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Media Hegemony and Political Scandal: The Narrative of Ridwan Kamil Alleged Affair in the Vortex of Power

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abstract

In the realm of politics, scandals involving public figures often attract significant attention, especially when reported by the media. One major scandal that once stirred public discourse was the alleged affair involving Ridwan Kamil. The media plays a crucial role in shaping public perception of political figures, often through news reporting constructed with specific narratives. This study aims to explore how the media constructs narratives surrounding the alleged affair of Ridwan Kamil, and how it utilises its influence to shape public opinion and reinforce power structures through such reporting. Using Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, this research analyses how major Indonesian media outlets, such as Kompas.com, Detik.com, and CNN Indonesia, presented news coverage of this scandal. It also examines how the media frames the news in ways that influence the public's perception of Ridwan Kamil and his political standing. The method employed is discourse analysis, focusing on the texts and narratives built by the media. This research not only investigates what is reported but also how the reporting itself constructs public perception and discourse. The findings reveal that scandals related to personal morality have significant destructive potential, as Indonesian society still views political leaders as moral figures. The clear polarisation of public opinion in Ridwan Kamil's case is not solely caused by the content of the news but also by the selective consumption of information facilitated by social media algorithms. This study also identifies character assassination as a political communication strategy used to damage reputations by attacking personal aspects. Ideological bias in media coverage aligns with Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model, where the media serves the interests of capital owners and those in power.

abstrak

Dalam ranah politik, skandal yang melibatkan tokoh publik seringkali menarik perhatian signifikan, terutama ketika dilaporkan oleh media. Salah satu skandal besar yang pernah menggemparkan wacana publik adalah dugaan perselingkuhan yang melibatkan Ridwan Kamil. Media memainkan peran krusial dalam membentuk persepsi publik terhadap tokoh politik, seringkali melalui pemberitaan yang dibangun dengan narasi tertentu. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana media membangun narasi seputar dugaan perselingkuhan Ridwan Kamil, dan bagaimana media memanfaatkan pengaruhnya untuk membentuk opini publik dan memperkuat struktur kekuasaan melalui pemberitaan tersebut. Dengan menggunakan teori hegemoni Antonio Gramsci, penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana media-media besar Indonesia, seperti Kompas.com, Detik.com, dan CNN Indonesia, menyajikan liputan berita tentang skandal ini. Penelitian ini juga mengkaji bagaimana media membingkai berita sedemikian rupa sehingga memengaruhi persepsi publik terhadap Ridwan Kamil dan posisi politiknya. Metode yang digunakan adalah analisis wacana, dengan fokus pada teks dan narasi yang dibangun oleh media. Penelitian ini tidak hanya menyelidiki apa yang dilaporkan tetapi juga bagaimana pemberitaan itu sendiri membangun persepsi dan wacana publik. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa skandal yang berkaitan dengan moralitas pribadi memiliki potensi destruktif yang signifikan, mengingat masyarakat Indonesia masih memandang pemimpin politik sebagai figur moral. Polarisasi opini publik yang nyata dalam kasus Ridwan Kamil tidak semata-mata disebabkan oleh konten berita, tetapi juga oleh konsumsi informasi selektif yang difasilitasi oleh algoritma media sosial. Studi ini juga mengidentifikasi pembunuhan karakter sebagai strategi komunikasi politik yang digunakan untuk merusak reputasi dengan menyerang aspek pribadi. Bias ideologis dalam liputan media sejalan dengan model propaganda Herman dan Chomsky, di mana media melayani kepentingan pemilik modal dan penguasa.

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1. Introduction

In Indonesia, political power dynamics are frequently influenced by the public dissemination of personal issues, often amplified through the media. Scandals, particularly those involving political figures, are not just reported but actively constructed by the media, shaping perceptions through framing that can either reinforce or undermine the reputation of individuals. The alleged affair of Ridwan Kamil offers a compelling example of how media outlets craft narratives within the power struggle, underscoring the significance of analyzing media hegemony in contemporary Indonesian politics. The process through which the media shapes public discourse around political scandals increasingly highlights its role in steering public opinion and reinforcing power structures. As Laclau and Mouffe (2019) argue, media hegemony is not only a tool for maintaining political dominance but also for defining societal values and meanings. In the case of Ridwan Kamil's alleged affair, media coverage exemplifies how the media reshapes the image of political figures within the broader context of power (Heryanto, 2020). The narratives constructed are not neutral; they are inherently shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces (Kusuma, 2021).

