

## Media Narratives and Social Exclusion: A Structuration Analysis of Rohingya Refugee Coverage in Indonesia

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**ABSTRACT:** This study examines the role of the media in shaping public meaning towards Rohingya refugees in Indonesia through Anthony Giddens' structuration theory. The problem discussed is how the media constructs narratives that are in line with the political and economic interests of the elite, which directly shape the public's meaning towards refugees as a "threat" or "burden." The purpose of this study is to understand in depth how the media uses its reporting mechanisms to shape meaning, control discourse, and legitimize policies regarding Rohingya refugees within the framework of the political economy communication structure. The theories and concepts applied include Giddens' structuration theory, which emphasizes three key elements: significance, dominance, and legitimacy, which provide a framework for empowering how the media shapes perceptions and policies on refugee issues. The methodology used is an analysis of news coverage about Rohingya refugees on SCTV media as an example of media in Indonesia, identifying narratives and interests conveyed in reporting. The analysis shows that coverage such as that carried out by SCTV, shapes public meaning through repeated narratives that depict refugees positively and negatively. The conclusion highlights the media structuring that determines the meaning of public opinion towards Rohingya refugees.

**Keywords:** Media Narratives, Political Economy, Public Meaning, Rohingya Refugees, Structuration.



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## INTRODUCTION

The Rohingya refugee problem in Indonesia has become a complex humanitarian issue. The Indonesian government faces challenges in providing protection and assistance to refugees. The media plays an important role in shaping public perception regarding this issue. Media coverage can influence public views on refugees and government policies (Munandar et al., 2024). Unfortunately, media coverage is often unbalanced and dominated by certain interests. This condition causes information bias that impacts the way the public views Rohingya refugees.

According to Putri (2024), biased reporting can create negative public perceptions of refugees (Putri & Hariyanto, 2024) .

Handling the Rohingya refugee issue requires a more comprehensive approach. The government is expected to work with various parties to create fairer and more humane policies (Sari, 2018). The media should present objective and in-depth news on this issue. This effort aims to ensure that the public obtains accurate and balanced information. In addition, increasing public awareness through appropriate media coverage can encourage better policies (Lumban Gaol & Wibowo, 2024). According to Chandra (2019), objective reporting can encourage better understanding from the public (Chandra Purnama et al., 2019).

Anthony Giddens' dual structuration theory explains the relationship between social structure and agents in the context of communication (Chatterjee et al., 2019). Giddens states that social structure is not a rigid entity, but something that is continuously formed and reshaped by individual actions (Giddens, 2004). In this case, the media plays a role as an agent that can reshape social structures through news reporting. The structure of the media itself is also influenced by the interests and policies that exist in

society. Thus, the dual structuration theory is relevant to studying the relationship between media, policies, and public perception (Van Langenhove, 2017).

Further on Giddens' Structuration Theory identifies three main elements in social interaction, namely significance, dominance, and legitimacy which together form the relationship between structure and agents. Significance relates to the way individuals or agents give meaning to their actions based on existing social rules, thus forming collectively accepted perceptions (Giddens, 2004). On the other hand, dominance involves the distribution of power and control over resources that allows agents to influence others or control certain social conditions (Fuchs, 2019). Finally, legitimacy refers to the norms and values that justify certain rules or actions, ensuring social compliance and stability in the existing order. (Van Langenhove, 2017). These three elements, according to Giddens, work dialectically in society, creating space for agents to maintain or change social structures through their repeated actions. Thus, structures are not static, but operate through the dynamic actions of agents in giving meaning, exercising power, and maintaining legitimacy. (Parker, 2020). Thus, this theory emphasizes the importance of human actions in shaping and being influenced by social structures simultaneously. (Giddens, 2004).

The political economy of communication proposed by Vincent Mosco emphasizes the relationship between media, power, and economic interests. Mosco argues that the media cannot be separated from the economic and political forces that influence it. Economic and political control over the media affects how social issues are reported (Mosco, 2009). In this context, news about Rohingya refugees can be influenced by certain economic and political interests. Therefore, the political economy of communication is important to use in analyzing media bias towards refugee issues. (Maurer et al., 2022)

