

REPRESENTING POWER AND IDEOLOGY IN TIKTOK NEWS HEADLINES: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF RADAR BANDUNG AND RADAR CIANJUR

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Abstract

This study investigated how digital news media constructed events, social actors, power relations, and ideology through linguistic representation in news headlines. The study aimed to identify the representation strategies employed by both media outlets and examine how linguistic choices contributed to the construction of meaning in digital news discourse. This research used a qualitative method with applied Critical Discourse Analysis using Fairclough's three-dimensional framework and Van Leeuwen's theory of social actor representation. The data were obtained from 17 pairs of headlines published on the official TikTok accounts of Radar Bandung and Radar Cianjur. The findings revealed that Radar Bandung tended to employ active, explicit, and informative structures that clearly represented actors and responsibilities, whereas Radar Cianjur frequently used passive constructions, evaluative expressions, and impact-oriented representations emphasizing emotional engagement and audience attraction. The study also showed that linguistic choices shaped the representation of accountability, authority, and social relations within discourse. The findings indicated that digital news headlines were not neutral texts but discursive constructions that actively shaped public perception and social reality through language and representation strategies. Future researchers are encouraged to examine larger datasets and different digital media platforms to gain a broader understanding of representation strategies in contemporary news discourse.



Keyword: *Critical Discourse Analysis; social actor representation; digital media discourse; headlines; TikTok news; ideology; power relations*

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INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in shaping how people understand and interpret social reality. Through language, information is not merely transmitted but also constructed and represented in particular ways. In modern society, mass media serves as one of the most influential

institutions in disseminating information and shaping public perception. News reports are commonly regarded as factual representations of reality; however, scholars have argued that news is not a neutral reflection of events. Rather, it is a socially constructed product influenced by ideological, political, economic, and cultural interests. Fowler (1991) argues that news discourse is shaped by ideological forces and therefore cannot be considered a purely objective representation of reality. Similarly, Van Dijk (1988) explains that news functions as a framework through which society interprets and understands the social world. Consequently, the language used in news discourse becomes a powerful mechanism through which media institutions influence public understanding of events, social actors, and social issues.

Among the various elements of news discourse, headlines occupy a particularly strategic position. Headlines are often the first component encountered by readers and frequently determine whether audiences continue reading the full news story. Beyond their summarizing function, headlines play a significant role in framing events and directing readers' interpretations. According to Hadidi et al. (2022), headlines are deliberately constructed through specific linguistic strategies to attract attention while simultaneously shaping audience understanding of reported events. Through lexical selection, grammatical structures, and framing devices, headlines can foreground certain aspects of reality while backgrounding others. Therefore, headlines do not merely provide information but also function as representational tools through which media organizations construct particular versions of reality.

The significance of headline construction has become increasingly apparent in the digital era. The rapid development of digital technology has transformed the ways news is produced, distributed, and consumed. Social media platforms such as TikTok have emerged as influential channels for news dissemination, allowing media organizations to reach audiences through concise and highly engaging content. In such environments, headlines become even more important because audiences frequently encounter news through short-form content where headlines serve as the primary source of information. Nickl et al. (2025) observe that online headlines have evolved in terms of structure, length, and emotional tone as a response to the highly competitive attention-driven environment of digital media. As a result, news organizations increasingly employ strategic linguistic choices to maximize audience engagement and visibility.

From a critical linguistic perspective, language is never entirely neutral because it operates within broader structures of power and ideology. To investigate how language contributes to the construction of social reality, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a relevant analytical framework. Fairclough (1992, 1995) conceptualizes discourse as a form of social practice that maintains a dialectical relationship with society. Through discourse, institutions reproduce, negotiate, and challenge existing power relations and ideological structures. Fairclough's three-dimensional model integrates textual analysis, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice, enabling researchers to examine not only linguistic features but also the broader social implications of discourse. This framework is particularly relevant for media studies because news discourse frequently reflects institutional interests and ideological positioning.

