



## Critical Discourse Analysis of Local Online Media Coverage of the Alleged Corruption Case of the Governor of Riau

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### Article Info

**ISSN (online):** 2583-8261  
**Impact Factor (RSIF):** 8.41  
**Volume:** 05  
**Issue:** 04  
**Received:** 20-04-2026  
**Accepted:** 22-05-2026  
**Published:** 24-06-2026  
**Page No:** 15-21

### Abstract

This study investigates how local online media in Riau construct discourse surrounding the alleged corruption case involving the Governor of Riau, Abdul Wahid. Employing Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research examines the interaction between textual structures, social cognition, and socio-political contexts embedded in media reporting. Data were collected from news articles published by prominent local online media outlets that intensively covered the alleged corruption case. The findings reveal that local media did not primarily frame the issue as a corruption offense but rather as a politically contested legal process characterized by procedural irregularities and potential politicization of law enforcement. Through lexical choices, narrative structures, and source selection, media representations positioned Abdul Wahid as a political figure potentially subjected to unfair treatment while encouraging public skepticism toward the legitimacy of the anti-corruption operation. The study demonstrates that media discourse functions as a site of ideological contestation where corruption narratives are negotiated, reproduced, and challenged within local democratic contexts.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis, Local Online Media, Corruption Discourse, Indonesia

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### Introduction

Corruption is one of the most complex governance issues in developing countries because it is not only related to violations of the law, but also concerns power relations, resource distribution, political legitimacy, and the quality of democracy. In various studies of public administration and political science, corruption is understood as the practice of abuse of authority carried out by public office holders to gain personal and certain group benefits (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016) <sup>[25]</sup>. However, the development of contemporary corruption studies shows that corruption is no longer seen solely as an individual deviant act, but rather as a socio-political phenomenon that operates through a network of patronages, clientelistic relationships, and power structures that allow the practice to continue (Porta & Vannucci, 2012) <sup>[5]</sup>.

In the Indonesian context, corruption has been an issue that has continued to be present in the public sphere since the reform era. Although various institutional instruments have been established, including strengthening the surveillance system and eradicating corruption, various cases involving public officials continue to emerge, both at the central and regional levels. Decentralization, which is expected to strengthen local government accountability, in many cases opens up new space for the practice of abuse of authority. Hadiz (2010) <sup>[11]</sup> explains that political decentralization in Indonesia does not completely eliminate old patterns of patronage, but rather distributes centers of power to the local level. As a result, regional heads are often central actors in political and economic networks that are vulnerable to corrupt practices. This condition is strengthened by the high political costs in electoral contests which encourage some political elites to seek sources of financing through access to state resources (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2016; Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019) <sup>[3, 2]</sup>.

However, corruption is not only a legal problem that is resolved through judicial mechanisms. In a society that is increasingly digitally connected, corruption is also a communication phenomenon that is produced, disseminated, and debated through the mass media. The public in general did not witness directly the process of corruption or the legal process that followed it. Public knowledge about a case is largely shaped by information presented by the media. Therefore, the media has a strategic position in determining how a corruption case is understood, who is considered responsible, and how the public assesses the credibility of the institutions involved in the case.

In the perspective of social construction, the media does not work as a neutral channel that only moves facts from the field to the public. On the contrary, the media is an institution that actively shapes social reality through the process of selection, interpretation, and representation of various events that occur in society. Berger and Luckmann (1966) in Döbler, (2022) [6] explain that social reality is formed through a continuous construction process. In the context of the media, this process appears through the selection of news sources, the use of certain terms, emphasis on certain aspects of an event, and the elimination of information that is considered less relevant to the media's point of view. Thus, news is not a complete reflection of reality, but rather a result of construction influenced by the values, ideologies, and interests that surround media institutions. This phenomenon becomes even more interesting when studied in the context of online local media. Compared to national media, local media have a stronger affinity with the social, cultural, and political environment in which events take place. Local media not only reported a case, but also became part of the political dynamics of the region itself. In many cases, local media have more intense relationships with local political elites, government bureaucracies, civil society organizations, and other local interest groups. This proximity makes local media have different news characteristics compared to national media.

