



The Discursive Construction of “Poor” in Timothy Ronald’s YouTube Content: A Critical Discourse Analysis Using Norman Fairclough’s Model

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Abstract. Financial influencers have become influential actors in shaping how young Indonesians understand money, success, and poverty. Among them, Timothy Ronald stands out for blunt, confrontational narratives that frame wealth and poverty as products of individual mindset, a framing that risks normalizing the view that poverty is a personal failure while obscuring the structural roots of inequality. This study analyzes how the discourse of “poor” (miskin) is constructed in Timothy Ronald’s YouTube content. The study contributes to the application of critical discourse analysis to new media and to scholarship on the representation of poverty by digital influencers in Indonesia. It employs a qualitative approach using Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis, covering text, discursive practice, and social practice. Data were drawn from seven purposively selected videos that explicitly discuss poverty, the “poor mindset,” wealth, and financial success; the videos were transcribed verbatim and coded in two stages by two coders and the researcher through consensus coding. The findings show that, at the textual level, poverty is represented as an individual fault through pejorative labels and metaphors such as “disease,” “virus,” and “competency test.” The speaker builds a hierarchical relation with the audience that is legitimized by his wealth, and the identity of the poor is constructed as morally and intellectually deficient. These patterns articulate an ideology of meritocratic individualism that is amplified by YouTube’s platform logic. The study concludes that motivational-financial content is not merely educative but ideological, constructing poverty as a personal failure rather than a structural problem.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, financial influencer, ideology, poverty, YouTube.

1 Introduction

YouTube occupies a dominant position among social media platforms in Indonesia as a space for sharing knowledge, entertainment, and social discourse. The platform is no longer merely a site of content consumption; it has become an arena in which social meanings and ideologies are constructed, negotiated, and openly contested [1]. With more than 143 million active users among Indonesian internet users aged 16–64 [2], YouTube plays an important role in shaping public perception of issues including education, the economy, and poverty. Within this landscape, financial influencers or finfluencers do not only serve as sources of digital financial information; they also shape perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes that influence how people make financial decisions [3].

Among Indonesian finfluencers, Timothy Ronald stands out as one of the most influential figures in building discourse on self-development and financial awareness among young people. Through a direct, assertive, and unfiltered communication style [4], he presents narratives of personal responsibility, hard work, and positive mindset as the foundation of financial success, constructing “rich” and “poor” not only as

economic conditions but as representations of how one thinks and acts toward life. Such narratives reflect a neoliberal-inflected worldview in which success results purely from individual effort and poverty from personal failure—a framing that risks disregarding structural factors, given that poverty in Indonesia remains significantly influenced by economic policy, unequal access to education, and uneven employment opportunities [5]. When such narratives become dominant, the public may be encouraged to view poverty as a “personal fault” rather than a product of an unequal system [6], which matters for communication studies because digital influencers act as discourse-shaping actors capable of normalizing particular views of social reality [7].

This study uses Norman Fairclough’s model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which involves three main dimensions: text, discursive practice, and social practice. The approach makes it possible to reveal how linguistic choices, sentence structure, and social context interact in producing meaning and ideology [8]. It is supported by the concept of the social construction of reality [9], which emphasizes that social meanings are formed and reproduced through communication, interaction, and media; in this context, “poor” is not merely an economic condition but the outcome of social construction colored by cultural and ideological values [10].

Previous studies provide a relevant foundation: research applying Fairclough’s CDA has shown that media are arenas of ideological contestation in corruption reporting [11], that language and narrative choices in online media shape public opinion on sensitive issues [12], that media hold power in constructing the image of social groups [13], that content design on YouTube channels affects public perception of social issues [14], and that editorial narratives shape opinion in the press [15]. Studies of Timothy Ronald’s own channel, however, have generally applied content analysis to message themes, and research that specifically examines the ideological construction of poverty in Indonesian influencer discourse remains limited. This study fills that gap by asking: how is the discourse of “poor” constructed in Timothy Ronald’s YouTube content? Accordingly, the objective is to analyze that construction across Fairclough’s three dimensions and to examine the ideology and power relations underlying it.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis and Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model

