation produced at the second level. This explanation is produced by connecting the production of the text with the socio-cultural practices of the media [4].

2.2 Data Analysis Methods

In this article, critical discourse analysis will be applied to understand news stories published on the internet. Analysis will be conducted at the micro (textual) level, focusing on the maritime representations, relations, and identities included in the stories. A text does not only present its object, but also determines how its relationships are defined. Fairclough [15] identifies three basic elements, as depicted in the following table.

Table 2 Three Basic Elements of the Faircloughian Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Representations</td>
<td>How events, people, groups, situations, etc. are presented and depicted by the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relations</td>
<td>How the relations between reporters, the public, and news participants are presented and depicted by the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identities</td>
<td>How the identities of reporters, the public, and news participants are presented and depicted by the text.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Fairclough (1998) processed by authors

These three aspects (representations, relations, and identities) can be examined through critical discourse analysis at the micro (text) level in every written discourse (news story) published by online media. After the data is analyzed, a conclusion will be drawn regarding the views, biases, and strategies found in online media [22].

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Tendencies in Depictions of the Maritime in Online Media

The coverage of maritime issues in Indonesian online media has frequently focused on the performance of the Indonesian government under President Joko Widodo. Every step taken by the government to manifest its new developmental paradigm, known as the Global Maritime Axis doctrine, has received media attention [34]. The discourses presented through the news stories published by these online media are part of the mass media’s construction of society and media audiences, recognizing that the mass media is one means through which individuals can gain knowledge about the realities outside them. Online
media are among those considered credible by the public. However, that does not rule out the need for a critical perspective. The media is not an empty vessel, but rather influenced by specific ideologies and interests.

The maritime discourses published by online news outlets have generally dealt with seas and sailing, in accordance with the denotative meaning of ‘maritime’. This has included, for example, coverage of such maritime topics as the Ministry of Fisheries and Oceans’ programs, the establishment of the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs, the presence of the Indonesian president at international forums promoting infrastructure development, the drafting of laws regarding the loading and unloading of ships, and the active role of the government in realizing its new development paradigm (i.e. the Global Maritime Axis doctrine). Meanwhile, coverage of the Indonesian people has dealt primarily with the economic difficulties faced by fishermen’s organizations, the celebrations of coastal communities, the local customs and wisdoms of coastal communities, as well as the beauty and tourism potential of Indonesia’s oceans.

3.2 Construction of the Maritime in Online Media

The media plays a key role in modern society, and the reality created by the media through its news coverage — i.e. its discourse — can easily be consumed by modern society. The stories published by the mass media are parts of written discourse, which itself plays a significant role in constructing reality. Even today, writing remains the most effective and efficient means of conveying ideas, knowledge, and other aspects of human creativity [40]. In media studies, communities cannot simply be ignored, as the media can inform and shape individual community members’ mindsets. Likewise, the maritime realities presented by online media cannot be understated; the extensive online coverage of maritime issues in Indonesia gives individuals and communities considerable opportunity to understand how the media constructs reality and its purpose in doing so [42].

During the first hundred days of Widodo’s presidency, the Indonesian media gave increased coverage to maritime issues. This is not surprising, given that Widodo had emphasized the importance of applying a maritime perspective to development in one of his speeches [26]. Given the number of stories published by online media during this period, this article will focus on analyzing the four categories of maritime issues that received the most coverage: infrastructure development, maritime security, fisherman welfare, and maritime consciousness (i.e. awareness of Indonesia’s situation as a maritime country). These four categories of discourse will be analyzed by applying a Faircloughian approach to critical discourse analysis, focusing on the powers and ideologies presented by the media in constructing and presenting reality [18].

3.3 Critical Discourse Analysis of News Coverage of Maritime Infrastructure Development

News stories, both print and online, are part of written mass media discourses. Online media in Indonesia have frequently covered the issue of maritime infrastructure development, i.e. the process of deliberately transforming aspects of maritime life in accordance with a specific plan. The development of maritime infrastructure is expected to increase access and thereby facilitate economic activities throughout Indonesia [23]. Maritime infrastructure development is also the third pillar of President Widodo’s Global Maritime Axis doctrine [7].