In the context of Riau Province, local online media have a very important position in shaping public opinion on various local government issues. News portals such as those based in Riau are the main reference for the public in obtaining information about government activities, public policies, and regional political dynamics. Therefore, when allegations of corruption involving Riau Governor Abdul Wahid emerged, local online media became the main actor in building the narrative and public perception of the case. The way the local media constructs the event has the potential to affect the level of public trust in local governments, the legitimacy of the governor's leadership, and the image of the government institutions as a whole. The news about Abdul Wahid's alleged corruption is interesting to study because it appears in a sensitive political situation. As a regional head who holds a strategic position in the provincial government, every information related to him has a high news value. In practice, local media do not always present events in the same way. Some media may emphasize the legal aspects and the investigative process, while others may emphasize the political response, defense from related parties, or its impact on the stability of local governments. These variations show that corruption reporting is not just an information delivery activity, but a discourse production process that involves various interests, ideologies, and certain perspectives. To understand the phenomenon more deeply, the Critical

Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach is relevant. CDA departs from the assumption that language is not just a means of communication, but a social practice that is closely related to power and ideology (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2023) [9, 28]. Through this approach, media texts are understood as spaces where various social and political interests are negotiated, defended, or even opposed. CDA allows researchers to identify how a group gains legitimacy, how certain actors are represented positively or negatively, and how power relations are reproduced through the use of language.

A number of previous studies have used CDA to analyze media coverage of corruption issues. Research by Mardikantoro (2017) [15] found that the media uses certain lexical strategies to strengthen public perception of corrupt actors. Maulinda (2025) [16] and Putri (2023) [24] show that the selection of news sources and narrative patterns greatly influences the construction of meaning in corruption reporting. Meanwhile, Pramitasari (2022) [20] and Yana (2015) [29] found that the media tends to prominence certain aspects that are in accordance with the editorial orientation of each media. Research by Pramono (2020) and Prayogi (2021) [23] also shows that different media can produce different representations of the same corruption case because they are influenced by different ideological positions and institutional interests.

However, most of the research still focuses on national media or conducts analysis of corruption cases in general. Studies that specifically examine how local online media construct discourse on alleged corruption of regional heads are still relatively limited. In fact, local media has unique characteristics because it is in the same socio-political environment as the object of the news. In addition, previous research generally used more framing and content analysis approaches, while studies that integrate the dimensions of text, social cognition, and social context as developed in Teun A. van Dijk's sociocognitive model have not been widely conducted. The research gap shows the importance of a study on discourse in local online media coverage of the alleged corruption of Riau Governor Abdul Wahid. This research not only aims to identify how local media represent the case, but also uncover how language is used to build legitimacy, attribution of responsibility, and public perception of the actors involved. Using the Teun A. van Dijk Critical Discourse Analysis approach, this research is expected to be able to explain the relationship between the structure of news texts, the social cognition of journalists and media institutions, and the socio-political context behind news production. The results of this research are expected to contribute to the development of the study of political communication, local media, and corruption, as well as enrich the treasure of Critical Discourse Analysis research in the context of local democracy in Indonesia.

## Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with the *Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)* method of the Teun A. van Dijk model. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to examine media reporting not only as a text, but also as a social practice that represents the power relations, ideologies, and interests that work behind news production. The research focuses on the construction of discourse in local online media coverage regarding the alleged corruption of Riau Governor Abdul Wahid. The source of research data

consists of primary data and secondary data. Primary data is in the form of news published by local online media in Riau Province, such as Halloriau.com, Riauonline.co.id, Cakaplah.com, Goriau.com, Tribunpekanbaru.com, Bertuahpos.com, and other local media that intensely report on Abdul Wahid's alleged corruption. Media selection was carried out by purposive sampling by considering the relevance, intensity of news, and influence of media in the local public space. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained

from books, reputable journal articles, official documents, as well as various literature relevant to corruption studies, mass media, political communication, and Critical Discourse Analysis. Data collection was carried out through documentation techniques, namely by identifying, collecting, archiving, and classifying news related to Abdul Wahid's alleged corruption during the research period. Furthermore, the news that has been collected is selected based on suitability with the research focus and analyzed in depth.

