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## Meme as Political Criticism towards 2019 Indonesian General Election: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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### Abstract

*This study aims to investigate the memes created by Nurhadi-Aldo, a fictional presidential candidate. Data is collected from Nurhadi-Aldo's Instagram profile. The descriptive qualitative approach was used and the sampling procedure carried out was purposive sampling. To analyze the data and to uncover the hidden values, the three-dimension analysis proposed by Fairclough (2001) was used. The first dimension was textual analysis where the textual and visual sign of the presidential memes were examined. The second dimension was the analysis of the discursive practice surrounding the production of Nurhadi-Aldo memes. And the last was the sociocultural practice analysis that deals with how Indonesian internet users reacted to this viral phenomenon. The result points out that the memes represent the visualization of public social critics toward a political condition in Indonesia. With regards to the content creator, Nurhadi-Aldo's memes further indicate the scepticism value of Indonesian youth. These findings further confirm that the function of the meme is not limited to entertainment purpose only, but also to deliver political criticism. Hence, it is expected that the findings will give more insights into how certain values can be delivered through the use of everyday text, such as memes.*

**Keywords:** CDA, Fairclough's framework, memes, fictional candidates, hidden values.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian presidential election held in April 2019 can be considered as one of the most important events in Indonesian political history. According to Bland (2019, April 3), the current election is, in fact, the most complicated single-day ballot in global history. The predicate of the most complicated single-day ballot in global history was assigned due to the enormous number of people involved in the event as it is referred to as *pesta demokrasi* (a celebration of democracy). Besides, the election itself has initially provoked various responses from media and people in general long before the actual election was conducted. Unfortunately, this condition led to a number of horrendous political and social issues including the viral spread of hoax in social media, the call for regime alteration delivered by the protesters, and the increase in social media war as seen in the hashtags #2019gantipresiden ‘#2019change president’ and #tetapJokowi ‘#JokowiAgain’ on Twitter and other online media. Yet, amidst the feverish political situation and an intense social media war between supporters from both sides, a parody of the presidential campaign poster appeared to save the day. The parody came in the form of campaign poster memes with the fictional presidential candidate in it. The fictional candidates were known as Nurhadi and Aldo from *Partai untuk Kebutuhan Iman* ‘Need for Faith Party’. It did not take a long time for this meme to become viral among Indonesian youth. The moment after the internet users got the idea of the Nurhadi-Aldo meme, they started sending and flooding the social media platform with this meme. The process became easier and a lot faster as the social media accounts of the fictional candidates were bombarded by follows, likes, and comments. It seemed that the appearance of the fictional presidential candidates’ campaign was seen as the speck of light amidst darkness by internet users, especially during the political tension in Indonesia. Due to that reason, there was a tendency to take it as a positive thing rather than an insult towards the official presidential candidates because of the humorous content offered in them. As indicated by Shifman (2014) that humorous internet memes are used to represent political or social participation on numerous occasions.

Simply put, it can be said that memes are not limited to humorous discourse only. They can also be employed as a tool to present certain messages to the public. Discourse analysis make it possible to reveal the hidden ideologies (Risdanewa, 2018). Regarding this, previous research concerning the analysis of internet memes has been conducted by several scholars. First to mention is a study conducted by Raja (2018) who employed multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis by Machin and Mayr (2012) in analyzing Singaporean internet memes taken from SGAG. He found that Singaporean memes show the networks of inter-semiotic meaning, and have similar features of comic and sequential art in representing local educational problem related to general pedagogy and hegemonic discourses. In another study, Siregar et al. (2018) utilized multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis by van Leeuwen (2013) to investigate the stereotyped language about women found in Indonesian memes. The obtained result points out five types of stereotyped language namely women’s personality traits, women’s cooking and domestic behavior, women’s physical appearances, women’s role in the teaching profession, and women’s behavior in riding motorcycles. Meanwhile, another study by Palupi (2018) carried out Fairclough’s framework in investigating the meme *makasih yang lebih cantik* (thank you, you’re prettier) found on Instagram and 1Cak. The results show that Indonesian women tend to be demure

when another woman praises their beauty. Their default response to ‘you are so pretty’ compliment is to give another compliment, which is ‘thank you, you are prettier’. This type of response is given as they try to receive the compliment without sounding arrogant. Concerning this, it is known that it is the Indonesian society’s culture to uphold politeness. Women are socialized to be modest and humble. This is the reason why Indonesian women respond to compliments with another compliment as an effort to show politeness.

