

Inclusive discourse in the coverage of blasphemy cases in Indonesian online media: A Foucauldian perspective

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<p>Keywords:</p> <p>religious blasphemy</p> <p>online media</p> <p>sociology of inclusion</p> <p>critical discourse analysis</p> <p>Foucauldian</p>	<p>This study employs Foucauldian discourse analysis to investigate how three major Indonesian online media outlets—Detik.com, Tribunnews.com, and Kompas.com—constructed public discourse surrounding Pastor Gilbert’s 2024 blasphemy case. By analyzing coverage from April to July 2024, the research uncovers how media narratives reinforced the dominance of the Islamic majority while marginalizing minority perspectives in Indonesia’s pluralistic society. All three outlets functioned as panoptic instruments, aligning with state-religious authorities such as the MUI, DMI, and Jusuf Kalla to define “truth” and shape acceptable discourse. Detik.com portrayed Gilbert’s apology as a resolution aligned with majority sensibilities; Tribunnews.com privileged Islamic leaders’ critiques while minimizing Gilbert’s own explanations; Kompas.com deployed selective “evidence” to label him a blasphemer, disregarding theological nuance. Across the platforms, <i>epistemic violence</i> was evident: Gilbert’s voice was delegitimized, reconciliation was conditioned by dominant norms, and dissent was monitored through harmony-oriented rhetoric. The media’s collaboration with biopolitical forces—police investigations and politico-religious framing—deepened structural hierarchies and exemplified Foucault’s notion of truth as a product of power. While each outlet employed distinct strategies, all participated in disciplining discourse and excluding dissenting voices. This study calls for ethical reflection on the media’s role in shaping inclusive narratives and promoting justice in a multicultural nation.</p>

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Introduction

In today's digital age, online media has become a powerful tool in shaping public opinion (Wong & Morales, 2022). Media does not merely disseminate information but actively constructs and controls discourse, often marginalizing alternative perspectives (Foucault, 1980; Hobbs & Mitchell, 2008; Chen & Li, 2022). Foucault (1970) argues that the media plays a pivotal role in defining 'truths' by establishing socially accepted narratives while silencing opposing views through what he terms the '*regime of truth*' (Foucault, 1972; 1975).

Religious blasphemy is a recurring issue in media, especially in diverse societies like Indonesia, where it can provoke political and social tensions (Zakia, 2018; Mahmood, 2022). Media plays a critical role in framing who is perceived as the perpetrator or victim, revealing its non-neutrality and ideological influence in shaping public opinion (Firdaus, 2019; Khan & Ali, 2019; Bhattarai, 2020).

Though often regarded as neutral, media is inherently biased in its selection of topics, framing of events, and determination of perspectives (Taylor & Clark, 2021; Lee & Park, 2020). Foucault (1980) and Poster (1984) emphasize that media, as a producer of discourse, is tied to power and specific interests. Media reinforces dominant narratives while sidelining critical or alternative voices (Gaventa, 2006; Couldry, 2021).

This bias is evident in several ways. First, the media is often influenced by the economic and political interests of its owners. Chomsky and Herman (1988) argue that media outlets operate within frameworks shaped by corporate and governmental interests, which influence how social issues are framed and reported (Smith & Kumar, 2021). Second, the use of emotionally charged language, such as 'desecration of religion' or 'riots', further reinforces dominant narratives, deepening

social polarization (Fuchs, 2020). Media also influences the public agenda, emphasizing issues aligned with specific interests, often ignoring broader public concerns (McCombs & Shaw, 2014; Hesmondhalgh, 2019).

Third, media bias is evident in its representation of social groups. Media often reinforces stereotypes of minority groups, positioning majority groups as the moral and truthful defenders (Thompson & Wilson, 2022; Ahmed & Thompson, 2021; Gupta & Sharma, 2021). In Indonesia, media often portrays majority groups as victims in blasphemy cases, while minority groups are framed as threats to social values (Barokah, 2023). This highlights how media shapes discourse, positioning power relations in society (Foucault, 1980).

The role of media in constructing power relations is evident in how it selects issues, frames events, and determines which perspectives are legitimate (van Dijk, 2005; Müller & Schmidt, 2019; Chen & Li, 2022). For example, in blasphemy cases, media typically supports dominant norms while marginalizing alternative views (Firdaus, 2019). Media's framing influences public perception and can perpetuate social injustice by reinforcing harmful stereotypes and biases (Barokah, 2023).