Research conducted by Efendi (2018) examined media framing in the Rohingya refugee issue in Indonesia. The study found that the media emphasized more on the political aspect than the humanitarian aspect (E. Efendi, F. Rizal, 2018). This shows that the media tends to follow certain

political interests in its reporting. In addition, research by Rahman (2022) examined the representation of Rohingya refugees in local and national media Bangladesh. Rahman found differences in the focus of reporting between local and national media in describing the conditions of refugees (Rahman, 2022)

A study by Zaman (2024) examined the influence of media on public perceptions of Rohingya refugees in ten countries. Zaman found that the public tends to have negative perceptions due to unbalanced media coverage. This study also shows that the media often uses language that marginalizes refugees (Al-Zaman & Rashid, 2024). In addition, Ma et al (2018) conducted a constructing Rohingya identity, analysis of the coverage of the Rohingya refugee issue. The results of the study showed that there was a certain bias in media coverage, which had an impact on public opinion (Ma et al., 2018).

Previous studies have focused more on framing analysis or media discourse analysis on the Rohingya refugee issue. However, there has been no study that specifically combines Giddens' dual structuration theory and Mosco's political economy to examine the role of the media in this issue. This study offers a unique approach by combining both theories to understand the dynamics of media, social structure, and political interests. By identifying this gap, this study aims to provide new insights into how the media can shape public perception. The uniqueness of this approach is expected to contribute to the development of political economy studies of communication.

Following up on the identified gap research, this study poses several main and derivative questions. The major research question posed is, "How does the political economy of communication structure influence the role of the media in reporting on the Rohingya refugee issue in Indonesia?" This question aims to explore in depth the relationship between political, economic, and media power in reporting. Minor research questions include: "What are the motives of economic and political interests that influence the media in reporting on the Rohingya refugee issue?" "To what extent does the media shape public perceptions regarding this refugee issue?" and "How can the media's reporting framework strengthen or weaken the social structure related to Rohingya refugees in Indonesia?" These questions are designed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the media and political power in this issue.

This study focuses on the analysis of the role of media in shaping public perceptions regarding the Rohingya refugee issue in Indonesia through a political economy of communication approach. The subject of the study is the national media in Indonesia that actively covers the Rohingya refugee issue. The object of the study includes news presented by the media, the political economy structure that influences the news, and public reactions to the information conveyed. This focus was chosen to explore the relationship between political-economic control and media narratives related to the refugee issue. This study will explore how the media, as a social agent, reproduces or reshapes the social structure in Indonesia. Through this study, it is expected to find factors that encourage or hinder the objectivity of news reporting related to Rohingya refugees.

The main objective of this study is to analyze how the political economy of communication structuring influences the role of the media in reporting on the Rohingya refugee issue in Indonesia. This study aims to identify the economic and political motives that influence the media in presenting the refugee issue. In addition, this study also aims to explore the impact of media

coverage on public perceptions regarding Rohingya refugees. Another objective is to examine how media can strengthen or weaken social structures related to the refugee issue. This study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of media and political power in the refugee issue. By achieving these objectives, it is hoped that this study can contribute to the development of political economy studies of communication in Indonesia.

## METHOD

This study uses a critical paradigm to analyze how economic and political power influences the media in reporting the Rohingya refugee issue in Indonesia. The critical approach was chosen because this paradigm seeks to reveal and criticize the power relations that exist between the media, the state, and economic actors. According to this paradigm, the media is not only a means of communication but also part of a power structure that is often influenced by dominant interests (Fuchs, 2015). Through a critical approach, this study aims to identify how media narratives are created to form or strengthen existing social structures, while analyzing the impact of news on public opinion and related policies. According to Fuchs (2016), the critical paradigm in media studies focuses on revealing the inequality that exists in the production and distribution of information, which is usually related to economic and political power (Fuchs, 2016). By using this approach, the study is expected to reveal the power bias that works behind the news narrative. By using this approach, the study is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions in understanding the structuring of the political economy of communication.

The data in this study were collected through in-depth interview techniques and document analysis related to the news coverage of Rohingya refugees in the Indonesian media. Interviews were conducted with Ramadhan Wibisono, a journalist from SCTV/Indosiar, and a communication expert from Paramadina University, Mrs. Juni Alfiah, to explore based on experience and perspectives on the dynamics of news reporting and the influence of political economy and news published by international media that show different sides of the Rohingya refugee topic.