In the previous studies, it can be seen that a study on political memes by employing the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach has not been explored yet. To fill the gap, this study aims to analyze Nurhadi-Aldo viral memes taken from their official Instagram and Facebook. This study also attempts to investigate the value that is manifested in the memes of fictional presidential candidates.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis, according to [Martin and Wodak \(2003\)](#), is the study that is fundamentally interested in investigating the hazy and transparent structural relationship between dominance, discrimination, power, and control expressed in language. Following [Martin and Wodak \(2003\)](#), [Blommaert \(2005\)](#) urges that inequality in texts as the result of the existence of power in discourse is the focus of Critical Discourse Analysis. In other words, Critical Discourse Analysis approach emphasizes on the fact that there is no such thing as neutral in a text. There is always the so-called concept of power, identity construction ([van Dijk, 2002](#)), and unequal issues manifested in every discourse.

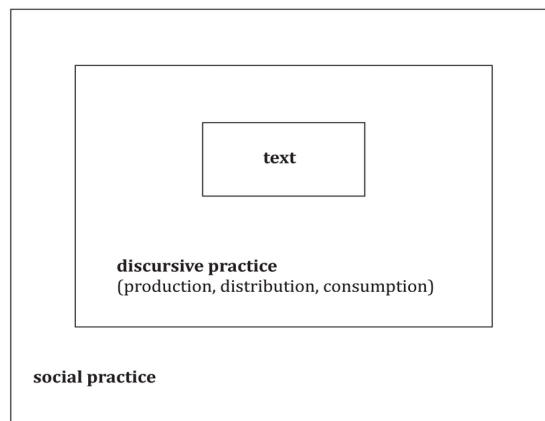
Based on the definition that has been previously mentioned, it can be said that the main idea of Critical Discourse Analysis is a language which can be defined in terms of its usage in particular discourse which further represents social life in different ways. Regarding this, the cultural informative platforms such as media, according to [Anderson and Collins \(2001\)](#), will reproduce the ideas of a more powerful group due to its values and suppress the ideas of those who are less powerful. Therefore, the significance of Critical Discourse Analysis emerges as a form of uncovering these suppressed values. In doing so, three attributes are considered important in CDA, namely critique, ideology, and power. Critique is implemented by analyzing the text to find the underlying power relation that is present in society. Yet, analyzing text is not sufficient to uncover the whole idea. The discourse of the text should be connected to the ideology that can indicate certain patterns of inequality. Ideology further has the capacity of influencing people to produce texts in certain ways ([Fairclough, 1992](#)). Following analysis on ideology, the concept of power is immersed through the research to discover how language is interpreted and to fully uncover the problem related to inequality.

To analyze these elements, CDA provides six analytical tools with different theoretical underpinnings and focuses. One of them is proposed by [Fairclough \(2001\)](#). The model of CDA by [Fairclough \(2001\)](#) focuses on the relationship between textual analysis and sociocultural analysis. As the aim of the current analysis is to investigate

a viral phenomenon following Indonesia's presidential election in 2019, the CDA model by Fairclough (2001) is chosen in the current analysis.

### 2.1.1 Fairclough model for CDA

The CDA model by Fairclough (2001) differentiates the analysis into textual analysis and socio-cultural analysis. The textual analysis aims to give excellent insights about what is in the text, while the sociocultural analysis provides perspectives that are not expressed in the text. He further mentions that sociocultural analysis has various orientations such as economic, political, and cultural aspects that are possible to be simplified in discourse. To apply the CDA model by Fairclough (2001), three interrelated processes of analysis that are connected to three inter-related dimensions of discourse should be performed. The three dimensions can be seen in the following figure.