According to Fairclough (2013), the media functions as an ideological agent, capable of either reinforcing or destabilizing existing power structures. The scandal surrounding Ridwan Kamil's affair shows how media not only presents facts but also strategically constructs their meanings to align with specific political agendas (Handayani, 2022). In the era of post-truth politics, where emotional appeals often outweigh factual analysis, media hegemony becomes more subtle yet pervasive, forming public consensus through the narrative of scandals (McIntyre, 2018; Irawan, 2021). Personal scandals, particularly those tied to issues of morality such as extramarital affairs, have long been potent tools for engaging the public due to their sensational nature (Tambunan, 2020). Media outlets leverage such stories to generate public interest, as scandalous content tends to go viral far more quickly than policy-focused reporting (Rahmawati, 2022). As such, political reporting increasingly centers on the personal lives of political actors rather than

substantive discussions of policy (Saragih, 2023). In the case of Ridwan Kamil, the media's extensive coverage of his alleged affair demonstrates how such scandals are used to influence public perceptions of a political figure's moral and political viability (Putra, 2012). From a Gramscian perspective (Forgacs, 2020), domination in contemporary society is not exerted solely through force but through the creation of ideological and cultural consensus. The media plays a key role in this process, selectively framing reality by emphasizing certain aspects of events while excluding others (Entman, 2003). In Ridwan Kamil's case, the media narrative often focused more on his personal morality than his policy achievements or governance record (Sari, 2022). This reflects a broader trend toward personalized political narratives in Indonesia, where the media plays an increasingly pivotal role (Wulandari, 2021). Furthermore, media coverage of political scandals often reveals an ideological bias, as outlets with specific political affiliations use these scandals to undermine political rivals (Suharto, 2022). Content analysis of the coverage of Ridwan Kamil's case shows notable disparities in how various media outlets, driven by political and economic interests, reported the affair (Latief, 2023).

This underscores the challenge to media independence, with mainstream outlets often entangled in political and economic agendas, reinforcing what Herman and Chomsky (2018) describe as the propaganda model (Zaharim *et al.*, 2024). Political scandals, like Ridwan Kamil's alleged affair, do not exist in isolation but emerge within a competitive political environment filled with intrigue and strategic maneuvering (Thompson, 2003). In this context, the media operates not only as a platform but as an active political player. The scandal surrounding Ridwan Kamil is intricately linked to the political dynamics leading up to national elections, where such controversies are strategically employed to erode a political opponent's credibility. Digital technology has further amplified the impact of media hegemony by accelerating the spread of scandal-driven narratives through social media platforms. Virality, now a key measure of a story's success, often trumps traditional journalistic values such as accuracy and objectivity (Hartono & Lisa Amelia Anggelina, 2014). In this case, the lines between fact and misinformation blurred, contributing to a distorted public

understanding and deepening mistrust of the media (Ngo, 2025). This study seeks to explore the intersection of media and political scandal, critically examining the hegemonic processes involved in constructing public perception and shaping political legitimacy. Using critical discourse analysis, the research will reveal the mechanisms through which media narratives about Ridwan Kamil's scandal are formed and disseminated. By analyzing the texts, production context, and the political dynamics underlying the reporting, this research aims to expand our understanding of the relationship between media, power, and political morality in Indonesia. As McNair (2017) notes, the media in modern politics functions not merely as a communication channel but as a battleground for discourses, where political actors vie to control the narrative for strategic gain. In Indonesia, the relationship between media and political power has become increasingly entangled. Many media organizations maintain either explicit or implicit political affiliations, supported by economic and ideological factors (Yanuar *et al.*, 2012). Consequently, the media's portrayal of political scandals such as Ridwan Kamil's alleged affair cannot be detached from the political and economic interests that seek to shape public perception.