Document analysis was conducted by reviewing news from one of the selected national and international media using content analysis methods to identify reporting patterns and motives behind the narratives conveyed (Mohajan, 2018). After the data was collected, a thematic analysis was conducted to organize and interpret the data based on themes relevant to the research objectives (Yin, 2019). Data verification was carried out through triangulation of sources and methods, where interview results and document analysis were compared to ensure consistency of information (Oranga & Matere, 2023). This approach is considered appropriate to minimize bias and increase the validity of qualitative research (Christou, 2023)

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research findings are in the form of excerpts from news headlines and accompanying images to strengthen the narrative of the news reported in the media, combined with the results of interviews with informants from the news institutions.

Ramadhan Wibisono explained that in general journalists must follow general rules in news coverage. The rules emphasize the importance of balance with the term cover both sides or even cover all sides. Every journalist is expected to present perspectives from various related parties. However, the core value business policies of each editorial team also affect coverage. Each news agency or news media has different core values. This difference is a factor that distinguishes one media from another. Thus, the editorial approach can vary even though the general rules of balanced coverage remain the basic guidelines.



**Picture 1.** VIDEO: Fleeing Again, Rohingya Refugees Fleeing from Lhokseumawe Camp Reaches 30 People | Enamplus

According to Juni Alfiah's opinion, if seen from the approach of the choice of words chosen, Vidio ENAM+ with the title 30 Rohingya refugees recorded escaping from shelter camps in Lhokseumawe explicitly highlights the "fleeing" action of the refugees. The choice of the word "fleeing" creates the impression of an uncontrolled situation or an indication that the refugees are violating applicable regulations. The phrase "recorded fleeing" indicates that this escape is a fact that has been acknowledged by the authorities, thus emphasizing the seriousness of the situation. This can create the impression of concern about uncertainty and insecurity related to the management of Rohingya refugees in the area, which could have an impact on social stability or local security. There are threats and negative perceptions from a group of Rohingya refugees towards the surrounding area.

Ramadhan Wibisono as a Journalist from SCTV/Indosiar stated that the content of the news or video is certainly typical of SCTV/Indosiar's style which aims to balance in highlighting the problem of refugee management, both from the government, local authorities, and international institutions. The title directs the audience to question whether there are weaknesses in the refugee management system in Indonesia, especially in Lhokseumawe. This could refer to the challenges in managing a large number of refugees and the ability to provide a safe and conducive environment, and provide a sense of security for the surrounding population.





**Picture 2.** VIDEO: Over 1,000 Rohingya Arrive, Is Indonesia the Main Destination for Refugees? - TV Liputan6.com

Liputan 6 SCTV reported that 1,000 Rohingya refugees have arrived in Indonesia. In the news, Liputan 6 SCTV highlighted, "Is Indonesia the Main Destination?". Ramadhan Wibisono's statement explained that SCTV highlighted the legal aspects related to the entry of refugees to encourage clarification of the issue of human trafficking and illegal trafficking and low supervision at sea. Speculation in the community is growing that Indonesia is indeed the main destination for Rohingya refugees, and this requires attention to the possibility of illegal practices and weaknesses of the government. In addition, SCTV also focuses on how the Indonesian government's policies are in handling this situation. Ramadhan Wibisono emphasized the importance of discussing the government's steps in handling refugees legally and humanely. Therefore, SCTV strives to present accurate and comprehensive information to encourage appropriate policies and protection for Rohingya refugees.

Juni Alfiah believes that SCTV has done its job well in covering the Rohingya case. SCTV delivers news in a balanced way by gathering views from various parties. All of these perspectives are included in one news frame so that the information provided is comprehensive. SCTV does not only focus on the legal or political aspects, but rather emphasizes the human side of this crisis. Juni Alfiah also added that this kind of reporting is important to raise empathy and understanding in society. By highlighting the humanitarian aspect, SCTV conveys a strong message about the suffering of refugees.

### Indonesia: Lindungi Pengungsi Rohingya yang Baru Tiba

Selidiki, Cegah Kekerasan Anti-Rohingya di Aceh



Pemungutan dari anak Rohingya terpaksa naik truk saat mereka dipindah dari tempat penampungan sementara di sebuah basement rumah warga yang menolak pengungsi Rohingya di Banda Aceh, Aceh, Indonesia, Rabu, 27 Desember 2023. © 2023 AP Foto/Reza Saifulah

**Picture 3.** Indonesia: Protect Newly Arrived Rohingya Refugees | Human Rights Watch

According to Juni Alfiah in handling the Rohingya refugee case, we in Indonesia are also controlled by the media that has a different perspective as shown by Human Rights Watch above. Human

Rights Watch wants to promote the perception that Indonesia has a moral and humanitarian responsibility to protect Rohingya refugees. By using the word "protect," this article highlights Indonesia's role as a country that is expected to provide protection for vulnerable refugee groups. This narrative could aim to strengthen international pressure for Indonesia to prioritize humanitarian measures. This title implies the urgency and need for concrete steps from the government to provide protection for refugees. Human Rights Watch wants to lead international and national public opinion to increase supervision of government policies and actions in handling this crisis.