**Figure 1.** Three-dimensional models of Fairclough.

The first layer of the model by Fairclough (2001) includes the object of analysis including verbal and visual texts. The second layer covers the processes producing and receiving the object by the subjects. Finally, the last layer covers the socio-historical conditions which govern all these processes. To do the analysis, the first dimension requires text analysis or description. The text analysis includes the analysis of diction, structures, and textual structures. It should be noted that the meaning of a text cannot be interpreted directly from the verbal and visual textual sign (Janks, 1997) since different available discourses will lead to different interpretation. Thus, it is important to relate to the second layer, which is the interpretation of the process of text production. The last one is a social analysis which deals with the consumption and interpretation of the text. The CDA model by Fairclough (2001) is useful since it provides multiple points of analytic entry. Additionally, since the order of the analysis is not rigid, the analysis phase can be started from any layer, as long as in the end they are all included and are shown to be mutually explanatory. The results should emphasize the interconnections and disjunctions of the interesting patterns that need to be described, interpreted and explained. The object of the analysis is not limited to political text only, but all communicative events, including memes.

## 2.2 Meme

The traditional definition of meme refers to a unit of cultural transmission that spread among a large number of people and reflect the general mind-set (Shifman, 2014). On the contrary, the modern definition of meme related to internet culture tends to emphasize the online content through the image, video, or GIF image. Shifman (2014) further defines internet memes as a group of digital items with similar characteristics that are used and spread online by internet users. The components of internet memes can be classified into manifestation, behavior, and idea Davidson (2012). He further explains that the manifestation refers to observable characteristics of the meme, the behavior emphasizes to the action taken by internet users to create a meme, and the idea refers to the concept or the message that will be conveyed through the meme.

As stated previously, internet memes are digital items that are shared cyber-wide by internet users. Internet memes are used to influence people's mindset, behavior, and action toward a certain phenomenon. To be able to do this, the users tend to include humorous content in their memes. Humor becomes important since it is considered as the most pervasive element of public culture and the core of everyday life and social interaction (Pickering & Lockyer, 2005). Yet, according to Knobel and Lankshear (2006) the function of the humor content is not limited to entertainment purpose only, but also to social purpose especially to get public attention and raise awareness on social practice or event. Shortly, internet memes can be used not only to spread laughter but also to spread social powerful messages and to be used in political culture. Consequently, it is appropriate to say that internet memes are considered as a serious business.

## 3. METHODS

This study intended to answer the following questions: (1) What are the meanings of Nurhadi-Aldo memes? (2) What value(s) is delivered through these memes? To answer these questions, this study further employed a descriptive qualitative approach. According to Creswell (2014), a descriptive qualitative method aimed to describe the phenomenon found in an everyday situation, in this context, the phenomenon was the memes of Nurhadi-Aldo found in social media. The data of the study were Nurhadi-Aldo memes taken from their official Instagram and Facebook. Regarding the data collection procedure, the purposive sampling was used since there were several memes which are considered to be unsuitable. Hence, purposive sampling is used to get suitable meme for this study.

Meanwhile, the analysis process employed the framework by Fairclough (2001), which was conducted through several steps. The first step was observing the linguistic aspect of each meme, which are (1) *Sebagai Capres Pilihan Saya Tidak Bisa Berjanji, Kita Jalani Saja Dulu Siapa Tau Cocok* 'As the preferred candidate, I cannot promise you anything, we go through this together', (2) *Saya berjanji tidak akan korupsi, kalau saya korupsi nanti saya janji lagi* 'I promise I won't be corrupt. If I break my promise, I will make another one', (3) *Jadi petani makmur & anak petani ga perlu kekota. Petaninya jadi PNS* 'The farmers will be prosperous and their children do not have to go to the city anymore since the farmers will be recruited as civil servants'. For the

non-linguistic aspects, or the discourse practice, that renders the emergence and spread of the meme were also analyzed. This was to observe the sociocultural practice of the memes. The last step was interpreting the linguistics and non-linguistics features of the social media memes to find out the values hindered within the selected memes. The linguistics aspects were the quotes found in the memes while the non-linguistics aspects were the figure used in the meme. These are the indicators of the analysis.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the analysis was divided into three dimensions. The first dimension was textual analysis where the textual and visual sign of the presidential memes were examined. The second dimension was the analysis of the discursive practice surrounding the production of Nurhadi-Aldo memes. The last was the sociocultural practice analysis that deals with the reactions of Indonesian internet users to this viral phenomenon.