CDA views language as a social practice closely related to power, ideology, and social structure, functioning to uncover hidden meanings behind texts and the power relations that shape discourse production [16]; discourse can serve as a means of reproducing or resisting domination, especially when socio-political inequality is given meaning through language [17]. Fairclough asserts that language is never neutral because word choice, sentence structure, and mode of delivery always contribute to forming a particular reality [18], and CDA reads not only the text but also its purpose, context, and surrounding social conditions [19]. In general, CDA rests on three assumptions: language is an instrument of power and ideology, discourse is an arena of contestation over meaning, and analysis aims to reveal hidden power relations and inequality [20].

Fairclough’s dialectical-relational model connects three dimensions [19]. In the text dimension, analysis focuses on diction, sentence structure, metaphor, cohesion, modality, and style [17]; in this study it is operationalized as representation (how poverty is depicted), relation (how power relations among speaker, audience, and object are built), and identity (how “the poor” and “the rich” are formed). The discursive-practice dimension covers the production, distribution, and consumption of texts [21], which in digital media involves platform algorithms, presentation formats, and user interaction. The social-practice

dimension concerns the social context, ideology, and power structures behind the discourse, showing how discourse can reinforce or challenge dominant ideologies [20].

2.2 Poverty as a Social Object

Poverty is a multidimensional social reality rather than a mere lack of income. Beyond monetary measures of per-capita expenditure below the poverty line [22], it involves deprivation of access to education, health, and decent living standards [23] and is bound up with social structure, values, interaction, and mobility [24]. Research on the working poor shows that people can remain poor despite working, because low and unstable wages, absent social protection, and limited access to services mean hard work alone does not guarantee welfare [25]; class analysis likewise shows that unequal relations between owners of capital and workers restrict lower-class access to education, formal employment, capital, and networks [26]. Studies of poverty, inequality, and crime in Indonesia caution against moral generalizations that blame the poor directly [27], gendered analyses show that poor women bear multiple burdens simultaneously [28], and research on zakat and social assistance indicates that philanthropy supports poverty reduction but cannot resolve poverty structurally without policies expanding access to education, decent work, health, and social protection [29, 30]. For communication research these perspectives matter because media discourse determines whether the poor are understood as victims of social structure or as individuals who have personally failed.

2.3 Meritocratic Individualism and Digital Media as a Space of Power

Meritocratic individualism positions the individual as primarily responsible for life success or failure [31], understanding social achievement as the outcome of ability, hard work, and discipline [32]. Paradoxically, more unequal societies tend to believe more strongly in meritocracy, making inequality easier to accept [32], and meritocratic belief is associated with judging less successful groups as responsible for their own condition [33]; experimental evidence from Indonesia shows this belief weakens when people learn about high inequality and low mobility [34]. At the level of discourse, the ideology works through language that morally praises the rich as hardworking and brave while condemning the poor as lazy and mentally weak [33, 32], and it circulates through popular culture in narratives of struggle, risk, and mobility [35].

YouTube is an important vehicle for this ideology: the “Broadcast Yourself” promise operates within digital capitalism in which user activity, audience data, views, comments, and popularity are commodified by the platform [36]. Digital space more broadly is shaped by algorithms, economic interests, and actors with the power to direct public attention [37], as shown by studies of the buzzer industry [38] and of media control through trolls, doxing, and hyper-partisan media [39]; at the same time, hashtag movements demonstrate the possibility of counter-narratives [40], though digital opinion movements can also develop without control [41]. CDA is therefore used to examine how word choice, titles, slogans, and metaphors in digital texts frame issues and marginalize groups [42].

3 Method

This study employs a qualitative approach based on Fairclough’s CDA, chosen because it allows language use to be examined as a social practice that both reflects and shapes power structures, ideologies, and social values across the three interrelated dimensions of text, discursive practice, and social practice [21].