Online media in Indonesia, while covering infrastructure development, have frequently published stories that may be categorized as “hard news”. These media outlets have also widely presented the government’s active involvement in international forums to ensure that the government’s vision and missions can be realized, as well as the positive and negative effects of sea toll development. This can be seen in several articles published by online media outlets. The article below, for example, was published by one online media platform and covers maritime infrastructure development. By applying critical discourse analysis at the textual level, it is possible to ascertain this story’s representations, relations, and identities, as well as identify the media’s constructs [37].

This article, titled “Tiongkok dan Indonesia Sepakat Tingkatkan Kerjasama Maritim” (China and Indonesia Agree to Increase Maritime Cooperation), covers a meeting between Joko Widodo with Chinese president Xi Jinping in Beijing in the lead-up to APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation). The Xinhua news agency reported that Widodo expressed his hope that China would continue to increase its cooperative activities in Indonesia, with a focus on maritime and infrastructure affairs. Meanwhile, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated during APEC that Indonesia would promote maritime issues as a main subject of discussion and international cooperation.

Critical discourse analysis of the text indicates, first, the representations of the text. The representations of the text are evident in its use of specific terms and grammatical structures. In this article, it is stated that an agreement was reached between Indonesia and China that would increase international cooperation in maritime affairs. Online media coverage in Indonesia indicated that this agreement had been reached between presidents Widodo and Xi. However, this contradicts the coverage by the Chinese news agency Xinhua, which indicated that Widodo had only told Xi of his hope that international collaboration could be established and maintained. This can be seen in the following table.

The use of the word sepakat (agreed) indicates that Widodo and Xi had already discussed maritime infrastructure development and reached an agreement. This implies that the Indonesian government had successfully reached
a bilateral agreement with the Chinese government that would help it achieve its infrastructure development goals. However, the same article quotes a story from the Xinhua news agency, which states that Widodo had told Xi that he hoped China would increase its international cooperation programs while prioritizing maritime development. This statement indicates a difference of understanding: was an agreement truly reached, as indicated by the Indonesian online media, or was there nothing more than an expression of hope, as indicated by Xinhua?

The relations in the above-mentioned article are those between President Widodo and President Xi. In this story, the relations between the head of the Indonesian state and the head of the Chinese state are depicted as harmonious, as both men reached a bilateral agreement to prioritize maritime development. Conversely, the Xinhua report quoted by the Indonesian news media indicates a degree of doubt; was an agreement reached, or was this only President Widodo’s hope?

The identities presented in this article indicate a pro-government orientation. This can be seen, for example, in its positive title. Descriptive analysis shows that online media can present a positive image of the Indonesian government, in this case by depicting the Indonesian government as having successfully established a bilateral agreement with China. Various media publications suggest that international collaboration has been established not only between Indonesia and a single investor, but between Indonesia and a range of Asian, European, and American countries that desire to invest in Indonesia’s maritime sector.

In general, Indonesian online media have, in constructing the reality of maritime infrastructure development, tended to exhibit a pro-government bias. Their written discourses, including the clear headlines and supportive sentences of their stories, have highlighted the success of the Widodo government in attracting foreign investors such as Russia, the United States, China, Myanmar, and Japan; they have also underscored foreign investors interest in Indonesia’s maritime sector and described it as holding a key position [44]. From this coverage, it may be inferred that the Widodo government and its new, maritime-based approach to development has received broad international support. Consequently, the public (readers) is indirectly directed towards the discourse that Indonesia’s maritime development doctrine will be successful as foreign countries are highly interested in investing in the program [32]. However, at the same time, many in the government have shown pessimism regarding the realization of the sea toll and deep-sea port programs.

### 3.4 Maritime Coverage in Online Media

Online media coverage of maritime issues is part of a written discourse used by the media to construct reality in society, and thereby influence how the public learns of and understands social realities that are far removed from them. Mass media is one means of social and political communications. Mass media content, similarly, is in essence a construction of reality, one which uses language as its building blocks. Language is not simply a tool for representing reality; it shapes reality. As a result, the mass media has considerable potential to influence the meanings and understandings of the reality it constructs [29].