##### 4.1 Textual Analysis

The textual analysis includes the analysis of visual and verbal sign taken from the memes. The Nurhadi-Aldo fictional presidential posters feature the elements of a regular political poster in Indonesia. The visual text depicting a middle-aged man, dressed in a red *Koko* shirt (known in Indonesia as a traditional Moslem shirt worn by men for religious purpose) and a *peci* (a Moslem hat worn by men for religious purposes), indicates the figure of the politician is a Moslem. Other visual elements that can be found in the memes are the name of the candidates, the logo of the political party, and the coalition party. All of the elements indicated the legitimacy of this poster. On the other hand, the verbal sign that can be seen in Figure 2, 3 and 4 is the campaign showed the expression such as *Sebagai Capres Pilihan Saya Tidak Bisa Berjanji, Kita Jalani Saja Dulu Siapa Tau Cocok* 'As the preferred candidate, I cannot promise you anything, we go through this together', *Saya berjanji tidak akan korupsi, kalau saya korupsi nanti saya janji lagi* 'I promise I won't be corrupt. If I break my promise, I will make another one', *Jadi petani makmur & anak petani ga perlu kekota. Petaninya jadi PNS* 'The farmers will be prosperous and their children do not have to go to the city anymore since the farmers will be recruited as civil servants', and the hashtag #QuotesNurhadi.



Figure 2. Nurhadi-Aldo Meme (source: [instagram.com/nurhadi\\_aldo](https://www.instagram.com/nurhadi_aldo))

In regards to the appearance of social actors, the content creator used inclusion strategy in the campaign message. Inclusion strategy, according to van Leeuwen (2008) is the strategy used by the text creator to include the appearance of a social actor in text. First, Nurhadi as the social actor is represented through the use of *saya* 'I' as in *saya tidak bisa berjanji* 'I cannot make any promises'. The use of *saya* 'I' indicates that the social actor is deemed as an active agent of *making* promises activity. Moreover, Nurhadi is represented specifically through the pronoun 'I'. It further indicates that the social actor is represented in terms of singularities and it emphasizes that the center of the message is about him, even though the activity can involve more than one person. On the other hand, Nurhadi was also assembled with the word *kita* 'we' as in *Kita Jalani Saja Dulu* 'We go through this process'. Yet, the difference can be seen through the use of generalization and assimilation as a part of a group, in this case, *kita* 'we'.

Moreover, the words that are used in the actual political poster are usually appealing messages to the voters. In most cases, the message includes various topic related to security values, state of living and healthcare, financial safety, morality, and education. The use of several elements mentioned above indicates the promise that should be fulfilled once the candidate is chosen as the president. However, there are no humanity values stated above that can be found in Nurhadi-Aldo meme campaign message. As previously mentioned, the message stated *Sebagai Capres Pilihan Saya Tidak Bisa Berjanji, Kita Jalani Saja Dulu Siapa Tau Cocok* 'As the preferred candidate, I cannot promise you anything, we go through this together'. The absence of human values in the campaign message indicated that Nurhadi, as the (fictional) presidential candidate, does not have to fulfill his campaign promises, since he did not mention anything. Meanwhile, the later message implied that the candidate does not have a purpose at all through the use of modality *siapa tau cocok* 'perhaps we can get along'. Furthermore, it also indicates the uncertainty of the candidate.