This dynamic also reflects how the media sets the public agenda, often emphasizing issues that benefit specific political and economic interests. For instance, sensationalizing blasphemy cases while ignoring broader societal issues, like poverty, deepening social divisions (McCombs & Shaw, 2014; Hesmondhalgh, 2019). Furthermore, the media's representation of minority groups can provoke intergroup tensions and create narratives that lead to social division (Ahmed & Thompson, 2021). In the Indonesian context, media bias exacerbates social segregation based on religious identity. It strengthens the position of majority groups while marginalizing

minority voices, creating representational injustices and reinforcing political power that controls public narratives (Mantri, 2022). The media's role in reinforcing power structures is particularly evident in how blasphemy cases are framed, where minority groups are portrayed as threats, and majority groups as protectors of societal values (Firdaus, 2019; Barokah, 2023).

Given these dynamics, examining the media's framing of blasphemy cases is essential. Deconstructing how media constructs inclusion and exclusion in these narratives through a Foucauldian perspective (Zeeshan, 2023) will provide valuable insights into how media shapes public opinion and reinforces dominant power structures (Levina, 2020). This research will contribute to the broader study of inclusive discourse in media journalism.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) based on Michel Foucault's model. This method was chosen for its ability to reveal how media discourse not only functions as a means of conveying information but also as a tool of power that shapes knowledge, norms, and social relations within society (Foucault, 1972; Machin & Mayr, 2022). According to Foucault, discourse is not merely a communication tool but also an instrument of power used to regulate, discipline, and shape how society understands reality (Foucault, 1980). In this context, online media acts as an agent of power that shapes public understanding of events and determines what is considered true or false within a social framework (Foucault, 1980; Hjarvard, 2008; Kelly, 2014).

Media discourse refers to how media constructs narratives about events or issues through specific word choices, perspectives, and framing (El-Mahdi & Abdelrahman,

2021). This discourse does not merely reflect reality but actively shapes it by determining how events are understood by the public (Fairclough, 2020; Entman, 2020). As a producer of discourse, media has the power to select topics, determine perspectives, and frame events in ways that align with specific interests, whether economic, political, or ideological (Syahputra, 2010; Couldry, 2021). Additionally, media discourse plays a role in shaping social identities, reinforcing dominant norms, and marginalizing alternative voices (Foucault, 1975; Thompson, 1995; Brown & Taylor, 2020). In this study, media discourse will be analyzed to understand how the blasphemy case involving Pastor Gilbert is framed by online media, as well as how this discourse influences public perception and power relations within society.

The first step in this research is selecting the online media platforms *Detik.com*, *Tribunnews.com*, and *Kompas.com*. This study analyzes the media coverage of the religious defamation case involving Pastor Gilbert on *detik.com*, *tribunnews.com*, and *kompas.com* during the period from April to July 2024. According to the website ranking site www.similarweb.com under the News and Media category for January 2025, these three online media outlets have the highest readership in Indonesia. Furthermore, these platforms have covered the blasphemy case involving Pastor Gilbert from April to July 2024.

The second step is data collection. This process involves gathering news articles that reflect various perspectives on the blasphemy case involving Pastor Gilbert, including official statements from authorities, religious figures, and public comments. Collecting news articles containing diverse opinions from these three online media platforms helps to understand how the discourse on blasphemy is received and interpreted by a broader audience (Foucault, 1980).

The third step is identifying how media frames the blasphemy case through language (Rossi & Nowak, 2021). Foucault reveals that language is not merely a communication tool but also an instrument of power that shapes how we understand the world (Foucault, 1980). For example, does the media emphasize the moral aspects of the perpetrator, legal aspects, or other dimensions? The choice of words such as 'blasphemy', 'moral violation', 'norm violator', 'source of public unrest', or 'blasphemy perpetrator' will be analyzed to see how this discourse reinforces dominant social norms while discriminating against those perceived as acting outside these norms (Foucault, 1972).

The fourth step is analyzing the power and knowledge embedded within the media's constructed discourse. Foucault argues that discourse does not merely convey facts but also distributes power and knowledge within society, ultimately determining what is considered 'valid', 'true', or 'false' in an event (Foucault, 1980). Online media plays a significant role in controlling the knowledge received by the public by constructing specific narratives about the events involving Pastor Gilbert. For instance, media affiliated with majority religious groups may emphasize moral and religious violations by the perpetrator, while perspectives from minority groups, activists, observers, or human rights organizations are often marginalized in the coverage (Foucault, 1976).

