



LEGAL LANGUAGE IN DIGITAL MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE NURHADI CASE: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY AND INSTITUTIONAL LEGITIMACY

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Abstract:

This article examines the construction of legal discourse in online media coverage of the death of Brigadier Muhammad Nurhadi at Villa Tekek, North Lombok, allegedly resulting from abuse committed by his superior officers. Drawing on Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study examines three interrelated dimensions: textual practice, discursive practice, and social practice. At the textual level, media framing relies on legalistic diction—such as “suspect” and “investigation” that foregrounds procedural aspects of the case while obscuring substantive accountability. At the discursive practice level, the analysis reveals heavy media reliance on institutional sources, which reproduces police narratives while marginalizing the voices of the victim's family and civil society. At the social practice level, the findings reveal asymmetrical power relations in which legal discourse functions to legitimize institutional authority rather than to encourage transparency. This research contributes to critical studies of legal language in journalism by illustrating how legal-bureaucratic discourse can simultaneously construct and obscure institutional accountability in cases of alleged state-apparatus violence.

Key words: legal discourse; critical discourse analysis; media framing; police accountability; Nurhadi case.

Abstrak:

Artikel ini mengkaji konstruksi wacana hukum dalam pemberitaan media daring mengenai kematian Brigadir Muhammad Nurhadi di Villa Tekek, Lombok Utara, yang diduga akibat penganiayaan oleh atasannya. Dengan menggunakan Analisis Wacana Kritis (AWK) Norman Fairclough, penelitian ini berfokus pada tiga dimensi yang saling terkait: praktik tekstual, praktik diskursif, dan praktik sosial. Pada level teks, pemberitaan media memanfaatkan diksi legalistik seperti “tersangka” dan “penyidikan” yang menonjolkan aspek prosedural sehingga mengaburkan akuntabilitas substantif. Pada level praktik diskursif, analisis menunjukkan ketergantungan media yang besar pada sumber institusional, sehingga mereproduksi narasi kepolisian dan meminggirkan suara keluarga korban serta masyarakat sipil. Pada level praktik sosial, temuan menunjukkan relasi kuasa yang timpang, di mana wacana hukum justru melegitimasi otoritas institusional alih-alih mendorong transparansi. Penelitian ini memberi kontribusi pada kajian kritis bahasa hukum dalam jurnalisme dengan menunjukkan bagaimana wacana hukum-birokratis dapat sekaligus mengonstruksi dan mengaburkan akuntabilitas institusional dalam kasus dugaan kekerasan oleh aparat negara.

Kata kunci: wacana hukum; analisis wacana kritis; framing media; akuntabilitas kepolisian; kasus Nurhadi.

A. Introduction

The death of Brigadier Muhammad Nurhadi (MN) at a villa in the Tekek area of North Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), has become one of the legal cases that has drawn considerable public attention in recent months.¹ Nurhadi, a member of the Indonesian National Police, was found dead after allegedly suffering severe abuse at the hands of his direct superiors, identified in this study by the initials Kopol Y and Ipda HC.² The case has not only caused deep grief for the victim's family but has also added to a long list of incidents that have tarnished the image of the Indonesian police institution. The fact that a police officer could die at the hands of a superior within the internal sphere of the institution raises serious questions about power relations, abuse of authority, and the extent to which legal accountability can be enforced when law-enforcement officers are simultaneously the alleged perpetrators and the body responsible for handling the case.³

This phenomenon merits analysis because it touches on fundamental questions in the relationship between law and society. The police institution is, in principle, meant to function as the guardian of public order, the protector of the community, and the executor of the law.⁴ Yet incidents such as Nurhadi's death expose a paradox: an institution mandated to enforce the law may itself become an agent of legal violation. The case is rendered more complex by an inherent institutional dilemma police investigating police a situation that frequently raises public doubt regarding the independence, transparency, and fairness of the resulting legal process.

