

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introduction regarding the background, purposes, research questions, significance, clarification of terms, as well as the organization of the research.

#### 1.1 Research Background

Mass media has become one of the most vital parts of human communications. The reason is that media comes in many forms of communication that reach people in large number, including television, newspaper, Internet, books, films, recordings, magazine, billboards, et cetera (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Media holds importance in the modern world because of its capability as a source to understand the world (Talbot, 2007). Furthermore, media may also become a public forum since participants are able to assert their opinion. However, media cannot be separated from the concept of power. van Dijk (1996) defines media power as “symbolic and persuasive”. He argues that media holds the potential to influence the minds of its audience.

Despite its powerful nature, media, especially news articles published by online outlets, has no direct communications with its audience, allowing no space for the audience to be directly involved. The audience consumes the presentations that are given, and are considered as merely demographics or consumers (Talbot, 2007). Moreover, media plays favors in issues they publish and may represent certain interpretation of their own through picking and narrating certain elements of reality (Stewart, Mazzoleni, & Horsfield, 2003). Journalists in media also play a role in producing biased content as the cherry-picking of truth is reflected by their mindset (Entman, 2007). Furthermore, media may also accelerate a group or a certain ideology’s agenda to achieve success by the aforementioned process of truth cherry-picking (Boomgarden & Vliegthart, 2007).

The ideology as well as the truth that are believed by the media are realized by their representations regarding objects, individuals, or events. What is meant by representation is the construction of a figure as presented by the media (Kurniawan

& Utami, 2017). In the perspective of discourse analysis, it refers to the way in which language is employed in order to express hidden meanings of the description of people, places, and social practices (van Dijk, 2002). Media representations, however, are not entirely neutral since they have ideologies of their own (Kurniawan & Utami, 2017; van Dijk, 1988).

Power and ideology then would be an interest of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The term power in CDA refers to an asymmetrical relationship involving social actors that belong to certain social groups or partake in social positions (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Meanwhile, ideology according to CDA is the driving force between the power relations behind the social actors' relationship. In addition to power relation, ideology may also affect power domination and exploitation. In regards to language, power is assumed by users' through language, meaning that language alone has no power. It is then the purpose of Critical Discourse Analysis to unmask power structure and ideologies through critique.

To uncover both ideologies and power in Critical Discourse Analysis, one requires approaches that are offered by the field. This research employs the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) which is aimed to deduce ideologies that are used to establish, perpetuate, or fight dominance by uncovering the hegemony of certain groups in specific discourses (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). The DHA offers discursive strategies as a tool for the analysis to decipher the representation of certain actors; they include nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and mitigation strategies. In addition to the strategies, the DHA also takes the historical background into account as a way to analyze the intertextuality and interdiscursivity relations of the texts.

Several studies have been conducted on media representations. A study was made to investigate the local and international media representation of blasphemy protests that took place in Indonesia in 2016 (Al Fajri, 2018). By using transitivity and van Leeuwen's social actor representation (SAR) model, the research found out that there exists a difference between the local and international media representation of the event. The difference lies in the portrayal of the protesters. While both media delegitimize the event, the international media tends to portray

the protesters as extremists. This article is beneficial to the study as it presents other perspective on the representation analysis.

Another piece of research was published in 2017 regarding the representations of the President of Indonesia, Joko Widodo in the Jakarta Post's news articles using nomination and predication strategies of the Discourse-Historical Approach (Kurniawan & Utami, 2017). Findings indicate that a shift occurred in presenting Joko Widodo's figure from positive to negative. The positive presentation was made during Joko Widodo's role as the governor of Jakarta. However, it turned negative once Joko Widodo's attitude on anticorruption issue is not in line with the Jakarta Post's belief.

A case of representation can be taken from PewDiePie. PewDiePie is a Swedish internet personality who is considered to be one of the most popular and influential person in the video sharing platform, Youtube. PewDiePie's real name is Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg. The Swedish vlogger dominated the platform as the largest user with the highest count of followers or subscribers. His reign as the King of Youtube lasted from 2013 to 2019. PewDiePie rose into fame by providing contents that involve *Let's Play* series, gaming reactions, social commentary, as well as news reading. *The Let's Play* series and gaming reactions are put into the same content in which he plays video game while displaying his reactions to the public. Meanwhile, the social commentary and news reading include comedic elements (Wikipedia, 2019). Furthermore, PewDiePie is reportedly to have a net worth of \$20 million dollars in 2019 (Griffin, 2019).