The fifth step is analyzing the formation of social identities. This stage examines how the media shapes the social identities of the perpetrator and victims in the Gilbert case. Media plays a crucial role in determining how individuals or groups are portrayed, which influences public perception. In this case, the research will analyze how Pastor Gilbert is depicted—whether he is predominantly portrayed as a 'blasphemy perpetrator' or a 'victim of social injustice'. Conversely, it

will also examine how the religious group that feels offended is portrayed as oppressed victims or as a group seeking justice? This formation of social identities is critical because media discourse influences public perception of the perpetrator and victims, as well as shaping social relationships between groups in society (Foucault, 1975; Brown & Taylor, 2020).

The sixth step is analyzing the dynamics of power within the discourse. Foucault emphasizes that power does not only originate from visible institutions but also from social practices and discourses accepted within society (Foucault, 1980). At this stage, the researcher analyzes how the discourse constructed by the media reinforces or challenges power relations between dominant and minority groups. For example, does the media provide more space for the voices of majority groups, or are minority groups also given the opportunity to express their views? This stage is crucial for understanding how power operates in shaping social narratives that either exacerbate or alleviate interreligious tensions (Foucault, 1976).

The seventh step is interpreting and concluding the discourse analysis findings. At this stage, the researcher interprets how media shapes public perception of the blasphemy case and how this discourse potentially influences social relations and interreligious harmony. Does the coverage by these three online media platforms worsen social polarization, or does it open space for more inclusive interreligious dialogue?

Using Foucault's CDA model, this study aims to delve deeper into how media constructs discourse around the blasphemy case, as well as how power, knowledge, and social identities interact within media coverage. This CDA method plays a role in detecting whether media journalism is inclusive and capable of influencing social harmony and interreligious relations,

particularly in the multicultural and pluralistic context of Indonesia (Foucault, 1980). The findings of this study aim to provide policy recommendations for the media to improve their coverage of sensitive issues such as blasphemy. This is crucial for reducing social tensions and enhancing social understanding and inclusion in Indonesia's pluralistic society (Foucault, 1982).

Results and Discussion

This section systematically dismantles how Detik.com, Tribunnews.com, and Kompas.com construct discourse to strengthen the hegemony of dominant groups in Indonesia's pluralistic society. Through a Foucauldian discourse analysis of coverage of the 2024 blasphemy case, three mechanisms emerge: (1) the *regime of truth* (strengthening the majority voice as the determinant of legitimacy), (2) *panoptic surveillance* (disciplining dissent through language such as 'ongoing cases'), and (3) *epistemic violence* (erasing minority perspectives).

Detik.com normalizes Gilbert's apology as the only path to reconciliation, tying 'peace' to majority norms. Tribunnews.com rigidly frames Gilbert as the 'perpetrator' while silencing his theological clarification, which prioritizes the authority of the MUI. Kompas.com uses 'evidence' as a weapon to stigmatize Gilbert, separating his sermon from the context of his congregation. Collectively, these media serve as extensions of *biopower*, working in synergy with state-religious institutions (police, MUI) to police and eliminate narratives that do not fit. This analysis culminates in a synthesis of how media discourse naturalizes majority domination, reducing inclusion to performative conformity—a stark reflection of Foucault's domestication of discourse.

Detik.com

Perpetrator of religious defamation

According to Michel Foucault, discourse is not just language, a means of communication or exchanging messages, but also a tool for controlling power within society. For example, Foucault illustrates the strategy of the *regime of truth*. The *regime of truth* is a system that determines what is considered legitimate truth accepted by society, and this truth typically comes from dominant groups or certain authorities. In the case of Pastor Gilbert, Detik.com tries to construct the discourse that an apology is the right way to resolve the issue. Detik.com attempts to establish a social truth based on norms accepted by the broader society. This can be seen when Detik.com quotes Abdul Mu'ti of Muhammadiyah:

I appreciate Pastor Gilbert's apology to Mr. JK and MUI. The model of preaching those attacks followers of other religions or other groups is not a wise way to attract people to follow a religion (Detik.com, April 17, 2024).

This quote shows Detik.com's attempt to construct an inclusive discourse by appreciating Pastor Gilbert's apology. However, from Foucault's perspective, this step strengthens the *regime of truth* accepted by the majority group. Detik.com reinforces the view that interfaith dialogue can only occur peacefully, according to the norms accepted by the majority. Furthermore, the use of the *regime of truth* discourse like this ignores alternative voices, especially from groups who feel that this peaceful dialogue does not reflect their experiences and needs, leaving them marginalized by the prevailing power structures. "All religions teach peace, because delivery and actualization must be done peacefully," added Abdul Mu'ti. (Detik.com, April 17, 2024).