From a social standpoint, the case has triggered a wave of public criticism directed at the culture of violence, patronage, and opacity within the police institution.⁵ Nurhadi's death at Villa Tekek cannot be understood merely as an isolated criminal incident; it should instead be read as a reflection of long-entrenched structural problems.⁶ A culture of seniority, hierarchical power relations, and weak internal oversight are frequently cited as conditions that enable practices of violence and abuse of authority. The case is therefore not merely a criminal matter but also one that implicates institutional governance and professional ethics.⁷

Within the context of media coverage, Nurhadi's death has become a significant matter of public concern. Mass media, and online media in particular, play a substantial role in shaping how the public comes to understand such a case. Through lexical choices, sentence

¹ "Kronologi Lengkap Pembunuhan Brigadir Nurhadi, Terungkap Peran 2 Terdakwa Perwira Polri," https://www.kompas.tv/regional/625802/kronologi-lengkap-pembunuhan-brigadir-nurhadi-terungkap-peran-2-terdakwa-perwira-polri?page=all#goog_rewarded, 2026.

² Kompas Cyber Media, "Sidang Pembunuhan Brigadir Nurhadi, Kopol Yogi Divonis 14 Tahun Penjara Dan Ipda Aris 8 Tahun," <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2026/03/09/164234878/sidang-pembunuhan-brigadir-nurhadi-kopol-yogi-divonis-14-tahun-penjara-dan>, 2026.

³ Kusdiono, "Police Reform and Accountability Mechanisms in Contemporary Indonesia," *Review of Indonesian Administrative Law* 14, no. 3 (2020): XIV, 201–25.

⁴ S Wijaya and A Rahman, "Institutional Discourse and Accountability in Indonesian News Media," *Media Studies Southeast Asia* 5, no. 1 (2022): V, 78–95.

⁵ H Suryanto and R Hidayat, "Critical Analysis of Police Communication Strategies in High-Profile Cases," *Indonesian Quarterly on Law and Society* 21, no. 4 (2024): XXI, 512–30.

⁶ David L Altheide and Robert P Snow, *Media Logic* (SAGE Publications, 2020).

⁷ T Amelia, "Victim Representation and Media Justice in Institutional Violence Reporting," *Journal of Southeast Asian Journalism* 9, no. 3 (2023): IX, 234–51.

structure, and the narratives that are constructed, the media can frame a case so that it appears either as an ordinary criminal act or as an institutional scandal.⁸ The concept of framing (Entman, 1993) explains that media organizations selectively emphasize particular aspects of an event in order to foreground certain meanings.⁹ When media coverage foregrounds an “internal ethics process” rather than an “alleged criminal act of abuse,” for instance, the public is cued to read the case as a matter of internal discipline rather than as a serious crime.

The legal language used in news coverage constitutes a crucial point of analysis. Tiersma (1999) argues that legal language is characteristically formal, technical, and exclusionary.¹⁰ When transposed into the space of journalism, this language undergoes a transformation: rigid legal terms enter public discourse and shape perceptions of legality, authority, and legitimacy.¹¹ When the media employ terms such as suspect, reconstruction, or code-of-ethics violation, an implicit message accompanies them. Namely, that the case is proceeding through proper legal channels. Yet beneath this surface, such word choices may also obscure the possibility that the case is being handled half-heartedly, particularly when the alleged perpetrators are themselves members of the law-enforcement apparatus.

Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2010) offers an appropriate theoretical framework for examining this phenomenon.¹² This approach treats language not merely as a medium of communication but as a social practice saturated with ideology. Three levels of analysis can be applied: textual analysis, discursive practice analysis, and social practice analysis. At the textual level, one can examine how word choice and sentence structure in coverage of the Nurhadi case are used to construct particular meanings. At the discursive practice level, one can analyze how texts are produced and who serves as the principal source of information. At the social practice level, one can understand how such coverage relates to the broader social context, including power relations and public trust in legal institutions.