PewDiePie's popularity has become a target for the media's coverage, the coverage includes his actions, income, as well as his influence (Moss, 2014; Regan, 2015). One of the media outlets that covered PewDiePie is Vox news. Vox is an online news website based in the United States. It claims to 'explain the news' as its slogan (Vox, 2019). The said media has reported PewDiePie's actions spanning from 2017 to 2019. Their portrayal of PewDiePie has incited conflicts between him and his subscribers against Vox media itself. The Youtuber claims jokingly through imitating a persona of a news anchor in one of his videos that he is a victim of

Vox's publishing (Kjellberg, 2018). Moreover, PewDiePie's followers has reportedly harassed the journalist behind the articles (Himanshu, 2018).

In addition to media's coverage in news articles, PewDiePie is also a subject in academic studies. The first topic deals with PewDiePie's personal branding in his Youtube career. The study finds that PewDiePie's formula of success involves his ability to connect and appeal to the young audience of Youtube (Holland, 2016). According to another study, his connections and appeal can be linked to his habit of swearing. PewDiePie is known to swear in his videos, and the study indicates that this habit of his is a way to form a relationship with the audience (Fägersten, 2017). The reason for such matter is because swearing in private discourses or interpersonal contexts is considered to be normal; also, swearing is seen as a way to reflect intimacy, foster solidarity, and reduce social distance (Butler & Fitzgerald, 2011; Culpeper, 1996; Adams, 2016).

This study would then examine the articles behind Vox's coverage on PewDiePie. As seen previously, the studies regarding representation in the Critical Discourse Analysis involve political figures; meanwhile, this study aims to uncover the portrayal of a popular-culture icon. This study implements the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method, specifically the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA). The motivation of employing Critical Discourse Analysis is because the act of unmasking ideologies is an interest in the field as ideology is one of the three important notions (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Moreover, the historical background is taken into account as well since the articles were published between 2017 and 2019.

## **1.2 Purposes of Research**

The aim of this research is two-fold. The first is to examine the representation of the Youtuber PewDiePie in Vox's online news by using nomination and predication strategies as proposed by Reisigl and Wodak in their Discourse-Historical Approach. Then, the second purpose is to unfold the signification of the representation of PewDiePie in Vox's articles.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

The intention of this study is to answer the following questions:

1. What is the representation of PewDiePie in Vox's online news?
2. What does the representation signify?

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This research acts as a contributor in the expansion of discourse-historical approach literature as well as to incite awareness in media discourse, particularly online news. As stated by van Dijk (van Dijk, News analysis: Case studies of international and national news in the press, 1988), there are no such thing as neutral news. Moreover, media uses their influence to sway and direct their readers' opinion and perspectives or to gain larger demographics as they see readers as consumers (Talbot, 2007). Thus, this study is expected to help readers to better understand the news they are reading through the unmasking of the subtle ideologies they present in their publishings.

#### **1.5 Clarification of Terms**

- a. Media discourse refers to a multidisciplinary field that delve into production or audiences communities' interactions, as well as productions' and audiences communities' interactivity (Talbot, 2007).
- b. Representation is a method to express hidden meanings behind the descriptions of places, people, or social practices (van Dijk, 2002).
- c. Critical Discourse Analysis is a linguistic approach to analyze social phenomena that include power, ideology, and critique (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).
- d. Discourse Historical Approach is a concept made by Wodak and Reisigl to analyze the intertextuality and interdiscursivity of texts; it is one of the many approaches of CDA (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009).
- e. Discursive strategies are tools utilized in DHA analysis to investigate the underlying meaning behind language in texts (ibid).
- f. Vox is an American online news outlet which is launched in 2014 by Ezra Klein, Melissa Bell, and Matthew Yglesias (Vox, 2019).

## 1.6 Organization of the Paper

This paper is comprised into five chapters with each reports the information regarding the research. The five chapters are organized in this following manner:

### a. Introduction

The first part of the research deals with the brief information regarding the contents that are discussed in the later chapters. It consists of the background, purposes, research questions, significance, clarification of terms, and the structure of the study.

### b. Theoretical Framework

The second chapter consists of relevant theories that are be used as the framework of the research. It elaborates the theoretical framework with detailed information alongside the issues which were discussed by previous researches that share an exact or similar topic or manner.

### c. Research Methodology

This section involves methods and procedures taken to provide the findings of the research. It encompasses the research design, data collection, as well as the data analysis.

### d. Findings and Discussions

This chapter discusses the findings of the research as well as the signification of the analysis in a detailed manner.

### e. Conclusions and Suggestions

The final chapter presents drawn conclusions from the analysis of the research. In addition, it also provides suggestions for future researchers.