### **Significance: Meaning in Media Coverage of Rohingya Refugees**

In the context of reporting on Rohingya refugees, researchers see that the rules of media significance in Indonesia play an important role in shaping the meaning conveyed to the public. The media acts as a framework that regulates how the Rohingya issue is understood, often framing it in a narrative that depicts refugees as a "social burden" or "national challenge." Gulzar (2021) states that "the media has the power to shape perceptions through the language used, which is often influenced by political factors" (Gulzar et al., 2021). This is supported by the study of Alchatib (2021), which states that "editorial policies tend to follow narratives that support state interests, giving limited meaning to the humanitarian issue of refugees" (Alchatib, 2021). Thus, the significance produced by the media creates public understanding that is in line with structural interests, shaping the perception of refugees as a "problem" that needs to be addressed selectively.

According to the researcher, what is reviewed above is actually theoretically depicted from the news content or reproduction of meaning that emerges from the media in Indonesia, as stated in the research findings, the word "flee" is important to understand from the perspective of the news, that Rohingya refugees are indeed a problem, a social burden problem that must be resolved immediately before it further disrupts the stability and peace of the surrounding residents. Although if seen from the entire contents of the video ENAM<sup>+</sup> The content is quite extensive in discussing the escape of refugees from various parties involved in it.

At the agent level, researchers have a view that the significance given by journalists to the Rohingya issue is also influenced by their personal backgrounds and pressures from external parties. Journalists have the capacity to provide different perspectives on news reporting, but are often faced with editorial policies that direct them to a certain point of view. Jeljeli (2021) states that "journalists are in a dilemma between professional independence and the demands of media owners who have economic and political interests" (Jeljeli et al., 2021). As added by Oranga (2023), "media policies in developing countries often limit journalists' freedom, shaping the way news is reported and the meanings produced" (Oranga, 2023). This shows that the significance given to the Rohingya refugee issue does not only depend on individual factors, but is also influenced by the existing dominant structure.

At the system level, researchers want to explain that the pattern of meaning reproduction in media reporting plays a role in strengthening public perceptions of Rohingya refugees as a "threat" to social stability. This pattern is repeated and conveyed consistently, which reinforces negative

stereotypes about the refugee group. According to Gupta (2022), "narratives that repeat the perception of threats to refugees reinforce existing social boundaries" (Gupta & Suryavanshi, 2022). In line with this, Fahmi (2024) found that "biased reporting patterns contribute to the formation of negative public images of certain groups" (Fahmy Fotaleno et al., 2024). Ultimately, this system reinforces the social structure that limits public acceptance of Rohingya refugees and creates obstacles to conveying more objective realities.

### **Domination: The Influence of Editorial Control and Media Ownership on Refugee Narratives**

The dominance rule in Indonesian media is evident in the coverage of Rohingya refugees, where the media tends to follow narratives that benefit economic and political elites. The influence of media owners and business interests leads to editorial dominance that suppresses the independence of reporting, resulting in narratives that often frame refugees negatively. Wen (2021) states that "media owners have a significant influence on editorial policy, especially in countries with consolidated media economies" (Wen, 2021). Masduki (2022) adds that "this dominance limits the diversity of views in the media, creating a situation where public perception is directed by elite groups" (Masduki & D'Haenens, 2022). As a result, dominance by media owners shapes reporting in line with dominant interests, limiting public access to an objective understanding of the refugee situation.

This dominance is experienced by journalists and editors who have a role in organizing and compiling news. Journalists often face tight editorial control, which makes it difficult for them to put forward an independent point of view. According to Masduki (2021), "journalists in many developing countries must submit to editorial policies that align with the interests of media owners" (Masduki, 2021). Van Dijk (2017) states that "limited journalistic independence raises concerns about the ethics of reporting, especially on sensitive issues such as refugees" (VanDijk, 2017). With this dominance at the agency level, journalists do not have sufficient freedom to explore refugee issues objectively, narrowing the possibility of more inclusive reporting.