The selection of this quote also strengthens the discourse of peace, which is accepted by the majority's norms. From Foucault's perspective, this discourse normalizes the view that peace can only be achieved through methods that are legitimate according to existing norms, namely through dialogue that does not attack or criticize other groups. This view tends to ignore groups who might feel that peace can be achieved through more critical or different means, especially if they feel the power system is unjust. "My statement, once again, we apologize to the hurt and offended communities, *insyaallah*, in the future, we will do better," said Pastor Gilbert (Detik.com, April 17, 2024).

This quote is an example of how Detik.com reinforces the inclusion narrative by emphasizing the apology as the most appropriate solution. However, within Foucault's framework, this reporting consolidates the *regime of truth* that deems an apology as a legitimate, correct, and proper way to solve a problem. On the other hand, the apology may actually create the possibility of dissatisfaction from minority groups such as inequality.

Normalization of majority group authority

Foucault presents the idea that in society, only certain groups have the right to determine what is true and whose voice is legitimate in the public space. This idea is reflected in Detik.com's report, which gives more space for religious figures like Jusuf Kalla (JK) and Abdul Mu'ti to express their opinions, while the voices of minority groups are often not given equal space. "Yes, for me, why choose Mr. JK? There are three reasons. First, Mr. JK is a senior figure in this nation and has held many positions, meaning he is experienced and not only experienced, but also recognized as a Muslim leader," said

Pastor Gilbert at JK's residence (Detik.com, April 15, 2024).

The use of this quote shows how Detik.com tries to shape Pastor Gilbert's social identity as someone who needs legitimacy from influential figures within the majority religion. From Foucault's perspective, this normalization of power happens when Detik.com positions JK as a central figure with the authority to determine whether an action or apology can be accepted. This method strengthens the position of the dominant group in society, determining who is allowed to speak and who is not.

Panopticon mechanism: Social surveillance

Foucault uses the concept of the *panopticon* to explain how power operates through invisible surveillance. In the case of Pastor Gilbert, the style of reporting created by Detik.com acts as a *panopticon* that watches and disciplines society's behavior. Any action or speech deemed controversial is constantly monitored by the media. "The case of Pastor Gilbert Lumoindong's preaching video, which went viral on social media, is still ongoing," said Detik.com.

By reporting this case intensively, Detik.com creates the awareness that every statement or action, especially from minority groups, is subject to surveillance and punishment. Foucault explains that the *panopticon* functions to internalize social surveillance, so that individuals feel they are being watched and voluntarily adjust to the dominant norms to avoid punishment.

Biopower: 'Collaboration' between the state and the media

Biopower is a concept Foucault uses to describe the collaboration between the state and non-state institutions (including

the media) in controlling the lives of individuals or groups through discourse and social regulations. In this context, Detik.com not only gives space to the authority of the majority religion, but also provides significant room for state authorities, such as the police, who are considered a legitimate and credible source of truth. "This case is now being handled by the Subdirector of State Security (Kamneg) Diteskrin Pol Metro Jaya," said Detik.com.

This quote illustrates how Detik.com plays a role in reinforcing *biopower* by giving more space to state authorities to legitimize the resolution of this issue. At the same time, the voices of minority groups with differing views are not given enough room to express their opinions, ideas, and thoughts. This type of reporting further consolidates the power of the state and the majority religion.

Tribunnews.com

Gilbert violates religious norms

Foucault explains that discourse does not merely serve as a tool for delivering information but also as an instrument of power to regulate and shape knowledge within society. In the case of Pastor Gilbert, Tribunnews.com constructs the dominant discourse that views Gilbert's statement as a violation of Islamic religious norms. Tribunnews.com primarily quoted statements from majority groups such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) and the Indonesian Mosque Council (DMI). However, at the same time, Gilbert's explanation that his sermon was intended for the congregation's internal use is not given sufficient space. An example of this *regime of truth* can be seen in the quote from MUI Chairman KH Cholil Nafis: "Are you joking or serious? If joking, it's not funny, but if serious, it's definitely wrong," (Tribunnews.com, Tuesday, April 16, 2024).

This quote shows how Tribunnews.com strengthens the *regime of truth* in which the social truth accepted by the majority is that Gilbert's statement is a violation of Islamic religious norms. According to Foucault's ideas, what Tribunnews.com does here is build a social truth construct accepted by the majority group. By quoting KH Cholil Nafis without giving Gilbert sufficient room to explain his sermon's context, Tribunnews.com ignores the voices of minority groups. This style of reporting reflects *epistemic violence*.