The primary data consist of verbatim transcripts of seven YouTube videos published by Timothy Ronald, selected purposively using criterion sampling from more than one

hundred videos on the channel: (1) Kalian Harus Jadi Kaya Sekarang; (2) Penyakit Utama Orang Miskin; (3) Hapus Pola Pikir yang Bikin Kamu Tetap Miskin; (4) Mindset Miskin Bikin Sengsara; (5) Kenapa Gen Z Itu Miskin; (6) 7 Kebohongan Uang yang Bikin Kamu Miskin; and (7) Kenapa Lo Masih Miskin di 2025. Five criteria were applied: the video originates from the channel as the main research subject; it explicitly discusses poverty, the term “poor,” the mindset of the poor, poor–rich relations, or narratives of financial success; it contains sufficiently dominant verbal argumentation that can be transcribed verbatim and analyzed linguistically; it can be analyzed through Fairclough’s three dimensions; and it is representative of the discourse patterns relevant to the research objective rather than chosen for popularity. Secondary data were obtained from scholarly journals, books, and official reports, and records of production context (topic, delivery style, tone, forms of address, and narrative structure) were kept to support the discursive-practice analysis.

Coding used a coding sheet in two stages involving two independent coders and the researcher: initial selection of relevant quotations, followed by in-depth categorization of agreed final quotations into representation, relation, and identity, producing 21 final quotations. Final codes were determined through consensus coding (negotiated agreement), with differences resolved by discussion against operational definitions and category indicators. Analysis proceeded through the three dimensions—textual analysis of diction, labeling, metaphor, style, and sentence structure; discursive-practice analysis of production, distribution, and audience positioning, including platform characteristics such as titles and engagement logic; and social-practice analysis connecting the findings to context, ideology, and power—and concluded with a synthesis of how “poor” is constructed, disseminated, and normalized in digital space.

Trustworthiness followed the four criteria of Lincoln and Guba [43]: credibility through cross-video pattern checking and theoretical grounding; transferability through thick description and verbatim transcription; dependability through an audit trail documented in the coding sheet; and confirmability through negotiated agreement, so that findings derive from the data rather than researcher bias.

4 Result and Discussion

4.1 Textual Analysis

The seven videos, each between roughly 13 and 23 minutes long and viewed hundreds of thousands to more than a million times (Table 1), provided 21 final quotations through the two-stage consensus coding. At the level of text, poverty is not positioned as a social or structural problem but as an individual fault related to mindset, character, and mental attitude, conveyed through direct, harsh, and emotional language that produces an unequal power relation between speaker and audience.

Table 1. Videos analyzed in this study (data per December 2025).

No	Video title	Duration	Views
1	<i>Kalian Harus Jadi Kaya Sekarang</i>	15.46 min	±705 thousand
2	<i>Penyakit Utama Orang Miskin</i>	20.13 min	±909 thousand
3	<i>Hapus Pola Pikir yang Bikin Kamu Tetap Miskin</i>	20.43 min	±1.04 million
4	<i>Mindset Miskin Bikin Sengsara</i>	13.42 min	±438 thousand
5	<i>Kenapa Gen Z Itu Miskin</i>	22.20 min	±615 thousand
6	<i>7 Kebohongan Uang yang Bikin Kamu Miskin</i>	13.44 min	±647 thousand
7	<i>Kenapa Lo Masih Miskin di 2025</i>	14.59 min	±301 thousand

A first pattern is the metaphorical equation of wealth with competence:

“Miskin itu tes kompetensi. Kalau lu bukan manusia yang kaya, lu gak lulus nih standar tes kompetensi. Menurut gua ya, batasnya adalah kekayaan.”
[Being poor is a competency test. If you are not a rich human being, you have not passed the competency-test standard. In my view, the threshold is wealth.] (Video 1, 5:10–5:21)

Through the metaphor of a “competency test,” wealth is made the measure of a person’s success, while the poor are positioned as those who fail; the phrase “the threshold is wealth” reduces human value to an economic measure. A second pattern is the explicit rejection of structural explanations:

“Tapi bilang, oh gak bisa karena struktural lu bego. Semua, ya lu miskin itu karena lu arogan, lu goblok, lu pemales, udah gak ada lagi yang lain.” [But saying, oh, you cannot because of structural factors—you are stupid. All of it: you are poor because you are arrogant, stupid, lazy; there is nothing else.] (Video 1, 5:48–6:00)