**Table 1:** Data Sources from local online media

Media	News headlines
Etalase.news.com	Riau Malay Figures Consider There Are Irregularities in the KPK Legal Process Against Governor Abdul Wahid
Beritariau.com	OTT at the Riau PUPR-PKPP Office, UIN Suska Alumni Form TPF
Sebalik.com	OTT at the Riau PUPR-PKPP Office, UIN Suska Alumni Form TPF
Haloterkini.com	OTT at the Riau PUPR-PKPP Office, UIN Suska Alumni Form TPF
Riauzone.id	OTT at the Riau PUPR-PKPP Office, UIN Suska Alumni Form TPF
Bogorkami.id	OTT at the Riau PUPR-PKPP Office, UIN Suska Alumni Form TPF
Kabarpubliknews.com	OTT at the Riau PUPR-PKPP Office, UIN Suska Alumni Form TPF
Hariansinarbogor.com	OTT at the Riau PUPR-PKPP Office, UIN Suska Alumni Form TPF
Forumspirasi.id	OTT at the Riau PUPR-PKPP Office, UIN Suska Alumni Form TPF
Wartaperubahan.com	OTT at the Riau PUPR-PKPP Office, UIN Suska Alumni Form TPF
Suaraperubahanweb.id	OTT at the Riau PUPR-PKPP Office, UIN Suska Alumni Form TPF
Garda45.com	The establishment of a fact-finding team (TPF), to find the truth related to the Operation to Catch the Hand (OTT) of Riau Governor Abdul Wahid
Kriminal24.com	OTT at the Riau PUPR-PKPP Office, UIN Suska Alumni Form TPF
Insidentalnews.web.id	OTT at the Riau PUPR-PKPP Office, UIN Suska Alumni Form TPF
Beritaharian.co.id	OTT Riau Governor Abdul Wahid, UIN Suska Alumni Form TPF
Daririau.id	OTT Riau Governor Abdul Wahid, UIN Suska Alumni Form TPF
Headlinesia.com	OTT Riau Governor Abdul Wahid, UIN Suska Alumni Form TPF
Bukamata.co	The Awkwardness of Riau Governor Abdul Wahid's OTT Woes, TPF Prepares Duel Material Vs KPK
Headlinesia.com	KPK OTT at PUPR Riau: 14 Lawyers Ready to Join, TPF Focuses on Collecting Incident Data
Bukamata.co	Anti-Corruption Activist Bobson Samsir Simbolon: KPK RI OTT Against Abdul Wahid, Violating the Criminal Code
Riauonline.co.id	Advocate Bobson Simbolon Highlights A Number of Irregularities in Abdul Wahid's OTT
Riausatu.com	Two OTTs, Two Worlds: Rinaldi Reveals the Striking Differences between Noel and Abdul Wahid

Data analysis uses Teun A. van Dijk's sociocognitive model which includes three main dimensions. First, text analysis, which includes macrostructure (the main theme or topic of the news), superstructure (the outline or arrangement of the news), and microstructure (word choice, syntax, semantics, stylistics, and rhetoric). Second, social cognition, which is identifying how journalists and media institutions build understanding, perspective, and representation of reported cases. Third, the social context, which is used to explain the relationship between news texts and the socio-political conditions behind the production and distribution of news, including the relationship between the media and local power, regional political dynamics, and the formation of public opinion.

To ensure the validity of the data, the study applied source triangulation by comparing news from various local online media as well as triangulation of theories through the use of

various relevant theoretical perspectives, such as social construction theory, media theory, and Critical Discourse Analysis. With this approach, this research is expected to be able to produce a comprehensive understanding of how local online media construct, represent, and interpret the alleged corruption of Riau Governor Abdul Wahid in the regional public space.

### Result and Discussion

The analysis shows that the two media groups construct different realities to the same event. Online media construct OTT as an event that cannot be fully accepted as a final legal fact because there are still allegations of politicization and various procedural irregularities. The macro, superstructure, and microstructure show that media coverage is not neutral, but is influenced by the ideological orientation, social interests, and political position of each media.

**Table 2:** Structural-Macro Analysis Table of OTT News Abdul Wahid

Dimensions of Analysis	Remarks
Main Themes	OTT as an event that contains allegations of politicization and legal irregularities.
News Focus	The legality of OTT, alleged violations of procedures, the formation of the Fact-Finding Team (TPF), and political conflicts.
Narrative Orientation	Explaining OTT as an event that needs to be criticized and not accepted as a final legal fact.
Dominant Perspective	Procedural fairness and the possibility of political interests.
Abdul Wahid's Position	Regional political figures who have the potential to become victims of political battles.