While political scandals targeting private lives are not new, the rapidity and reach of such information in the digital era have significantly intensified. Research by Chadwick and Stromer-Galley (2016) demonstrates how social media has accelerated both the spread and polarization of political scandals. Personal scandals, especially those involving moral transgressions like infidelity, are often more potent in damaging a politician's credibility than issue-based attacks, as they tap into deeply held societal values concerning morality. The focus on Ridwan Kamil in this study is particularly relevant due to his previously positive public image in Indonesian politics. The scandal against him illustrates how media narratives can be weaponized to either destroy or enhance a political career, suggesting that, in modern politics, public perception often takes precedence over objective reality (Velasco *et al.*, 2024). The Ridwan Kamil affair serves as a striking example of how the media uses framing to steer public opinion. Framing, as Entman (1993) explains, involves selecting and

emphasizing certain aspects of social reality while downplaying others, shaping how an event is perceived. This process is inherently biased and reflects a hegemonic strategy, as described by Gramsci, where power is maintained through cultural and ideological consensus. According to Strömbäck and Esser (2014), modern political media operates under the logic of mediatization, where commercial considerations and audience engagement often outweigh journalistic impartiality. In such an environment, scandals become "commodities" that attract attention, drive clicks, and enhance media revenue, while also serving political agendas. In many contemporary political contexts, the media functions as a hegemonic tool to maintain, divert, or dismantle power. This research draws on Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, which argues that dominance in modern society is not solely achieved through coercive force but through the establishment of ideological consensus. In this context, the media serves as a crucial instrument in sustaining hegemony by framing reality in ways that align with dominant political and economic interests (Gramsci, 1971; Forgacs, 2020). Rather than simply reporting events, the media constructs social meaning through selective emphasis and strategic omission, shaping how the public understands and interprets reality.

This perspective is further supported by Robert Entman's (1993) framing theory, which explores how the media defines problems, diagnoses their causes, makes moral judgments, and suggests remedies. In the case of Ridwan Kamil's scandal, the media's framing choices such as emphasizing moral suspicion over political achievements have a much more profound effect on public perception than the mere presentation of facts. Additionally, Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model (2018) provides further insight into how media content is shaped by factors such as ownership, advertising revenue, sourcing biases, and ideological leanings. This model demonstrates how certain narratives, especially those that align with elite interests, are given precedence, creating the illusion of objectivity while perpetuating existing power structures. Moreover, the study integrates theories of mediatization (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014) and algorithmic logic (Napoli, 2019; McIntyre, 2018), which explain how digital platforms prioritize sensational content based on its emotional

appeal, rather than its informational value. Social media virality becomes a mechanism of narrative control, amplifying scandals over substantive political issues and elevating emotional responses above factual accuracy. Empirical studies on political scandals in Indonesian media (Heryanto, 2020; Kusuma, 2021; Handayani, 2022) further underscore the local relevance of these theoretical frameworks. These studies highlight how political narratives are often shaped by media ownership, ideological alignment, and audience engagement imperatives, transforming the media into a battleground for competing ideologies.

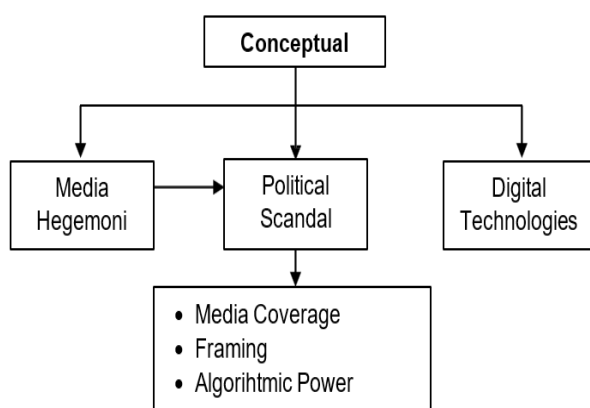


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

2. Research Methodology

This study aims to investigate how mass media construct political narratives related to the affair scandal involving Ridwan Kamil and how these narratives interact with existing political power structures. To examine this phenomenon, the research adopts a qualitative methodology, utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and media framing analysis to understand media representations of the scandal and their impact on Ridwan Kamil's political positioning. A qualitative approach is chosen to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the texts and discourses created by the media, as well as to analyze how these discourses shape public perceptions of political figures and the scandals they face. In this context, media are not simply channels of information but powerful agents of meaning-making and interpretation, significantly influencing the

legitimacy of political authority (Wodak, 1997). The study primarily draws on discourse and framing analysis. While this methodology enables a nuanced and comprehensive interpretation of media texts, it does not include quantitative data to substantiate trends in frequency, sentiment, or audience reception. Furthermore, although the study engages with public discourse on social media, it does not systematically examine audience responses using empirical tools such as surveys or focus groups. Future research could expand the scope of media analysis to include a broader range of sources, including alternative and regional media outlets. Incorporating quantitative methods, such as content analysis or algorithmic mapping, could provide further depth and rigor to the findings. Additionally, future studies could examine how different demographic groups interpret and respond to media narratives, particularly in a politically polarized environment.