Online media in Indonesia appears to have widely covered the development of maritime infrastructure, the issue of maritime defense, as well as international cooperation on maritime affairs [5]. It does not simply present the events occurring in Indonesia and among the Indonesian people, but discursively shapes their realities. As such, the content of media may be understood as constructed reality, as reality shaped through meaningful discourse. This process involves the following stages: (a) preparation of construction materials; (b) construct dissemination; (c) construction; and (d) confirmation. Discourse contributes to the construction of realities, including social identities, social relations, and knowledge/meaning systems [27].

Online media coverage has focused significantly on developmental affairs. In a maritime context, development is seen as playing an important role in ensuring social welfare. It is a process through which all aspects of life are deliberately transformed in accordance with a specific plan. More specifically, maritime development refers to the development of Indonesian waters and the use of the natural
resources contained within to promote the welfare of the Indonesian nation [2]. It has implications for the government's policymaking and development strategies, as it may lead the government to promote economic growth by building ports, fish processing facilities, ship factories, etc. Infrastructure supports such activities within specific contexts and areas, serving as both a vehicle and catalyst for development. As such, its availability can improve public access to resources, thereby increasing productivity and motoring economic activities. Infrastructure development, particularly within a maritime context, is thus expected to promote public welfare and increase the financial capacity of maritime communities — especially fishermen [47].

The financial capacity of Indonesia's fishermen is still considered lacking, a situation that may be attributed to the government's lack of programs promoting their welfare. As such, insurance programs offer an alternative solution, or financial backbone, for their activities. First, fishing involves a high level of speculation, meaning that fishermen are unable to accurately predict their monthly or annual income. Second, investment in the fishing sector requires significant financial capital; money is needed to cover operational costs, recruit labor, and maintain equipment. Third, fishing is dangerous, leaving fishermen at risk of life and limb. Fourth, coastal areas themselves are vulnerable to disease; similarly, the human resources in such areas tend to be of poor quality, with limited levels of education [49].

The problem of illegal fishing is rampant in Indonesian waters [38]. The ability to monitor and control such activities has been lacking, as the necessary infrastructure and facilities have not been readily available. The government has, however, dealt with problems such as environmental degradation and pollution, such as blast fishing, large-scale coral reef mining, and illegal dumping. It has been recognized that the practice of illegal, unreported, unregulated fishing in Indonesia waters has significantly harmed the national economy and threatened the national dignity of the Indonesian people [48]. The lack of maritime awareness at the national level has negatively impacted concern for maritime issues. Many Indonesians do not understand their maritime heritage or their past naval glory, which has emerged as a consequence of its total water area being greater than its total land area. This limited maritime awareness can be seen in the limited consumption of fish in the archipelago, although admittedly this consumption pattern is influenced by a number of factors [31].

Similarly, Indonesia's maritime tourism potential has yet to be optimally exploited [19]. The involvement of the government, as a major stakeholder, is necessary to promote awareness of the beauty of Indonesia’s seas—for example, through the commemoration of an “Archipelago Day”. However, creating awareness of maritime issues must involve more than just the government. The media, given its important role in constructing reality, must also be involved. The mass media, including electronic media, can help create greater public awareness of coastal issues in contemporary Indonesian society [43]. By publicizing actual contemporary maritime issues, including maritime development, the media can increase public concern [21]. However, in practice, this has yet to occur, and the media has dedicated little space to maritime affairs. Similarly, there has been a dearth of academic publications on topics such as maritime anthropology, sociology, industry, law, politics, communications, and history [11].

4 Conclusion

Based on this critical discourse analysis (CDA), it may be concluded that the media plays an important role in the construction of reality through the written discourses it publishes, which in turn can influence society’s system of knowledge. Online media, a credible form of media, includes much coverage of maritime development, with a particular emphasis on the government's active role in attracting foreign investors and backers. The discourses presented through online media significantly influence the construction of reality. This construction of reality, through the coverage of maritime development, can influence public understandings and views of maritime issues.

This research applies a critical paradigm, and as such it is hoped to provide enlightenment, freedom, and emancipation to readers, the public, and media audiences. It opens new spaces for discussion of online media and their coverage of maritime issues, emphasizing that even credible media are not entirely correct in their coverage. As noted above, the media is not a neutral medium, but contains within it ideological contestations; written discourses (news stories) cannot shed the ideological biases of their media.

References