The death of Brigadier Nurhadi at Villa Tekek can also be situated within a broader series of events that have tested public confidence in the Indonesian police. The public still recalls the killing of Brigadier J, which implicated Ferdy Sambo, a two-star police general, in 2022. That case opened the public’s eyes to the fragility of internal oversight mechanisms within the police institution and the extent to which entrenched power structures can manipulate legal process. Viewed in this light, the Nurhadi case appears almost as an “echo” of a similar problem, albeit on a different scale: a mid-ranking officer and a junior officer allegedly abused a subordinate to death. This pattern affirms that the underlying structural problem is not a singular case but a recurring one.

This background reveals a research gap that warrants attention. Previous studies have more often examined media coverage of criminal cases involving civilians, or major cases such

⁸ B J Nasution, “Media and State Apparatus in Postauthoritarian Democracies,” *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 19, no. 2 (2021): XIX, 145–62.

⁹ Robert M Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (2017): XLIII, 51–58.

¹⁰ Peter M Tiersma, *Legal Language* (University of Chicago Press, 2023).

¹¹ Peter Lunt and Sonia Livingstone, *Media Regulation: Governance and the Interests of Citizens and Consumers* (SAGE Publications, 2021).

¹² Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, ed. 2nd (Longman, 2023).

as the Sambo case, while relatively few have focused on internal police cases in which the victim is a fellow officer. This research therefore offers novelty by analyzing how online media frame the Nurhadi case through the lens of legal language. In doing so, the study contributes not only to the study of legal communication but also broadens understanding of the relationship between language, power, and legal institutions in the digital era.

Several strands of prior scholarship inform the present study. Eriyanto (2023) has examined media discourse analysis in the Indonesian context, demonstrating how news texts encode ideological positions through lexical and structural choices.¹³ Tiersma (1999) provides a foundational account of legal language as an instrument bound up with institutional power and professional exclusivity, while van Dijk (1998) develops a multidisciplinary theory of ideology that links discourse to the reproduction of social power.¹⁴ Within the Indonesian context specifically, Siregar (2018) documents bias in legal language as it appears in national media coverage, and Nurhadi (2021) argues that digital legal discourse tends to be reproductive of official narratives rather than independently investigative. More recent studies from the 2020–2023 period further suggest that media framing of police violence tends to weaken the discursive position of victims relative to institutional actors. Taken together, this body of literature establishes that legal-media discourse is rarely neutral; it is shaped by institutional access, professional convention, and underlying power asymmetries.

B. Research Methods

This research adopts a qualitative approach using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). A qualitative approach was selected because the study is concerned with the interpretation of meaning within texts rather than with numerical measurement. Critical Discourse Analysis, particularly Norman Fairclough's model (Fairclough, 1995, 2010), serves as the principal framework because it is well suited to explaining how language, power, and ideology operate within media texts.¹⁵

Fairclough divides CDA into three dimensions of analysis: (1) textual analysis, which examines linguistic structure, diction, and sentence form; (2) discursive practice analysis, which examines the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption; and (3) social practice analysis, which situates the text within the broader social, political, and cultural context. This model is well suited to understanding how coverage of Brigadier Nurhadi's death was constructed, and how legal language was used to frame the underlying reality. Accordingly, the present study is descriptive-qualitative in design, with its focus directed at describing and analyzing legal language as it appears in online media texts. The chosen analytical approach examines not only linguistic features but also the ideological, political, and social dimensions that underlie the construction of discourse.

The research data consist of news texts drawn from national online media portals, including Kompas.com, Detik.com, and Tempo.co, together with several NTB-based local media outlets that reported on the Nurhadi case during 2025. These outlets were selected for their wide reach, comparatively high credibility, and capacity to shape public opinion.

¹³ Eriyanto, *Analisis Wacana: Pengantar Analisis Teks Media* (LKIS Yogyakarta, 2023).

¹⁴ Peter M Tiersma, *Legal Language* (University of Chicago Press, 2023).

¹⁵ Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*.