Data for this study will be collected from a variety of media sources, including print media, electronic media, and social media platforms. Print media data will consist of news articles from newspapers, magazines, and other printed sources discussing the affair scandal involving Ridwan Kamil. These materials will provide insight into the framing strategies used by traditional print media outlets. Electronic media data will include transcripts from television and radio news programs that report on and analyze the scandal, contributing to an understanding of how such coverage is produced and how it shapes public perception. Given the growing influence of digital platforms, social media will also be a crucial data source, as it plays an increasingly dominant role in shaping public opinion and providing a space for political discourse to evolve organically. Data collection will be carried out using two primary techniques: documentation and participatory observation. Documentation involves gathering news articles, television broadcast transcripts, and social media posts related to Ridwan Kamil's affair scandal. These materials will serve as the primary sources for discourse and framing analysis. Participatory observation will involve engaging with social media discussions and online forums to capture public responses to the media narratives surrounding the scandal. This approach will allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of how the public

interacts with and reacts to the narratives constructed by the media. Data analysis will be conducted using two core methods: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and framing analysis. CDA will be employed to reveal the relationship between language and power within media contexts. This analysis will focus on how media construct narratives that shape public impressions of political figures and the scandals they are involved in. As Van Dijk (2020) suggests, CDA requires a close examination of how media shape social representations, which can, in turn, influence public perceptions of individuals and major events. The study will identify key linguistic elements such as words, phrases, and sentence structures that media use to frame the narrative surrounding Ridwan Kamil and the scandal. Framing analysis will be applied to explore how media selectively emphasize certain aspects of the scandal while downplaying or omitting others. As Goffman (1974) posits, media framing influences public interpretation by foregrounding or suppressing specific elements of a story.

This study will use framing analysis to investigate how the media depict the affair scandal and examine the implications of these representations on Ridwan Kamil's political power. The research will proceed in three key stages. The first stage involves data collection, which will occur in the first two months. During this phase, the researcher will gather news articles, television program transcripts, and social media posts related to the scandal. These materials will be accessed through online sources and archived print media. The second stage is data analysis, scheduled for months three and four. During this period, the collected data will be analyzed using CDA and framing analysis to map the media narratives surrounding the scandal and Ridwan Kamil's political power. The final stage, which will take place in months five and six, involves interpreting the findings and preparing the research report. The report will outline the key findings and conclusions, focusing on how the media construct political narratives surrounding the scandal and the impact of these narratives on Ridwan Kamil's political legitimacy.

3. Results and Discussion

Results

Political Scandal as a Hegemonic Discourse

In contemporary politics, the media no longer functions merely as a passive conduit for information. Instead, it has evolved into an active agent that shapes, directs, and sometimes destabilizes power dynamics. This transformation is clearly evident in the scandal surrounding Ridwan Kamil, a prominent political figure implicated in an alleged extramarital affair in 2025. Amidst this controversy, the media played a pivotal role not only in reporting the incident but also in framing its meanings, shaping public perception, and influencing the political figure's standing. The aim of this research is to deconstruct how the media constructs the narrative of scandal and to examine how this narrative operates within a hegemonic framework that involves power, ideology, and symbolic domination. The findings of this study reveal that the media coverage of Ridwan Kamil's alleged affair is far from a neutral or factual recounting of events. Rather, it represents a process of hegemonic discourse construction. The media does not simply relay information; it actively selects, organizes, and emphasizes certain aspects of the story while downplaying or omitting others. This process aligns with Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, which suggests that dominance is not maintained solely through coercion but also through the creation of cultural and ideological consensus. Media narratives play a significant role in this process, constructing social realities that reinforce or challenge the dominant power structures. To analyze how the media constructs the narrative around this scandal, this research utilizes Robert Entman's framing approach. Entman's model involves defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting remedies. By applying this framework, the study identifies how the media frames the scandal, focusing on the key elements of problem definition, the causes attributed to the affair, the moral judgments rendered, and the remedies suggested by the media. Through this lens, the media's role in shaping the scandal's narrative is revealed as not merely descriptive, but actively involved in constructing a symbolic order that influences political legitimacy and public opinion.