In addition to examining discourse as social practice, the representation of social actors constitutes another important aspect of media discourse analysis. Van Leeuwen (2008) argues that social actors are not simply described within texts but are actively constructed through specific representational strategies. Through mechanisms such as inclusion, exclusion, activation, passivation, nomination, and categorization, media discourse can influence how readers perceive responsibility, authority, and legitimacy. The representation of social actors becomes particularly significant in news headlines because headlines condense complex events into brief textual forms that often determine initial interpretations. Consequently, examining how social actors are represented in headlines provides valuable insights into the ideological orientations and communicative objectives of media institutions.

Research on media discourse has consistently demonstrated that linguistic choices play an essential role in shaping representation and ideology. Sabahat et al. (2025) reported that selective lexicalization and thematic emphasis contribute to the construction of partisan narratives in political news discourse. This study demonstrates that headlines function not only as informational texts but also as ideological instruments capable of influencing public understanding.

Other studies have further emphasized the relationship between linguistic representation and ideological positioning. Herawati et al. (2025) investigated the representation of social actors in Indonesian media coverage of the Emergency Warning movement and revealed substantial differences in actor positioning, lexical choice, and thematic organization across media institutions. Likewise, Firdausi and Sahayu (2022) found that ideological perspectives are embedded in lexical choices, transitivity patterns, and framing strategies employed in Covid-19 news discourse. These findings support the argument that language functions as a strategic resource through which media organizations construct social reality and communicate ideological perspectives.

Research examining ideology and power in media discourse has also highlighted the importance of institutional positioning. Andriani and Belkis (2024) demonstrated that thematic organization, lexical selection, and structural emphasis reflect institutional power and ideological alignment within political news reporting. Similarly, Afzaal et al. (2019) revealed that positive lexicalization and thematic emphasis were strategically employed to legitimize governmental initiatives and reinforce national narratives. These studies suggest that discourse serves not merely as a communicative tool but also as a mechanism for constructing legitimacy, authority, and power relations.

In addition to studies employing Critical Discourse Analysis, recent research conducted within the field of media discourse has highlighted the significance of linguistic choices in shaping meaning construction. Kartika and Wihadi (2018) demonstrated that language in online news discourse contributes to the establishment of interpersonal meaning and influences how information is interpreted by readers. Hidayah, Wihadi, and Rahmatunisa (2023) further showed that textual organization plays a crucial role in constructing coherence and meaning within news discourse. Similarly, Hasanah, Wihadi, and Suryana (2025) found that linguistic resources are strategically employed to position viewpoints and negotiate perspectives within media texts. Although these studies focus on different aspects of media discourse, they collectively reinforce the argument that

linguistic choices are central to the construction of meaning and representation in news communication.

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that linguistic choices in news discourse contribute to the construction of ideology, power, and social actor representations. Studies by (Sabahat et al., 2025; & Hernawati et al., 2025) show that lexical choices, syntactic structure, transitivity, and thematic emphasis can shape ideological meanings and the representations of social actors. Other studies have highlighted how institutional positioning and framing strategies influence the construction of authority, legitimacy, and responsibility in media discourse (Afzaal et al., 2019; Andriani & Belkis, 2024; Paradita et al., 2025).

However, several gaps remain. First, much previous research has examined complete news articles rather than headline-level discourse. Second, local media discourse, particularly in Indonesia, has received less attention than national and international media. Third, relatively few studies have combined Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis with van Leeuwen's social actor representation framework to compare local media headlines. Finally, limited attention has been given to local newspaper headlines distributed on TikTok, where concise and attention-oriented communication may influence how events and social actors are represented.