Data were collected using purposive sampling, selecting news items that explicitly addressed the Nurhadi case and foregrounded legal diction. The selection criteria included the following: Articles containing legal terms such as suspect, reconstruction, code-of-ethics violation, criminal act, or professional code of conduct. Articles quoting statements from police officials, lawyers, or legal experts. Articles published during the period of intensive public discussion of the case.

Analysis followed the three stages of Fairclough's model: 1) Textual analysis: examining sentence structure, diction, and the legal terminology used in coverage. 2) Discursive practice analysis: examining how texts were produced, which sources were quoted, and how news items were constructed for public consumption. 3) Social practice analysis: relating the use of legal language to the broader social, political, and cultural context, particularly power relations within the police institution and public perception of law-enforcement officers.

To maintain validity, this study employed source triangulation by comparing coverage across several different media outlets and cross-checking it against official documents, such as police statements, investigation reports, and statements from the victim's family. Intertextual analysis was also conducted to examine how narratives across different media outlets reinforced or contradicted one another.

C. Result and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study and discusses them in light of Fairclough's (2010) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis. The discussion proceeds through the textual, discursive, and social practice dimensions in turn, before drawing the three levels together in an integrative discussion of findings. Throughout, the discussion treats the illustrative phrasings drawn from media coverage as representative of recurring patterns of legal-journalistic diction rather than as a verbatim transcript of any single article; the intention is to characterize a discursive tendency, not to reproduce specific published text.

Textual Analysis

At the textual level, Critical Discourse Analysis directs attention to the micro-linguistic choices through which a news text is assembled: lexical selection, syntactic structure, presupposition, modality, and nominalization. These choices are never ideologically inert. As Fairclough (2010) argues, texts are sites in which social meaning is produced through the cumulative effect of seemingly small linguistic decisions, and it is precisely at this level that the legal-journalistic coverage of the Nurhadi case repays close reading.¹⁶

Coverage of the case is dense with legal and quasi-legal terminology: suspect, detention, reconstruction, evidence, investigation process, examination, code-of-ethics violation. The sheer frequency of this vocabulary performs an important discursive function irrespective of its denotative accuracy: it signals to the reader that an orderly, rule-governed process is underway. Tiersma (1999) observes that legal language carries an inherent aura of authority precisely because of its technicality and its association with formal institutions; when this

¹⁶ Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*.

register migrates into journalistic prose, it imports that authority wholesale, even where the underlying facts remain contested or incomplete.¹⁷ The reader encounters the vocabulary of due process detention, examination, reconstruction before encountering any settled account of what was actually done to the victim, and the former tends to anchor the reader's initial interpretive frame.

This terminological density also performs a temporal function. By foregrounding procedural markers ("under investigation," "named as suspects," "awaiting the results of reconstruction"), coverage situates the case perpetually in the realm of the not-yet-decided. This is not in itself misleading criminal cases are indeed protracted but the cumulative rhetorical effect, repeated across dozens of headlines and ledes, is to keep the public oriented toward administrative milestones rather than toward the substantive question of what occurred at Villa Tekek and why a subordinate officer died in the custody, so to speak, of his own superiors.

Nominalization and the Erasure of Process

A related textual device is nominalization: the conversion of a verb describing an action into a noun describing a state or event. Phrases of the type "the investigation process," "the detention," or "the examination" compress what was originally a sequence of actions performed by identifiable agents into a static, free-standing object. Once nominalized, the underlying agency who investigated whom, who detained whom, under what authority recedes from view. Fairclough (2010) identifies nominalization as one of the principal grammatical resources through which institutional texts manage agency, and the present corpus exhibits this pattern consistently: institutional action is rendered as institutional fact, stripped of its processual and agentive texture¹⁸.

Closely related to nominalization is the patterned use of passive voice in describing the conduct of the alleged perpetrators. Constructions such as "the officer was examined by internal investigators" or "detention was carried out against two personnel" displace the grammatical subject from the agent of wrongdoing to the institution performing a subsequent administrative response. The alleged perpetrators thus appear largely as objects of institutional process examined, detained, questioned rather than as subjects who acted. By contrast, the victim is frequently rendered through identity-marking constructions ("a member of the police holding the rank of Brigadier") that foreground his institutional role rather than his status as the person who was harmed.