Table 1. Framing Categorisation and Media Hegemony

Media	Entman's Framing Elements	Analysed Quote	Hegemonic Analysis (Gramsci)
CNN Indonesia	Define Problems	"Rumours of Ridwan Kamil's affair have become a public talking point following the virality of photos and videos on social media." (CNN Indonesia, 2025)	CNN frames the issue as a result of virality, not the validity of the allegations. This reflects digital media hegemony, where the "public" is nudged to regard something as significant due to its viral nature, rather than its factual grounding.
	Diagnose Causes	"To date, there has been no official statement from Ridwan Kamil's side."	Ambiguity is presented as the source of the issue, reinforcing the notion that RK is "guilty through silence" a symbolic construction that strengthens media dominance over the narrative.
	Make Moral Judgment	"The public demands clarification from Ridwan Kamil."	Media establishes a consensus that public figures must address any viral issue. This is a form of mediated public opinion hegemony.
	Suggest Remedies	"An official explanation is needed to prevent the polemic from escalating."	CNN pushes for clarification while simultaneously prolonging the issue through repeated coverage. A hegemonic consensus is formed through the repetition of speculative narratives.
Kompas.com	Define Problems	"Ridwan Kamil breaks silence on alleged love child: This is an economically motivated slander." (Kompas.tv, 2025)	Kompas initiates the narrative from the figure's side, not the rumour. This strengthens RK's position as a victim, framing that serves elite political interests in image restoration.
	Diagnose Causes	"This case actually occurred four years ago and was already resolved."	The allegation is framed as an old fabrication being revived. Kompas redirects blame to external actors with "economic motives", creating an imaginary enemy a classic hegemonic mechanism in Gramscian theory.
	Make Moral Judgment	"We possess irrefutable evidence."	Kompas asserts RK's moral high ground. The media functions as a tool of moral legitimization for the political elite.
	Suggest Remedies	"RK has reported Lisa Mariana to the National Police."	Legal channels are presented as rational solutions. This reflects institutional hegemony normalising authority through formal institutions.

Detik.com	Define Problems	"Ridwan Kamil's Instagram account was hacked, provocative posts stirred further unrest." (Detik.com, 2025)	The framing focuses on the medium (account hacking), not the content of the allegation technological framing that subtly undermines the credibility of the accusations.
	Diagnose Causes	"The family confirms the account has been recovered and reported to the authorities."	Perpetrators are framed as "anonymous digital actors". RK is portrayed as a victim of digital, not moral, attacks.
	Make Moral Judgment	"Provocative posts that worsened the situation."	The condemnation is directed at the mode of distribution rather than the content. Morality is shifted from the figure to the act of dissemination.
	Suggest Remedies	"It has been reported to the police and the account has been restored."	Emphasis is placed on technical resolution rather than substantive clarification. Detik seeks to de-escalate rather than prolong the issue hegemonic strategy for symbolic stability.

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that CNN Indonesia perpetuates hegemony through speculative framing, reinforcing its position as an opinion leader driven by virality. Kompas.com, on the other hand, performs pro-elite hegemony by portraying Ridwan Kamil favorably, criminalizing the opposition, and restoring symbolic morality. Meanwhile, Detik.com exemplifies technocratic hegemony, focusing on digital security and stability rather than engaging with the substance of the accusations. Overall, the framing of the scandal demonstrates how the media constructs a symbolic political reality in which the private lives of political figures are strategically orchestrated to either enhance or undermine their authority. Coverage of Ridwan Kamil's affair reveals two dominant narrative patterns:

- 1) "The Slandered Figure" Framing: Some media outlets emphasize Ridwan Kamil's defense and condemn the spreaders of the rumors.
- 2) "The Double-Standard Moral Figure" Framing: Other outlets reinforce suspicions of an affair, seeking to damage his political credibility.