The above review also appears in the findings of this study, where the news published by the media or news agency must be in accordance with the core value of the parent media business. If the media considers that they can be balanced in their reporting, then they do it in a balanced manner and in accordance with journalistic principles, but if it affects the media business in a larger business, then there is a request from the editor that news with a certain topic needs to be broadcast or not. And in relation to Rohingya refugees, if the media is close to power or the owner is affiliated with the holder of power, then the perspective is also different in raising the news.

Likewise, if the media has its own agenda, for example a global agenda such as the findings of research on news content from Human Right Watch (HRW) which shows that they carry a humanitarian narrative, they carry the Indonesian government must save Rohingya refugees, focus on humanitarian issues and relatively do not raise many issues that could potentially arise, for example human trafficking, and so on. So the media also has its own agenda, the content of which is determined by the owner of the media.



### **Legitimacy: Social Justification in Refugee Narratives in the Media**

This legitimacy is realized by journalists who follow editorial policies in accordance with norms that support the interests of the state and media owners (Diamond et al., 2024). Researchers have found that although journalists personally have the opportunity to challenge these rules, media outlets' internal policies often require them to avoid perspectives that conflict with state policy or the policies of media owners. As Koning (2023) put it, “journalists rarely have the flexibility to raise more critical perspectives due to internal policy constraints” (Koning, 2023). Another researcher, Rajandran (2023), asserts that “the legitimacy of media owners often serves as a barrier for journalists to report with an independent perspective” (Rajandran & Lee, 2023). Therefore, legitimacy at the agent level limits the possibility of diverse views emerging, or those that differ or go against the wishes of the state or media owners.

At the agent level, researchers argue that this legitimacy is realized by journalists who follow editorial policies in accordance with norms that support the interests of the state and media owners. Although journalists have the opportunity to challenge these rules, media outlets' internal policies often require them to avoid perspectives that conflict with state policy. As Ekman and Eidholm (2021) put it, “journalists rarely have the flexibility to raise more critical perspectives due to internal policy constraints” (Ekman & Widholm, 2023). Another researcher, Gecer (2018), asserts that “the legitimacy of media owners often acts as a barrier for journalists to report with an independent perspective” (Geçer, 2018). Therefore, legitimacy at the agent level limits the possibility of diverse views emerging.

At the system level, the results of the study suggest that the pattern of legitimation that is repeated in the media reinforces negative public perceptions of refugees and limits space for alternative narratives. When the media consistently legitimizes restrictive public policies, this system creates legitimacy that reinforces anti-refugee structures in society. According to Fuente (2024), “the media’s systemic legitimacy of state policies shapes public views that are in line with dominant structures” (Fuente, 2024). Liminga (2023) also states that “media systems that legitimize state policies often ignore the humanitarian aspects of migration issues” (Limminga & Strömbäck, 2023). With this pattern, media legitimacy in the public system reinforces anti-refugee attitudes among the public.

### **CONCLUSION**

Giddens' structuration theory approach allows us to understand how the media in Indonesia, such as SCTV with its various news and video channels, shape and are shaped by the political economic structure in reporting on Rohingya refugees. The media has a significant role in shaping public meaning of the Rohingya refugee issue in Indonesia. The element of significance is seen in the way the media constructs narratives that give certain meanings to the existence of refugees, often depicting them as a burden. Through domination, the media controls how information is conveyed, often in accordance with the interests of political elites and media owners. On the other hand, legitimacy plays a role in validating certain views on refugees, in line with restrictive public

policies. Thus, the media is not only a source of information, but also functions as an agent that strengthens social boundaries that limit public understanding of the humanitarian issue of refugees.

The implications of this analysis indicate that the role of the media in reporting on Rohingya refugees has a significant impact on the formation of policies and public opinion in Indonesia. With the dominance of political elites and media owners, regarding refugees is often biased, differences in public opinion that aim at this humanitarian issue. The resulting public policy tends to discriminate and strengthen anti-refugee attitudes, which are reflected in the narratives compiled by the media. Therefore, a more inclusive media policy and greater journalistic freedom are needed to present a more balanced view. By considering the third element of structuration theory, the media has the potential to become a more just agent of social change for the refugee issue in Indonesia.

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