This asymmetry in grammatical voice is consequential. Systemic-functional approaches to news discourse, building on the broader CDA tradition that Fairclough (2010) helped establish, treat the allocation of grammatical agency as one of the clearest indices of how a text apportions moral and legal responsibility. When the party alleged to have caused harm is consistently placed in the passive, syntactically backgrounded position, and the institution investigating that harm is placed in the active, foregrounded position, the text independently of any explicit editorial judgment tilts interpretation toward institutional competence rather than perpetrator culpability.

¹⁷ Tiersma, *Legal Language*.

¹⁸ Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*.

A third textual pattern is the recurrent use of euphemistic substitution. Terms such as “code-of-ethics violation” (pelanggaran etik) or “procedural error” (kesalahan prosedural) are deployed in contexts where the underlying allegation concerns physical violence resulting in death. This substitution is not merely stylistic; it performs genuine semantic work by relocating the alleged conduct from the register of criminal law to the register of internal administrative discipline. An “ethics violation” connotes a matter properly resolved within the institution, through internal sanction, whereas an “alleged unlawful killing” connotes a matter properly resolved through the ordinary criminal justice system, with external judicial oversight. The euphemism does not state a falsehood internal ethics proceedings may indeed run in parallel with criminal investigation but it nudges the reader toward the more containable of the two interpretive frames.

This ambiguity is compounded by what Fairclough (2010) terms presupposition: the embedding of contestable propositions as background assumptions rather than as assertions open to challenge. A statement to the effect that an investigation “has proceeded in accordance with legal procedure” presupposes, rather than argues for, the proposition that procedural compliance is itself sufficient evidence of legitimacy. Because presupposed content is grammatically backgrounded, it tends to escape the critical scrutiny that an explicit claim would invite, allowing institutional self-assessment to circulate as settled fact.

At the level of paragraph and article structure, coverage exhibits a recurring three-part pattern: an opening reference to the institution responsible for handling the case, followed by a description of the procedural stage that has been reached, followed by a quoted statement from an official spokesperson affirming that proper procedure has been or is being followed. This template, repeated with only superficial variation across outlets, performs what might be called a ritual function: irrespective of the substantive content conveyed, the form itself signals order, competence, and institutional control. The repetition of this template across many articles and many outlets further normalizes it, such that departures from the template coverage that opens instead with the victim’s family, or with an unresolved evidentiary discrepancy would themselves register as stylistically marked and journalistically unusual.

Taken together, these textual patterns dense legal diction, nominalization, asymmetrical voice, euphemism, presupposition, and formulaic structure do not operate in isolation. They compound one another, producing a cumulative textual effect in which the case is rendered legible primarily as an administrative and procedural matter. The victim’s death recedes behind the vocabulary of process; the alleged perpetrators recede behind the grammar of passivity; and the institution emerges, through repetition of form, as the text’s most stable and most legitimate object of reference.

3.2 Discursive Practice Analysis

Where textual analysis examines the internal structure of news texts, discursive practice analysis examines the social processes of their production, distribution, and consumption (Fairclough, 2010).¹⁹ This dimension asks who is permitted to speak within the text,

¹⁹ Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*.

through what institutional channels information reaches the journalist, and how texts produced by one outlet come to be reproduced, with minor variation, by others.

The corpus of coverage examined for this study exhibits a marked hierarchy of sourcing. Police officials spokespersons, regional police chiefs, and officers of the Professional Responsibility and Security Division appear overwhelmingly as the primary, and frequently the sole, named source within a given article. This pattern reflects what communication scholars have long described as a structural feature of crime and institutional-accountability reporting: official institutions maintain standing public-relations apparatus, designated spokespersons, and predictable channels of access, which lowers the transaction cost of obtaining a quotable, attributable statement. Journalists operating under deadline pressure therefore gravitate toward institutional sources not necessarily because those sources are more reliable, but because they are more efficiently available.