**Figure 3.** Nurhadi-Aldo Meme  
(source: [instagram.com/nurhadi\\_aldo](https://www.instagram.com/nurhadi_aldo))

In the second meme, the quote is *Saya berjanji tidak akan korupsi, kalau saya korupsi nanti saya janji lagi* 'I promise I won't be corrupt, if I break my promise, I will make another one'. First of all, the quote is written in capital or uppercase letters in the poster. The uppercase letters are used to indicate the importance of the message, in this case, the message that said he will not be corrupt. On the other hand, in terms of social actors, he used *saya* 'I' as in *saya berjanji* 'I promise', *saya korupsi* 'in this context it is translated to 'I broke the promise'', and *saya janji lagi* 'I will make another

promise'. From the use of social actor, the center of the attention is Nurhadi, so he has the power in this poster. Additionally, there is also the use of a conditional sentence that indicates the possibility of the occurrence in the future. Yet, the processes used in this meme are verbal processes. As it is shown in the quote, there will be no punishment if he broke his promise.

On the other hand, in the second meme, Nurhadi mentioned the idea of corruption which has been the main problem of Indonesia. He included the message that is always delivered by the politician to attract people's sympathy. Sometimes, politicians dare to say what kind of punishment they would give if they found other political members to be corrupted. However, in reality, the politicians did not keep their promises and acted as if they did nothing wrong. Concerning this, in the poster, Nurhadi's message has a bit of twist where he mentioned that if he breaks his promise and be corrupt, he will make another promise. This twist reflects the reality that has been mentioned earlier regarding the corruption issue in Indonesia.



**Figure 4.** Nurhadi-Aldo Meme  
(source: facebook.com/DildoForIndonesia)

In terms of non-linguistic aspect, the last meme consists of Nurhadi and Aldo's picture as the presidential candidates, who are dressed in *Koko* and *peci* (traditional shirt and hat used by Moslem men for religious purposes). It is important because one of the requirements for being an Indonesian president is being a Moslem. Next, the picture of a farmer that indicates the importance of this job in Indonesia considering agriculture is one of the key sectors within the Indonesian economy. There is also the picture of the social media platform of the candidate that indicates where to find other information about these candidates. On the contrary, the linguistic aspects include hashtag #kaloNurhadiPresidennya 'ifNurhadibecomesthepresident', the written message *Jadi petani makmur & anak petani ga perlu kekota. Petaninya jadi PNS* 'The farmers will be prosperous and their children do not have to go to the city anymore since the farmers will be recruited as civil servants', and the mistaken date of the election. The hashtag #kaloNurhadiPresidennya 'ifNurhadibecomesthepresident' is the response given by the creator to the hashtag war that happened in the Twitter platform between the supporters of candidates 01 and 02 leading to massive harassments on social media. Meanwhile, concerning the message that the farmers will be recruited as civil servants, so their children do not have to go to the city anymore, it indicates that the employment in Indonesia is still unfair because there is still the need to go to the city to get a better job and higher income. The sentence "the farmers will be recruited as civil servants" indicates that civil servant is considered as a highly

attractive job in Indonesia especially for those living in villages. This condition further points out the lack of knowledge regarding other jobs offered by the government. On the other hand, the mistaken date of the election indicates this poster is not an official poster, but a parody.

#### 4.2 Discursive Practice

The analysis of discourse practice focuses on the process of meme production. The creator of the meme is a group of Indonesian youth that met on a community that can be found on Facebook. Meanwhile, the fictional presidential candidate is a middle-aged man who lives in Kudus and works as a masseuse. On the other hand, Aldo, the fictional candidate for vice president turns out to be a fictional character that widely used by meme community. Hence, Aldo is not the name of the man that becomes Nurhadi's partner. It is said that the creator never personally met both Nurhadi and Aldo. The use of Nurhadi's and Aldo's face as the fictional presidential candidates is not for any reasons. They are chosen since both have gained public attention especially among the internet community: Nurhadi for his Facebook posting and Aldo for his appearance in many local memes. Meanwhile, the first campaign posting is launched on December 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018 through several social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