Here the structural explanation of poverty is declared illegitimate, the poor are assigned a negative identity through the labels “arrogant,” “stupid,” and “lazy,” and the absolute generalization “there is nothing else” closes off any cause outside the individual. A third pattern pathologizes poverty: the speaker “defines” poverty as a “disease” exactly like a physical illness (Video 2, 0:00–0:34), rendering the traits attributed to the poor damaged and in need of cure, and culminating in the deterministic verdict that whoever combines stupidity, laziness, cowardice, and arrogance “will certainly be poor for the rest of your life” (Video 2, 11:39–11:46). A fourth pattern reduces the causes of poverty to a single factor—“you are poor only because your mindset is poor” (Video 3, 0:14–0:24)—while a fifth frames life as a game whose high score is money (Video 4, 4:30–4:37), constructing the rich as winners and the poor as losers. A sixth delegitimizes the poor as sources of dangerous ideas, describing their views of money as “viruses” and “heretical teaching” (Video 6, 0:10–0:20), and slogans with a law-like repetitive structure—“the more you play it safe, the poorer you become” (Video 6, 8:41–8:48)—make a reductive cause–effect relation sound certain. Not all excerpts are purely individualizing: one acknowledges minimum-wage earners trapped in “a cycle that makes the people poorer” (Video 5, 7:13–7:51), yet even there the speaker redirects attention to the mentalities the individual must discard, so structural factors remain background rather than the object of critique.

Read across the 21 coded quotations, three interrelated patterns emerge. In representation, poverty is depicted far more as an individual problem than a structural one, its causes attached to mindset, mentality, character, and behavior, while structural factors such as inflation, minimum wages, housing prices, and expensive education appear only as background to be outsmarted. In relation, the speaker builds a hierarchical relationship with the audience through instructive, patronizing, and confrontational language—commands, prohibitions, rhetorical questions, and direct verdicts—with his wealth serving as the legitimation of his authority. In identity, “poor” is constructed as a negative, deficit identity loaded with demeaning moral and intellectual labels (goblok, pemales, arogan, penakut, pecundang, sampah, budak, penyakit), while “rich” is constructed as the ideal winner identity: competent, brave, informed, and worthy of emulation. Together these patterns transform poverty from an economic condition into a shameful social image and establish a hierarchy of value in which wealth is the principal measure of a successful life.

4.2 Discursive Practice

In production, the discourse is built on an authoritative persona: the informal *lu-gua* address creates conversational closeness while enabling confrontational and pressuring speech, and legitimacy is constructed by making wealth the basis of truth—the speaker asserts he is “far richer” and that audiences should therefore listen, so economic status determines who is entitled to speak, judge, and direct others. Blaming strategies and generalization reinforce production, with structural explanations rejected and replaced by lists of negative traits marked by certainty words such as “certainly” and “for the rest of your life,” alongside simplifying metaphors (money as “the report card of the real world”) and memorable motivational slogans.

In distribution, YouTube operates as a technological institution shaping circulation through recommendation systems, algorithms, and engagement mechanisms: directive, provocative titles act as initial framings that position audiences as being called upon and judged before viewing, while the platform’s preference for high-interaction content means a confrontational style functions as an indirect distribution strategy by provoking comments and debate; the speaker’s symbolic status as a financial influencer and the platform economy’s monetization incentives further amplify reach. In consumption—analyzed through how the text and platform position viewers rather than through comment data—audiences enter the content already framed as parties to be admonished, are consistently positioned as needing advice and discipline, and are pressed by demeaning diction and single-standard metaphors toward one dominant reading: poverty is primarily the individual’s fault and can be fixed through self-change alone, with short slogans enabling repeated exposure and internalization.