The consequence, however, is a systematic asymmetry in whose account of events becomes textually authoritative. The victim's family lacks an equivalent communications apparatus; civil society organizations monitoring police accountability lack standing access to the same briefings; independent forensic or legal commentators must be individually sought out rather than approached through an institutionalized channel. The resulting hierarchy of voice is not the product of any single editorial decision but emerges cumulatively from the routine structure of news production itself.

Where the victim's family does appear as a source, this study finds that such appearances are concentrated in local rather than national coverage, and tend to be positioned later in the article, after the institutional account has already been established. This sequencing matters: in standard news-writing convention, the material placed earliest carries the greatest interpretive weight, since it establishes the frame within which subsequently presented material is read. A family member's expression of doubt about the autopsy process, introduced only after several paragraphs of institutional procedural detail, is read by the audience as a supplementary reaction to an already-established official narrative, rather than as a competing account entitled to equal evidentiary weight.

Civil society and independent legal-expert commentary is rarer still, and where present tends to take the form of brief, generalized remarks on police accountability rather than case-specific analysis. This thinness of independent commentary is consequential because it deprives the reading public of an interpretive resource capable of contextualizing the institutional account for instance, by raising questions about the structural plausibility of an internal body investigating its own members.

A further discursive-practice pattern concerns the degree of textual similarity across outlets. Particular phrasings especially formulaic assurances that an investigation "has proceeded in accordance with legal procedure" recur with only minor variation across multiple national outlets, suggesting that an initial official statement is widely redistributed with limited independent elaboration. Fairclough (2010) uses the term *interdiscursivity* to describe the way texts draw upon and recombine prior discourse types; in this case, the prior discourse type being recombined is overwhelmingly institutional. Where redistribution of an official statement substitutes for independent verification, journalism risks functioning less as an investigative practice than as a relay mechanism for institutional

communication a pattern documented more broadly in studies of “media logic,” in which the operational rhythms and formats of news production come to mirror and reinforce official institutional rhythms rather than to interrogate them.

Not all outlets in the corpus exhibit this pattern to the same degree. NTB-based local media, situated geographically and socially closer to the victim’s family and to local civil society actors, demonstrate a somewhat greater willingness to incorporate family testimony and locally sourced critical commentary. This divergence is consistent with the proposition that an outlet’s structural proximity to non-institutional sources—and its relative distance from the economic and access-related dependencies that bind much national media coverage to centralized institutional communications—shapes its capacity to diversify sourcing. The reach of local coverage, however, remains comparatively limited, such that the alternative framing it offers struggles to compete with the volume and national distribution of institutionally sourced coverage.

Social Practice Analysis

The third dimension of Fairclough’s (2010) framework situates discourse within the broader social, political, and institutional order within which it circulates. Here the analysis moves beyond the internal structure of texts and the immediate practices of their production to ask what social function legal-media discourse performs, and in whose interest.

Read through the lens of Foucault’s (1977) account of disciplinary power, the legal-procedural language saturating coverage of the Nurhadi case can be understood as performing a normalizing function independent of its truth value. Foucault argues that modern institutions exercise power not primarily through overt coercion but through the construction of an apparatus of visible, rule-governed procedure examination, classification, documentation that produces in observers a disposition to trust that order prevails. Applied to the present case, the dense vocabulary of investigation, reconstruction, and evidentiary process performs precisely this normalizing function: it produces the impression of a system functioning as intended, regardless of whether the underlying institutional dynamics an internal body investigating members of its own hierarchy in fact warrant that confidence.

This is not to suggest that journalists consciously serve as agents of institutional discipline. Rather, the point is structural: the routine adoption of legal-procedural vocabulary, for the textual and discursive-practice reasons discussed above, has the unintended social effect of reproducing the disciplinary apparatus’s own self-legitimizing logic.