These two narratives underscore that the media is far from a neutral conduit of information; rather, it is an active political actor that influences public opinion. While political scandals are not a new phenomenon, their character and intensity have been radically

transformed in the digital age. Personal scandals, such as those involving extramarital affairs, now spread rapidly due to the speed and virality of social media. In Ridwan Kamil's case, the scandal did not unfold in isolation but emerged within a shifting political landscape, particularly as the nation prepared for a national contestation. This context positions the scandal as part of a broader political strategy, in which the media not only reports events but actively constructs narratives that either benefit or harm particular political actors. The media coverage of this scandal reveals two opposing poles of narrative construction. On one hand, a narrative emerges that frames Ridwan Kamil as a victim of slander a public figure unfairly targeted by politically motivated actors. On the other hand, a contrasting narrative seeks to expose the alleged moral failings of the figure, accusing him of moral hypocrisy. These narratives are far from neutral; they are shaped by editorial choices, political affiliations, and the economic interests of the media outlets involved. In this context, Gramsci's theory of hegemony becomes particularly pertinent. According to Gramsci, hegemony is the dominance of one group over another, not through direct violence, but through the creation of culturally constructed consent and consensus. In the media sphere, hegemony is realized when certain narratives are widely accepted as truth by society, often due to their mass and repeated distribution. In the case of Ridwan Kamil, the narrative surrounding the alleged affair

became a form of “truth” in the public consciousness, not because it was grounded in verifiable evidence, but due to the sheer volume and frequency with which it was presented by the media. This exemplifies symbolic hegemony, where media outlets and social media platforms work together to shape public perceptions and reinforce dominant power structures.



Figure 2. News Headline CNNIndonesia.com "Lisa Beber Kronologi Bertemu dan Soal Kehamilan, Kuasa Hukum RK Banten

From the headline above, CNN Indonesia wrote: “The rumour of Ridwan Kamil’s affair became a public conversation after photos and videos went viral on social media. However, until now Ridwan Kamil’s camp has not issued any official statement regarding the matter.” This quotation illustrates how informational uncertainty is utilised as a framing strategy to attract readers’ attention. Kompas.com, on the other hand, tends to balance the report of allegations with clarifications. For instance, in its article titled “Ridwan Kamil Opens Up about Allegation of Having Child from Affair: This is an Economically- Motivated Slander”, as shown in the news headline below

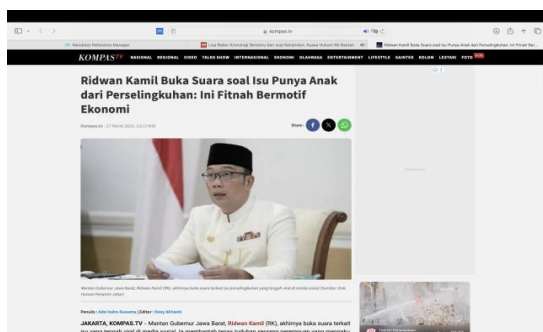


Figure 3. Kompas.com Headline "Ridwan kamil Buka Suara soal Isu Punya Anak dari Perselingkuhan: Ini Fitnah Bermotif Ekonomi

Kompas presents a relatively strong narrative of clarification and defence in favour of Ridwan Kamil. In the article, Kompas includes an official statement from Ridwan Kamil: “This case actually occurred four years ago and has already been resolved with irrefutable evidence.” This reflects the media’s effort to maintain balance, yet the issue remains in the public sphere, reinforcing the scandal narrative in the audience’s mind. According to the framing theory developed by Robert Entman, narrative construction involves four elements: defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgements, and suggesting remedies. In the context of Ridwan Kamil’s scandal coverage, the issue is framed as a moral crisis; the cause is attributed to the lifestyle of political elites; the moral judgement relies on conservative social standards; and the proposed remedy is either public condemnation or official clarification.

Through this framework, the media does not merely report events, but actively constructs a social reality that significantly shapes public perception. The logic of virality in digital media further exacerbates the situation. In many cases, scandalous news spreads faster than policy coverage. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok serve as new battlegrounds where competing narratives vie for public attention. In Ridwan Kamil’s case, news about the hacking of his Instagram account and the claims made by Lisa Mariana spread rapidly within hours, creating a snowball effect that was difficult to control. This situation demonstrates that scandals are not solely a product of mainstream media, but also the outcome of complex interactions between traditional and new media. In this regard, Detik.com also played a role in amplifying the scandal coverage by reporting in detail the hacking of Ridwan Kamil’s Instagram account. In one of its reports titled “Ridwan Kamil’s Instagram Account Restored after Being Hacked”:

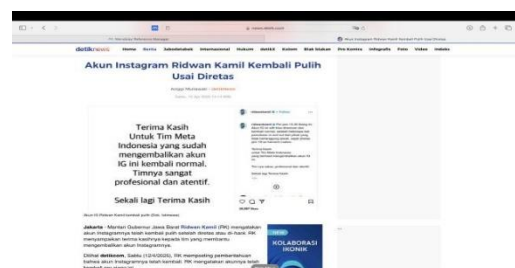


Figure 4. Detik.com Headline " Akun Instagram Ridwan Kamil Kembali Pulih Usai Diredas"

Detik.com wrote: “After Ridwan Kamil’s official Instagram account was hacked and provocative messages emerged that escalated the situation, the family confirmed that the account had been restored and reported to the authorities.” This statement shows how online media reinforce a dramatic atmosphere while also facilitating the spread of disorganized narratives in the public sphere. The research confirms that this scandal went viral due to the logic of mediatization. In this context:

- 1) Media construct news based on viral appeal rather than journalistic values.
- 2) Personal scandals attract more clicks and comments than government policies or programs.
- 3) Digital platforms (social media) reinforce narrative distribution based on emotional algorithms (anger, fear, moral outrage).

In other words, Ridwan Kamil is trapped not only in a personal scandal but also in an algorithmic logic that amplifies issues beyond the control of formal narratives.

The Duality of Media: Arena and Political Actor

Media in this context function both as arenas and political actors. As an arena, media provide space for various actors to deliver messages and compete in shaping public opinion. As an actor, media have their own agendas, whether economic (traffic and clicks) or ideological (linked to political affiliations of media owners). In such situations, journalistic objectivity becomes relative. What unfolds is a struggle for narrative dominance, where political actors who control the media have greater capacity to shape image and influence public opinion. Ridwan Kamil’s case also illustrates how media play a role in upholding certain moral values. In much of the reporting, the alleged affair is positioned as a serious moral violation, which implicitly undermines the political legitimacy of the figure involved. In this way, morality becomes a powerful political weapon to attack opponents. This shows that the media do not merely disseminate information, but also delineate moral boundaries that define who is deemed fit or unfit to lead. Political scandals tied to personal morality have a highly destructive potential. This is due to the tendency of Indonesian society to view leaders as moral figures. When a leader’s moral image is tarnished, public trust also diminishes. In Ridwan

Kamil’s case, public opinion became clearly polarized. Some supported and believed his clarifications, while others mocked and believed the accusations without verification. This polarization is not only caused by news content but also by selective information consumption, facilitated by social media algorithms. Social media algorithms operate on the logic of attention. Content that provokes emotion is more likely to appear on users’ timelines. Therefore, sensational or controversial narratives that trigger anger are more likely to go viral. Personal scandals like Ridwan Kamil’s suit this logic perfectly. As a result, this issue dominated public consumption for weeks, while more important matters such as public policy or development programs were sidelined. The analysis also shows that this scandal involves what is known as character assassination. This is a political communication strategy in which a person’s reputation is destroyed through attacks on personal aspects, usually carried out systematically and repeatedly.

In Ridwan Kamil’s case, the affair allegation became a tool to damage a personal image built over years. Even if the allegation is not legally proven, its political effect persists. This proves that in modern politics, perception outweighs facts. This research also finds the existence of ideological bias in media reporting. Media outlets affiliated with Ridwan Kamil’s political opponents tend to allocate more space to negative coverage, while neutral or positively affiliated media provide more room for clarification. This pattern aligns with the propaganda model proposed by Herman and Chomsky, which argues that media operate as hegemonic tools serving the interests of capital and power. In addition, this case demonstrates how social media accelerates political polarization. Society is divided into groups that are suspicious and hostile toward one another based on the narratives they believe. This creates an information ecosystem highly vulnerable to disinformation and manipulation. In such conditions, media literacy becomes critical. Unfortunately, media literacy among Indonesians remains low. Many cannot distinguish between fact and opinion, between news and propaganda. This strengthens the dominance of particular narratives systematically constructed by media and disseminated through digital algorithms.

Key Findings

The key findings from this research are that the media play two simultaneous roles:

- 1) As an arena for political discourse, where various narratives and interpretations compete for public attention.
- 2) As a political actor, actively steering narratives based on political affiliations, business interests, or specific ideologies.