At the macro level, the local media and alternative media that support Abdul Wahid build on different main themes. Instead of focusing on the substance of the alleged corruption, the media emphasized the alleged politicization of law enforcement and various irregularities in the OTT process carried out by the KPK. The central theme that is built is not corruption as a public crime, but OTT as an event that should be questioned for its legality and political motives. Headlines such as "Riau Malay Figures Consider There Are Irregularities in the KPK Legal Process Against Governor Abdul Wahid", "OTT at the Riau PUPR-PKPP Office, UIN Suska Alumni Form TPF", and "Riau Governor Abdul Wahid's OTT Irregularities, TPF Prepares Duel Materials vs KPK" show that the main focus of the media is no longer on acts of corruption, but on the validity of the law enforcement process itself. The macro structure of Abdul Wahid's supporting media also shows a different argumentative pattern. The narrative is built through the collection of various statements from community leaders, academics, legal practitioners, and activists who question OTT procedures. Information about the formation of the Fact-Finding Team (TPF), alleged violations of the Criminal Code, and the possibility of certain political interests are placed as central themes that continue to be repeated in various news reports. Through this pattern, the media tries to lead the public to understand that this case cannot be seen solely as a criminal act of corruption, but must be seen in the context of broader political conflicts between power actors at the regional and national levels.

In terms of organization, local online media use a more linear structure and focus on one main narrative, namely the alleged unfairness of the legal process. The information presented is largely directed at reinforcing the argument that OTT contains elements of politicization and is not entirely acceptable as a neutral legal process. The macro structure shows that online local media builds an interpretive framework that places OTT as a political event that needs to be questioned and criticized. In Van Dijk's perspective, macro structures not only serve as thematic organizations in news texts, but also reflect the ideological position of the media in shaping public perceptions of corruption, the

legitimacy of power, and trust in law enforcement institutions.

### Superstructure

At the superstructure level, the local media and alternative media that support Abdul Wahid build a significantly different superstructure. The opening part of the news generally does not start from the allegations of corruption that ensnared Abdul Wahid, but from the existence of irregularities in the OTT process, the formation of the Fact-Finding Team (TPF), or criticism of the procedures carried out by the KPK. The opening sentence in various news articles puts the reader in the frame of mind that there is something unnatural in the legal process that is taking place. Thus, the reader's attention from the beginning was directed not to the substance of the alleged corruption, but to the validity and legitimacy of the law enforcement action itself. The content of the news is then dominated by various arguments that support the narrative of the politicization of the law. Various quotes from legal practitioners, Malay community leaders, academics, and activists are used to question the legality of OTT. The narrative of violations of the Criminal Code, testimony about alleged pressure on witnesses, political relations between Abdul Wahid and the central government, and the alleged involvement of certain political elites were compiled sequentially to build the perception that the case could not be understood solely as a criminal act of corruption. This argumentation structure is accumulative, where any additional information serves to reinforce public doubts about the independence of the legal process. In closing, media supporting Abdul Wahid generally ended the news with a statement that the case still needed to be tested, traced, or clarified further. The presence of the Fact-Finding Team, the demand for transparency, and the call to oversee the legal process are important elements in the closing section. Unlike the national media that closes the news with legal legitimacy, this media actually ends the narrative by opening up space for doubt and the possibility of political motives behind the OTT. As a result, readers are directed to question the KPK's decision rather than accept the corruption narrative as an established fact.

**Table 3:** Super-structure analysis of Abdul Wahid's OTT News

Dimensions	Remarks
Opening News	It begins with OTT irregularities, criticism of the KPK, or the formation of TPF.
Content Development	Allegations of irregularities → criticism of legal procedures → opinions of community leaders → allegations of politicization.
Dominant Source	Legal practitioners, Malay community leaders, local activists, Abdul Wahid's advocacy team.
Argumentation Pattern	Defensive and critical of legal institutions.
Closing News	Emphasizing the need for transparency, oversight of the legal process, and the possibility of other facts that have not yet been revealed.
Narrative Objectives	Build doubts about the OTT process and maintain Abdul Wahid's legitimacy.