Therefore, this study focuses on 17 pairs of similar events headlines published by Radar Bandung and Radar Cianjur on their TikTok accounts between January to March 2026. By combining Fairclough's (1992; 1995) three-dimensional CDA framework with van Leeuwen's (2008) theory of social actor representation, this study examines how two local media outlets construct events and social actors through lexical, grammatical, and representational choices. The study specifically contributes a comparative perspective on how local digital news media represent similar events and how these representations may indicate differences in power relations and ideological orientations within the same sociocultural context.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary analytical approach. The study focused on examining the representation of social actors and events as well as the linguistic strategies employed in news headlines published by local newspapers. Fairclough's (1992, 1995) three-dimensional framework was used to analyze discourse at the levels of text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice, while van Leeuwen's (2008) theory of social actor representation was applied to identify representation strategies embedded in the headlines.

Data Source

The data consisted of 17 pairs of news headlines published on the official TikTok accounts of Radar Bandung and Radar Cianjur between January to March 2026. Purposive sampling was employed because the study required headlines that met specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. A pair of headlines was considered to report a similar event when both headlines referred to the same or closely related public event or social issue and provided information about substantially comparable actors, actions, and consequences. The selection also considered whether the two headlines provided sufficient textual information for analyzing linguistic choices, social actor representations, and power relations.

The selection process involved identifying headlines published by both media outlets during the same three-month period and grouping them according to the events or issues they reported. Headlines that referred to the same or closely related events were then compared. Headlines that did not have a sufficiently comparable events or did not provide adequate linguistic information for analysis were excluded. Through this process, 17 comparable headline pairs were selected as a final dataset. The unit of analysis were the headline texts, particularly linguistic features that represented social actors, events, actions, and consequences.

Instruments

The primary instrument of this study was the researcher. In qualitative research, the researcher plays a central role in collecting, selecting, categorizing, interpreting, and analyzing the data. To support the analysis, an analytical framework based on Fairclough's (1992, 1995) Critical Discourse Analysis and van Leeuwen's (2008) social actor representation model was employed. Data classification tables were also used to identify linguistic strategies and representation categories found in the headlines.

Procedures

The data collection process involved several stages. First, headlines were collected from the official TikTok accounts of Radar Bandung and Radar Cianjur. Second, headlines reporting similar issues or events were selected purposively to facilitate comparative analysis. Third, the selected headlines were documented and organized according to their publication source. Finally, the headlines were prepared for analysis by identifying linguistic features relevant to representation and discourse construction.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA. At the textual level, the analysis examined lexical choices, grammatical structures, transitivity, sentence structure, actor, visibility, and evaluative expression used in the headlines. These textual features were then analyzed using van Leeuwen's (2008) social actor representation framework, particularly inclusion, exclusion, activation, passivation, nomination, and categorization.

At the level of discursive practice, the analysis considered how the headlines were produced, selected, framed, and distributed as short-form news content on the official TikTok accounts of Radar Bandung and Radar Cianjur. Particular attention was given to differences in headline structure, information emphasis, lexical framing, and the ways in which actors or event consequences were foregrounded. These features were treated as evidence of differences in the way the two media outlets constructed and presented news for their digital audiences.

At the level of sociocultural practice, the interpretation considered the local media context and the broader social and ideological significance of the representations identified at the textual level. The analysis did not treat ideological orientation as directly observable from the headlines, instead ideological interpretations were made by relating recurring linguistic and representational patterns to the ways power, responsibility, authority, and social actors were constructed in the discourse.

The three levels of analysis were therefore connected systematically, textual patterns provided the primary evidence, discursive practices explained how those patterns functioned within digital news production and

distrubution, and sociocultural interpretation considered their implications for power relations and ideological positioning. The interpretation was based on recurring patterns across the 17 headline pairs rather than on isolated linguistic features.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Representation of Events and Social Actors in Local Newspaper Headlines

The analysis of 17 pairs of headlines published by Radar Bandung and Radar Cianjur revealed notable differences in the representation of events and social actors. Although both media outlets reported similar issues during the period from January to March 2026, they employed different discourse strategies in constructing reality. Radar Bandung tended to emphasize informational clarity, explicit actor representation, and factual reporting, whereas Radar Cianjur frequently highlighted event impacts through more dramatic and evaluative language. These differences indicate that headlines are not merely summaries of events but discursive constructions that influence how readers interpret social reality.