Foucault explains that *epistemic violence* occurs when the dominant discourse silences alternative voices or critical views against existing power structures. In this case, although Gilbert explains that his sermon was intended for the internal congregation and was not meant to insult Islam, Tribunnews.com chooses to quote criticisms from figures of the majority religion such as MUI. The selection of this quote reinforces the narrative that Gilbert's statement is a mistake that must be accounted for.

Kompas.com

Insulting other religions

According to Michel Foucault, discourse is not only a tool for conveying messages, but also a tool of power to regulate and shape knowledge within society. In the case of Pastor Gilbert, Kompas.com mainly quotes statements from majority groups such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), the Indonesian Mosque Council (DMI), the Bethel Church of Indonesia (GBI), and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag). This shows that Kompas.com plays a role in reinforcing the dominant narrative that comes from the majority group, while the voices of minority groups or alternative perspectives are marginalized.

Foucault explains that in every society there is a *regime of truth*, which refers to the power system that determines what is considered true and legitimate in society. In this case, Kompas.com reinforces the *regime of truth* that the majority group has the authority to define what constitutes religious defamation. This style of reporting is an example of how Kompas.com builds a social truth recognized only by the dominant group and ignores the perspectives of minority groups. This can be seen in the quote from the Chairman of the Indonesian Mosque Council (DMI), Jusuf Kalla: "Gilbert then met with the Chairman of the Indonesian Mosque Council (DMI), Jusuf Kalla, to apologize for his statement that caused an uproar in cyberspace" (Kompas.com, April 17, 2024).

This quote illustrates how Kompas.com gives more space to Islamic religious figures to emphasize the importance of maintaining the dignity of religion. Meanwhile, Pastor Gilbert is not given equal space to explain his intention or clarify that his statement was not meant to insult Islam. According to Foucault's idea, this style of reporting reflects the domination of power held by the majority group to determine the dominant narrative, while the minority group (in this case, Pastor Gilbert) is forced to accept the narrative without an opportunity to explain or defend themselves.

Conclusion

The media coverage of Pastor Gilbert Lumoindong's case by Detik.com, Tribunnews.com, and Kompas.com serves as a striking illustration of Michel Foucault's theories on power and discourse. At its core, all three outlets reinforced a *regime of truth* dominated by Indonesia's Islamic majority, positioning figures like MUI, DMI, and Jusuf Kalla as arbiters of 'legitimate' truth

while marginalizing Pastor Gilbert's voice. Detik.com, for instance, framed Gilbert's apology as the 'appropriate solution,' subtly binding reconciliation to norms accepted by the majority. Tribunnews.com amplified this dynamic by quoting MUI's KH Cholil Nafis, who dismissed Gilbert's sermon as "erroneous," ignoring the pastor's clarification that his message was intended for internal church audiences. Kompas.com took a different tack, citing the Chinese Muslim Association's 'irrefutable evidence' to cement Gilbert's narrative as a 'defamer,' bypassing theological context entirely.

These strategies reveal how media function as a *panopticon*—a surveillance mechanism disciplining public behavior. Phrases like 'the case is ongoing' (Detik.com, Kompas.com) or warnings that "criticizing religions fractures harmony" (Tribunnews.com) were not mere reports but tools to normalize majority authority. The collaboration of *biopower* further entrenched this control: Detik.com highlighted Jusuf Kalla's dual religious-political authority, Kompas.com leaned on police investigations, and Tribunnews.com blended both, showcasing how state and religious institutions synergize to dominate public discourse.

Yet *epistemic violence* permeated all coverage. Tribunnews.com silenced Gilbert's contextual explanations, Kompas.com privileged plaintiff and police statements, and Detik.com reduced reconciliation to majority-approved norms. Each outlet, in its way, exemplified Foucault's 'taming of discourse,' where minorities are heard only if they conform. While their tactics diverged—Detik.com's veneer of 'peaceful dialogue,' Tribunnews.com's rigid 'perpetrator vs. victim' framing, Kompas.com's stigmatization of Gilbert as a "self-righteous defamer"—all ultimately upheld the same Foucauldian hierarchy. Truth, as Foucault argued, is not neutral but

a construct of power. By amplifying majority norms, surveilling dissent, and silencing alternatives, these media outlets weaponized discourse to marginalize minority voices and preserve the status quo. In doing so, they demonstrated that power does not merely reside in institutions; it flows through the very language we accept as ‘true.’

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This article is our original work.

Conflict of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest to declare in this article.

Ethical Clearance

This research has been approved by the institution.

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