Concerning the campaign, the creators of the memes do not make the poster and their official accounts randomly. The idea behind each campaign has been discussed for months. They began their work in midyear and started uploading the campaigns in December as mentioned earlier. Afterward, a lot of people started creating and uploading their version of Nurhadi-Aldo meme and the Twitter, Facebook; and the Instagram account of Nurhadi-Aldo became more productive. Moreover, many people started making other social accounts of Nurhadi-Aldo on the same platform. Regarding this, it can be said that the content creators of these memes try to raise the internet users' awareness about this phenomenon following the horrible situation of the presidential election which would be held on April 2019. Moreover, other online media, such as online newspaper, also has a great influence on the spread of Nurhadi-Aldo meme. The enormous response given to the Nurhadi-Aldo phenomenon leads to several news reports concerning this phenomenon. There is a tendency of the news outlets to not exaggerate when delivering the news about this phenomenon.

#### 4.3 Sociocultural Practice

The analysis concerning social practice deals with situational, institutional, and social. Moreover, socio-cultural practices relate to how ideology is interpreted by society. First of all, the situational context of a meme is analyzed. Concerning the situational context, these memes were produced near the event of presidential campaigns, following the election in 2019. This meme cannot appear for a long period before the news regarding the presidential election was broadcasting since the content of the meme is about the political poster. Moreover, these memes were created in 2018 and the meme cannot be created earlier due to the exposure towards internet culture in Indonesia.

On the other hand, the influence of the institution toward the production and spread of this meme became the issue covering the second part of sociocultural practice

analysis. Even though there was a moment where the meme became controversial, the government did not take any legal action toward the creators of the meme. The reason is that Indonesia has a law governing freedom in expressing ideas, perspective, and opinion in social media as long as it does not involve discrimination elements towards race, religion, and gender. However, it did not mean the government could not take any action towards this issue. Despite the law concerning freedom in social media, the appearance of this meme in television is limited since broadcasting companies are under government supervision. Due to the inappropriate content and vulgar language, the appearance of this meme on television is limited. Yet, in the internet world, there was a moment where the social platforms suspended the activity of Nurhadi-Aldo accounts. However, it did not completely block and delete the account and the account can be accessed again after a while. Finally, the social aspect of the meme covers the fact that, nowadays, Indonesian start creating digital content to express their opinion regarding certain issues. Moreover, the spread of this meme further points out that many people are disappointed by the current government since they broke several promises that had been made during their pre-presidential campaign.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

From the analysis results, it is concluded that the purpose of fictional campaign posters is to communicate people's perspective over the political condition in Indonesia. The posters of Nurhadi-Aldo as the fake presidential candidates included the critics towards the politicians or the candidates shown through the twisted message in the posters. At first, the twisted message can be seen as the humorous aspect only, considering this is the parody of the official poster. Yet, the twisted message reflects the reality that has been happening in Indonesia. For example, the message that said the candidate will make another promise if he caught to be corrupt. There are no consequences involved in his action. A similar condition can be found in a reality where the case of corruption or another issue cannot stop the politician or candidates for continuing his or her plan in the present or the future election.

On the other hand, the critics cover the disappointment comes from Indonesia citizen towards the promises made given during the campaign by the candidates, but they have not been implemented in reality. Moreover, the poster's message also indicates the concern over the way the government has governed Indonesia in the past few years and how Indonesian people should be. One of them is to change the Indonesian people's perspective towards employment. The number of unemployment will not decrease if the government does not encourage people to understand that there is not only one *career* path available to them. Therefore, it is better to start promoting and preparing people for other alternative jobs. It has been noted that the spread of this memes means that Indonesian, especially the younger generation, have started to be critical and care about the future of Indonesia, especially when it is concerned to the political issues.

Concerning the creator's value, the results reveal that Nurhadi-Aldo meme created by a group of young people depicts the value of skepticism held by Indonesian youth towards the upcoming presidential election. The skepticism is the result of the growing number of social media war between the supporters of the two presidential parties in certain social platforms. Besides, the social wars also made the numbers of

hatred comments and hoax news increase. Moreover, through the fictional presidential campaign memes, the elites were challenged to appear in the public space.

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