A recurring theme across the textual and discursive levels is that legal language in this coverage tends to function as an instrument of institutional legitimacy rather than of public transparency. These two functions are frequently conflated in ordinary usage but are analytically distinct. Transparency requires that the public be given the evidentiary basis upon which to form an independent judgment; legitimacy requires only that the public come to trust the institution’s own judgment. Coverage emphasizing that “procedure has been followed” performs the latter function efficiently it reassures while performing the former only weakly, since it rarely specifies the evidentiary content that would allow an outside observer to assess the soundness of the institution’s own conclusions. Van Dijk’s (1998) account of ideology as the organizing link between social cognition and group

interest is instructive here: an institution under reputational threat has a structural interest in discourse that restores legitimacy, and the routine practices of journalism examined above make legal-media discourse a relatively efficient vehicle for that interest, even absent any deliberate intent to mislead.²⁰

The social practice dimension also brings into view a structural dilemma that textual analysis alone cannot fully capture: the body primarily responsible for investigating the alleged perpetrators is drawn from the same institutional hierarchy to which both the alleged perpetrators and, in this case, the victim belonged. Procedural assurances that an investigation “has followed proper channels” are, on their own terms, compatible with an investigation that is procedurally faultless and yet structurally compromised by this lack of independence. Because media coverage, for the textual and discursive reasons set out above, tends to foreground procedural compliance rather than structural independence, the public is generally not invited to scrutinize this distinction at all. The case thereby illustrates a more general proposition in the sociology of institutional accountability: procedural regularity and substantive independence are not the same thing, and discourse that emphasizes the former can obscure rather than illuminate deficiencies in the latter.

The Nurhadi case does not circulate in a discursive vacuum. It follows, by only a few years, the killing of Brigadier J, a case that implicated then National Police Inspector General Ferdy Sambo and that, in 2022, prompted extensive public reckoning with precisely the structural dilemma described above an internal affairs apparatus investigating the conduct of senior officers within its own ranks. That earlier case generated substantial public commentary regarding the fragility of internal police oversight mechanisms and the susceptibility of internal investigation to manipulation by those with institutional standing to manipulate it. Read against this backdrop, the recurrence of broadly similar discursive patterns in coverage of the Nurhadi case renewed emphasis on procedural reassurance, renewed marginalization of family and independent voices suggests that the patterns identified here are not idiosyncratic to a single case but reflect a more durable structural relationship between Indonesian law-enforcement institutions and the media that covers them, one that persists even after a prior case exposed its risks.

Indonesia’s post-1998 reform settlement assigned the press an explicit watchdog function vis-à-vis state institutions, including the police and military, as part of a broader project of civilian oversight. The patterns identified in this analysis suggest that this aspirational role coexists, in practice, with structural conditions official source dependence, interdiscursive repetition of institutional statements, asymmetrical access between institutional and non-institutional sources that constrain its realization in cases of this kind. This is not a claim that Indonesian journalism is uniquely captured by state institutions; rather, it is a claim, consistent with van Dijk’s (1998) broader theorization of elite discourse, that institutions occupying a privileged structural position within the information environment are well placed to shape coverage of crises implicating their own legitimacy, and that ordinary journalistic routine, rather than any extraordinary act of censorship, is frequently sufficient to produce this outcome.²¹

²⁰ Teun A Van Dijk, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. 2nd (SAGE Publications, 2024).

²¹ Van Dijk, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*.

Discussion of Findings

Drawing the three analytical levels together, this study identifies a coherent discursive architecture rather than three unrelated sets of observations. At the textual level, legal diction, nominalization, asymmetrical voice, euphemism, and formulaic structure work together to render the case legible primarily as an administrative and procedural matter. At the discursive-practice level, the routine structure of news production official source dependence, sequencing that privileges institutional accounts, and the interdiscursive redistribution of official statements ensures that these textual patterns are reproduced consistently across outlets rather than appearing as isolated stylistic choices. At the social-practice level, this textual and discursive architecture performs a legitimating function for the police institution at a moment of acute reputational vulnerability, a function that is reinforced by the structural dilemma of self-investigation and that echoes patterns observed in the earlier Sambo case.