Table 1. Representation in Text Dimension

Aspect	Radar Bandung	Radar Cianjur	Example / Evidence
Event representation	Process-based (action-oriented)	Impact-based (result-oriented)	“Tim SAR temukan korban...” vs “Mayat ditemukan...”
Sentence structure	Active, actor-oriented	Passive, event-oriented	“Dua pria todongkan...” vs “Motor dibakar...”
Actor visibility	Explicit	Often implicit or omitted	“Tim SAR” clearly mentioned vs omitted actor
Transitivity	Clear agency	Reduced agency	Actor performs action directly vs actor backgrounded
Word choice	Neutral, informative	Emotional, evaluative	“diduga” vs “makin berani”

Source: Research findings (2026).

The findings demonstrate that Radar Bandung generally represented events through action-oriented constructions. Active clauses were frequently employed to foreground actions and identify actors responsible for those actions. Headlines commonly emphasized processes rather than outcomes, enabling readers to recognize how events unfolded and who participated in them. Through this strategy, responsibility and agency remained visible within the discourse. In contrast, Radar Cianjur tended to construct events through impact-oriented representations. Passive structures appeared more frequently, shifting attention from actors toward the consequences of events. As a result, readers were encouraged to focus on outcomes rather than on the individuals or institutions responsible for producing them. This strategy reduced actor visibility and increased the prominence of the event itself.

The representation of social actors also differed significantly between the two media outlets. Radar Bandung consistently employed explicit actor identification, positioning individuals, institutions, and authorities as active participants within reported events. This representation increased transparency because readers could directly identify who performed particular actions. Conversely, Radar Cianjur frequently reduced actor visibility through omission, passivation, and backgrounding. In several headlines, actors were absent from the surface structure, causing responsibility to become less explicit.

In addition, Radar Cianjur often employed interpretative categorizations such as social or generational labels. These categorizations did not only merely identify actors but also attached evaluative meanings that shaped audience perceptions. Consequently, social actors were not only represented but also interpreted through specific perspectives constructed by the media.

Linguistic Strategies, Power Relations, and Ideological Orientation

The findings further revealed that linguistic strategies played an important role in constructing meaning, representing power relations, and reflecting ideological orientations. The differences between the two media outlets are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. *Strategies and Representation*

Aspect	Radar Bandung	Radar Cianjur	Example / Evidence
Linguistic strategy	Informative, explicit	Dramatic, evaluative	“diduga” vs “detik-detik”
Production strategy	Factual	Engagement-oriented	direct reporting vs emotional framing
Framing	Actor and process-based	Impact and emotion-based	actor shown vs event emphasized
Power representation	Authority clearly visible	Authority less visible	“Tim SAR” explicitly shown vs omitted
Responsibility	Clearly assigned to actors	Often unclear	clear subject vs passive structure
Ideology	Objectivity, accountability	Engagement, dramatization	neutral wording vs expressive wording

Source: Research findings (2026).

Radar Bandung consistently employed linguistic strategies characterized by neutral diction, explicit actor representation, and factual reporting. Lexical choices focused primarily on describing events without adding subjective evaluation. Modality markers such as “diduga” were frequently used to maintain journalistic caution and avoid premature conclusions. These strategies contributed to a discourse emphasizing informational transparency and accountability. Unlike Radar Bandung,

Radar Cianjur frequently employed dramatic and evaluative expressions designed to attract audience attention. Lexical items emphasizing urgency, intensity, and emotional impact appeared more often in its headlines. Such choices not only described events but also encouraged readers to adopt particular interpretations. This pattern reflects the increasing importance of audience engagement within contemporary digital media environments.

Differences in linguistic strategies also influenced the representation of power relations. Radar Bandung frequently foregrounded institutional actors such as emergency response teams, law enforcement agencies, and other authorities. By explicitly identifying these actors, the headlines reinforced perceptions of authority and accountability. Readers could clearly identify who exercised power and who was responsible for particular actions. In contrast, Radar Cianjur often backgrounded institutional actors and shifted attention toward event consequences. As a result, authority appeared less visible and responsibility became more diffuse. Readers were encouraged to focus on the event itself rather than on the actors responsible for producing it. This difference demonstrates that power relations are not represented objectively but are actively constructed through discourse.