The local media superstructure builds a defensive and political superstructure with the aim of questioning the validity of OTT. The narrative organizational pattern shows that the news superstructure not only functions as an information order, but also as a discursive strategy that reflects the ideological position of the media and social actors in shaping public perception of corruption cases involving Riau Governor Abdul Wahid.

### Microstructure

At the microstructural level, local media and alternative media that support Abdul Wahid use different linguistic strategies. The diction that emerges tends to be oriented towards doubt, uncertainty, and criticism of the legal process. Words such as "irregularities", "alleged politicisation", "violation of the Criminal Code", "fabrication", "political victim", and "fact-finding team" dominate the narrative. In contrast to the national media that focuses on the substance of alleged corruption, supporting media focus more on the possibility of injustice in the law enforcement process. The choice of words builds the impression that the OTT case cannot be fully understood as a corruption issue, but rather as part of a larger political conflict. From the syntactic aspect, the media supporting Abdul Wahid tends to use

argumentative patterns that are defensive. The sentences are constructed through a series of questions, conjectures, and statements that open up space for alternative interpretations of the case. This structure is different from the national media which uses declarative and affirmative patterns. Various quotes from legal practitioners, academics, and community leaders are used to reinforce the narrative that OTT still leaves many questions. As a result, news texts do not produce certainty of meaning, but instead create space for doubt and skepticism of law enforcement institutions. From the rhetorical side, the supporting media uses a victimization strategy through the narrative that Abdul Wahid is a victim of a larger political battle. The repetition of information about Abdul Wahid's criticism of the central government, the issue of sharing the results of the Rokan Block, and the alleged involvement of certain political elites are used to strengthen the assumption that OTT is a form of political pressure on vocal regional heads. In Van Dijk's perspective, this strategy is a form of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, which is an effort to present one's own group positively and the opponent negatively. Through this strategy, Abdul Wahid is represented as a figure who fights for regional interests, while the KPK and certain political actors are represented as suspicious parties.

**Table 4:** Abdul Wahid's OTT News Micro-Structure Analysis Table

Dimensions	Remarks
Semantics	OTT is understood as an event that does not necessarily reflect the entire legal facts.
Dominant Diction	"Irregularities", "alleged politicisation", "violation of procedure", "criminalisation", "political victim".
Syntax	A more defensive sentence, opening up the possibility of alternative interpretation.
Stylistics	Persuasive, critical, and advocative language.
Rhetoric	Highlight questions, doubts, and criticisms of the law enforcement process.
Dominant Quotes	Community leaders, lawyers, legal practitioners, TPF members.
Representation Strategy	Positive self-presentation to Abdul Wahid and negative representation of the OTT process which is considered problematic.
Expected Effects	The public questioned the legal process and was not in a hurry to blame Abdul Wahid.
Ideology Reflected	Procedural justice, protection of suspects' rights, and criticism of power relations in law enforcement.

### Social Cognition

At the level of social cognition, the news about the OTT of Riau Governor Abdul Wahid shows that there is a significant difference in mental model and ideological orientation between the national and local media. In Van Dijk's perspective, news texts are not born neutrally, but are influenced by the knowledge, beliefs, experiences, and ideologies possessed by the individuals and institutions that produce them. Therefore, the way the media understands Abdul Wahid's OTT case greatly determines how the reality is represented to the public.

Local online media builds a mental model that is not solely understood as a legal process, but as an event that has the potential to contain certain political interests. The social cognition underlying their reporting rests on the belief that the relationship between the central and regional governments is often colored by conflicts of interest, so that law enforcement actions are not always perceived as a completely neutral process. In this perspective, Abdul Wahid is represented as a regional political figure who has a strategic position in fighting for Riau's interests, especially related to the issue of natural resource revenue sharing and central-regional fiscal relations. Therefore, when OTT occurs, some groups do not immediately accept the corruption narrative as a final fact, but interpret it as a possible form of political pressure on actors who are considered too vocal.