This integration across levels is, methodologically, the central contribution of applying Fairclough's (2010) framework to this case. Textual analysis alone might identify passive voice or euphemism as stylistic curiosities; discursive-practice analysis alone might identify official source dependence as an artifact of newsroom routine; social-practice analysis alone might remain at the level of abstract claims about institutional power. It is only by tracing the connections among the three showing how a specific grammatical choice (passive voice) is sustained by a specific production routine (reliance on institutional spokespersons) in service of a specific social function (the restoration of institutional legitimacy) that the analysis demonstrates how language, in this case, does ideological work.

These findings are consistent with van Dijk's (1998) broader proposition that discourse, ideology, and power are mutually constitutive: actors who hold a privileged position within social structures tend also to hold a privileged position within discourse about those structures, and that discursive privilege in turn helps to reproduce the underlying social position. They are also consistent with Entman's (1993) account of framing, in that the selective emphasis on procedural compliance, to the relative exclusion of competing frames centered on victim experience or institutional accountability, performs precisely the kind of problem-definition and moral-evaluation work that Entman identifies as framing's core functions.²² Finally, the analysis extends Eriyanto's (2023) account of Indonesian media discourse by demonstrating, through a single sustained case study, how these general dynamics operate concretely within a case of intra-institutional police violence a context in which the conflict of interest inherent in self-investigation makes the legitimating function of legal-media discourse especially consequential.²³

Taken as a whole, the discussion suggests that the central problem identified by this study is not that any individual journalist or outlet acted in bad faith, nor that any single official statement was untrue. Rather, the problem is structural: the ordinary, unremarkable routines of legal-affairs journalism precise legal vocabulary, reliance on institutional spokespersons, formulaic article structure compound to produce a discourse that is more

²² Robert M Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (2017): XLIII, 51–58.

²³ Eriyanto, *Analisis Wacana: Pengantar Analisis Teks Media*.

efficient at restoring institutional legitimacy than at securing public transparency, in a case where the distinction between the two is of particular consequence.

D. Conclusion

This research demonstrates that the death of Brigadier Muhammad Nurhadi at Villa Tekek, North Lombok, NTB, represents not merely a personal tragedy but also a case that exposes structural problems within the police institution, as well as the relationship between language, law, and media.

First, at the textual level, the legal language used by the media in covering this case exhibits a formalistic and procedural tendency. Legal terms such as suspect, detention, reconstruction, and code-of-ethics violation frame the case as though it were being handled entirely through proper legal channels. Yet the passive sentence constructions and euphemisms employed in fact diminish the emphasis placed on perpetrator accountability. Legal language, in this sense, does more than convey fact; it shapes a public perception that favors the institution.

Second, at the level of discursive practice, the analysis reveals a clear dominance of official police sources. National media in particular tend to reproduce institutional narratives rather than to seek out alternative information. The voices of the victim's family, community figures, and civil society organizations appear only to a limited extent, and more often in local rather than national outlets. This reinforces the finding regarding official source bias namely, media dependence on authoritative sources that constrains the diversity of perspective represented.

Third, at the level of social practice, this coverage reveals an asymmetrical power relation between the public and law-enforcement officers. The media, which ought to perform a watchdog function, instead tend to reinforce institutional legitimacy. The use of legal language in news coverage functions more as an instrument of legitimacy than as an instrument of transparency. As a result, the public is directed toward trusting that the legal system is functioning properly, even as substantial doubt remains regarding independence and substantive justice.

Taken as a whole, this research concludes that the legal language used in coverage of the Nurhadi case is performative in character: it does not merely report but also constructs social reality. The discursive construction produced by the media reproduces institutional power while simultaneously obscuring the substantive core of the matter. Namely, the alleged criminal abuse of a subordinate officer by his own superiors.

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