4.3 Social Practice

The discourse emerges in a digital society that treats wealth as an urgent goal, visible in pressuring titles and in references to social assistance, inflation, education costs, minimum wages, and housing prices that signal economic pressure and competition. The context also includes how poverty is measured: official statistics record 8.25 percent of Indonesians (about 23.36 million people) as poor in September 2025 against a line of roughly Rp609,160 per person per month [5], while the World Bank records more than 60.3 percent (about 171.8 million people) below the USD 6.85 per day line for upper-middle-income countries [44]. The stark gap shows that poverty is partly constituted by the choice of measuring line; when the economically vulnerable population is in fact vast, a discourse attributing poverty solely to individual mindset helps conceal the breadth of the problem.

The dominant ideology articulated is meritocratic individualism: poverty is repeatedly explained through wrong mindsets, laziness, fear of risk, and loser mentality, while success is positioned as the direct result of individual quality—even though many people work hard yet cannot improve their condition, and capital, once owned, generates returns without equivalent effort [45]. The discourse also carries the ideology that wealth is the primary measure of human worth. The power structure operates on three layers: the symbolic power of the speaker, whose displayed wealth licenses him to define who is poor and why; the power of classification that places the rich as superior and the poor as inferior objects of judgment rather than subjects of their own reality; and the power of the platform, which expands and normalizes the message through repeated exposure. Beyond the speaker–audience relation, the discourse connects to wider power relations in which poverty can be exploited politically, as when social assistance is used for electoral interests [46] or binds recipients politically [47]; a discourse that frames poverty as personal fault ultimately diverts attention from structural inequality and weakens critical scrutiny of those who benefit from its persistence.

4.4 Discussion

Read through Fairclough’s framework, the findings confirm that the “poor” discourse is a construction arising through the relationship among text, discursive practice, and social practice, in line with the premise that language is never fully neutral [18]. The individualizing construction contrasts sharply with the multidimensional understanding of poverty [22, 23, 24] and with the working-poor phenomenon, which shows that effort alone does not guarantee welfare [25]; it enacts precisely the moral generalization against which poverty scholarship warns [27]. The findings also show the ideology of meritocratic individualism at work: attributing poverty to wrong mindsets and fear of risk is consistent with evidence that meritocratic belief makes less successful groups more readily blamed [33] and legitimizes inequality [32], even though the capacity to take risks is unequally distributed [34], while the “report card” and “competency test” metaphors echo meritocratic narratives circulating in popular culture [35].

Finally, the findings underline the role of digital media as the vehicle that spreads the discourse and its hidden meanings: provocative titles act as initial framings, short memorable sentences circulate readily under the platform’s popularity logic [36], and consumption is part of discursive practice in which audiences remember, quote, and use the messages to evaluate themselves and others [21]. What appears on the surface as financial advice therefore carries a deeper layer of meaning—the naturalization of the view that poverty is personal failure—and digital media extend the reach of that meaning [42, 20]. These findings extend previous CDA studies of Indonesian media [11, 13, 14] by showing that the ideological work performed by mainstream media in constructing social groups is now also performed, in a more personal and confrontational register, by individual influencers whose authority rests on displayed wealth.

5 Conclusion

This study concludes that poverty in Timothy Ronald’s YouTube content is predominantly constructed as a personal problem of mindset, mentality, character, and life choices rather than as an economic and structural condition. At the textual dimension, this is visible in harsh, demeaning, and judgmental diction and in metaphors—disease, virus, competency test, real-world report card, and the game of life—that together form the meaning that poverty is a sign of individual failure. At the dimension of discursive practice, the discourse is produced through a firm, confrontational, and authoritative communication style; beneath apparent financial advice lies the hidden meaning that poverty is a personal fault, and YouTube spreads that meaning widely through provocative titles, short memorable messages, and engagement-driven platform logic, positioning audiences as parties to be directed, corrected, and disciplined.

At the dimension of social practice, the construction articulates an ideology of meritocratic individualism within a digital culture that measures human worth by financial achievement, while structural factors—access to education, decent work, economic inequality, and social policy—are pushed out of focus, so that the discourse works through the individualization of poverty and conceals its structural complexity. The study recommends that audiences receive narratives about poverty, wealth, and financial success critically; that content creators exercise care in the language, metaphors, and labels attached to the poor so that motivational content does not reinforce stigma; and that future research analyze audience responses such as comments, or compare Timothy Ronald’s content with that of other creators addressing similar themes.

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