The cognitive construct is reinforced by various narratives regarding procedural irregularities, the formation of Fact-Finding Teams, and criticism from a number of legal practitioners of the OTT process. In this context, the KPK is not always perceived as a fully independent institution, but rather as an actor that can also be influenced by certain power configurations. As a result, the community is not positioned as a victim of corruption, but as a group that must be critical of the possibility of abuse of authority in the law enforcement process. In other words, the media supporting Abdul Wahid is trying to build public awareness that the main problem is not only allegations of corruption, but also the transparency and accountability of the legal institutions themselves.

### Social Context

At the level of social context, the news about the OTT of Riau Governor Abdul Wahid took place in a social space characterized by high public sensitivity to corruption issues, declining trust in political elites, and the strong influence of religious identity in local political life. In contrast to the usual reporting of criminal cases, this case developed in the context of a long history of corruption involving public officials in Riau Province. Various corruption cases that previously ensnared governors, regents, mayors, and regional officials have formed a collective memory of the community that corruption is a recurring problem in local governance. As a

result, any corruption case involving regional heads is no longer seen as an individual event, but rather as part of a broader structural problem in the local political system. In this context, local media and Abdul Wahid's support groups developed in different social contexts. For some people of Riau, Abdul Wahid was not only seen as a public official, but also as a representative of regional interests and a symbol of the aspirations of the Malay community.

In several strategic issues, such as natural resource management and fiscal relations between the central and regional governments, Abdul Wahid is often perceived as a figure who fights for Riau's interests. Therefore, the OTT against him is not solely understood as a legal process, but is also perceived by some groups as an event that can affect the regional political position in relation to the central government. This context has given birth to various narratives regarding the alleged politicization of the law, the formation of the Fact-Finding Team, and demands for transparency in the OTT process.

The power relations that appear in the news also show that there are differences in positions between the state, the media, and society. In local media online reporting, power relations are framed differently. The state, especially law enforcement institutions, is not always perceived as a neutral actor, but rather as part of a power configuration that can be influenced by certain political interests. Within this framework, the public is encouraged to be critical of the legal process and question the possible interests behind law enforcement actions. Another social context that influences the construction of discourse is the high level of public distrust of the Indonesian political elite in general. Various national surveys show that corruption is still one of the most complained about issues by the public. Therefore, the OTT case of Abdul Wahid comes in a situation where the public has had collective experience and memory regarding various previous corruption cases. This condition makes it very easy for corruption news to get public attention as well as a space for the media to build certain agendas related to government reform, political legitimacy, and trust in legal institutions.

### Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the reporting of the alleged corruption case involving the Governor of Riau was not merely an act of information dissemination but a discursive process through which competing interpretations of political reality were constructed and contested. Using Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis, the research reveals that local online media actively shaped public understanding by emphasizing procedural justice, legal irregularities, and the possibility of political intervention rather than focusing exclusively on the substance of the alleged corruption allegations. As a result, corruption was represented not solely as a legal issue but as a politically charged phenomenon embedded within broader power relations between local and national actors. At the textual level, local media strategically employed lexical choices, narrative structures, and source selection that encouraged audiences to question the legitimacy of the anti-corruption operation. The recurring use of terms such as "irregularities," "politicization," and "fact-finding team" contributed to the construction of an alternative discourse that shifted public attention from questions of guilt to questions of procedural fairness. Such representations illustrate how media discourse can influence public cognition by redefining the meaning of

corruption and legal accountability. From a socio-cognitive perspective, the findings indicate that media organizations operate within particular ideological frameworks shaped by local political interests, collective identities, and perceptions of regional representation. Abdul Wahid was frequently portrayed as a political actor defending regional interests, while law enforcement institutions were depicted as actors whose neutrality could be questioned. These representations reflect broader social beliefs and political assumptions circulating within local society. The study ultimately confirms that media are not neutral observers of political events but active participants in the production and reproduction of social meaning. Corruption discourse emerges as a contested arena where legitimacy, authority, and public trust are continuously negotiated. Consequently, understanding media representations of corruption requires attention not only to textual content but also to the social cognition and political contexts that shape the production of news discourse in contemporary local democracies.

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### How to Cite This Article

Harahap R. Critical discourse analysis of local online media coverage of the alleged corruption case of the Governor of Riau. *International Journal of Social Science Exceptional Research*. 2026;5(4):15–21.

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