The contrasting representation of power ultimately reflected different ideological orientations. Radar Bandung's discourse suggested an orientation toward objectivity, accountability, and informational clarity. Through explicit actor representation and neutral lexical choices, the media positioned itself as a source of reliable information. Conversely, Radar Cianjur appeared to prioritize engagement and emotional resonance. The use of dramatic framing, evaluative language, and selective actor representation suggests an orientation toward attracting audience attention and increasing interaction within digital media contexts.

The findings support Fairclough's (1995) argument that discourse functions as a social practice through which ideology and power relations are constructed and reproduced. The differences identified between Radar Bandung and Radar Cianjur demonstrate that headlines are not neutral representations of reality. Instead, they are strategically constructed texts that shape public understanding through lexical selection, grammatical structures, and framing strategies. The findings are also consistent with van Leeuwen's (2008) theory of social actor representation. Radar Bandung frequently employed activation and inclusion strategies by explicitly identifying actors and assigning responsibility for actions. In contrast, Radar Cianjur often utilized passivation and exclusion strategies that reduced actor visibility and redirected attention toward event outcomes. These patterns influenced how readers interpreted agency, accountability, and authority within media discourse.

The present findings align with Akinseye (2024), who found that active constructions strengthen perceptions of agency and responsibility, whereas passive constructions tend to reduce actor visibility. Similar patterns were observed in this study, where Radar Bandung emphasized accountability through active structures while Radar Cianjur foregrounded consequences through passive constructions. Likewise, Faizin (2022) argued that inclusion and exclusion strategies significantly influence readers' perceptions of power relations and responsibility. The findings of the present study support this argument because differences in actor visibility shaped how responsibility was understood in the headlines.

The findings further support Surjowati (2020), who demonstrated that categorization and nomination strategies influence social judgments toward actors represented in news discourse. The use of evaluative categorizations

in Radar Cianjur headlines reflects how media institutions attach interpretative meanings to social actors. Similar observations were reported by Paradita et al. (2025), who found that different media organizations employ distinct framing strategies according to their communicative objectives and ideological orientations. The findings are also relevant to previous studies conducted by Kartika and Wihadi (2018), Hidayah et al. (2023), and Hasanah et al. (2025), which collectively emphasize the importance of linguistic choices in constructing meaning within media discourse. While those studies focused on interpersonal meaning, textual organization, and engagement resources, the present study extends their findings by demonstrating how representation and linguistic strategies operate within local newspaper headlines distributed through digital platforms.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the representation of events and social actors as well as the linguistic strategies employed in headlines published by Radar Bandung and Radar Cianjur on TikTok using Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis framework and van Leeuwen's (2008) theory of social actor representation. The findings revealed that the two media outlets employed different discourse strategies in constructing news headlines. Radar Bandung tended to use active, explicit, and informative structures that emphasized factuality, accountability, and actor visibility. In contrast, Radar Cianjur frequently employed passive constructions, evaluative language, and impact-oriented representations that highlighted emotional appeal and audience engagement.

The findings further demonstrated that linguistic choices and representation strategies significantly influenced how events, authority, responsibility, and social actors were presented to audiences. Through activation, inclusion, exclusion, passivation, categorization, and nomination strategies, the headlines reflected different communicative orientations and ideological perspectives. These findings support the view that news headlines are not neutral informational texts but discursive constructions that shape public understanding of social reality.

This study contributes to Critical Discourse Analysis by highlighting how local digital news media construct meaning through headline discourse on social media platforms. Future studies are encouraged to examine larger datasets, compare different digital platforms, and incorporate audience reception or multimodal discourse analysis to provide a more comprehensive understanding of media representation in contemporary digital communication.

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