For instance, media affiliated with political rivals of Ridwan Kamil tend to intensify negative framing. This reinforces Herman and Chomsky's "propaganda model," which posits that media ownership and economic-political ties significantly influence news content. From these overall findings, the Ridwan Kamil affair scandal is not merely about personal morality, but a symbolic battleground involving political actors, the media, and the public. The media no longer act as guardians of democracy (watchdogs), but rather as sites of power contestation shaped by economic, ideological, and technological logics. Within this context, it becomes crucial to develop a new approach in political communication studies—one that integrates discourse analysis, hegemony theory, and a critique of algorithmic logic in information distribution.

Discussion

In the context of this research, the discussion on media hegemony in the political scandal involving Ridwan Kamil aligns with the theories and findings of various scholars. Antonio Gramsci, in his theory of hegemony, posits that social domination in modern society is not solely achieved through physical force but also through ideological consensus shaped by the media. As noted by Forgacs (2020), Gramsci describes how the media can function as a tool to create ideological agreement that supports dominant power structures. This study confirms that media in Indonesia do not merely relay facts but actively construct narratives through framing, leading to a symbolic construction of a political figure's morality, which plays a crucial role in shaping their political legitimacy. The framing approach, as proposed by Entman (1993), is also highly relevant in analyzing how the media define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and propose solutions. In the case of Ridwan Kamil's scandal, the

media did not simply report the issue but also directed public opinion by emphasizing personal morality, influencing how the public perceived him. This aligns with Irawan's (2021) findings, which emphasize that in the post-truth era, emotions often outweigh rational facts, making media narratives based on political scandals more likely to shape public opinion than fact-based policy arguments. Thus, this research underscores how the media plays a key role in shaping society's view of a politician's morality, which in turn reinforces or undermines their political position. Additionally, the findings of this study support Kusuma's (2021) argument about the significant role of the media in framing political scandals, which not only impacts public perception but also strengthens power structures through selective information dissemination. In this case, outlets like Kompas.com and Detik.com presented differing narratives one positioned Ridwan Kamil as a victim of slander, while the other emphasized the allegations of an affair demonstrating the ideological bias shaped by political affiliations and economic interests of media owners. Overall, this research confirms how the media does not just serve as a conduit for information but as an active political actor in shaping social and political reality. Media outlets leverage scandal narratives to either bolster or diminish political legitimacy, as highlighted in Herman and Chomsky's (2018) propaganda model. Political scandals, especially those involving personal morality, have a significant impact on public opinion, particularly in the digital age where news spreads rapidly via social media, reinforcing public polarization and distrust in the media itself.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this research indicate that the 2025 scandal involving Ridwan Kamil's alleged extramarital affair serves as a clear example of how the media in Indonesia function not merely as passive conveyors of information but as active agents in shaping, directing, and even destabilizing political power. This study, using Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, critical discourse analysis, and framing analysis, illustrates how scandal narratives are constructed and disseminated, operating within a hegemonic framework that intertwines power, ideology, and symbolic domination.

Personal scandals, particularly those involving infidelity, spread rapidly in the digital age, amplified by the reach and speed of social media. In the case of Ridwan Kamil, media coverage revealed two predominant narrative poles: one framing him as a victim of slander and the other portraying him as a public figure with a morally questionable private life. These narratives are not neutral; they are shaped by editorial decisions, political affiliations, and the economic interests of the media outlets involved. For example, CNN Indonesia adopts a speculative tone, Kompas.com attempts to balance the discourse by including official clarifications, while Detik.com amplifies the scandal by focusing on the hacking of Ridwan Kamil's Instagram account. Using Robert Entman's framing theory, this scandal is framed as a moral crisis, with the cause linked to the lifestyle of political elites. The moral judgment is rooted in conservative social standards, and the proposed solutions range from public condemnation to formal clarification.

The viral dynamics of digital media exacerbate this situation, as sensational stories tend to spread more quickly than policy-related content, especially across social media platforms. The media act both as an arena, where competing political actors struggle to shape public opinion, and as a political actor, driven by economic and ideological agendas. In this environment, journalistic objectivity becomes relative, as media outlets engage in a battle for narrative dominance. Moreover, the media play a significant role in upholding moral values, framing issues like extramarital affairs as moral transgressions that can undermine a political figure's legitimacy. Scandals tied to personal morality have immense destructive potential, especially in a society like Indonesia, where political leaders are still expected to embody moral integrity. The polarization of public opinion surrounding Ridwan Kamil was not solely driven by the media content itself but was also influenced by selective consumption of information, reinforced by social media algorithms. This research also highlights character assassination as a political communication strategy aimed at damaging reputations by attacking personal vulnerabilities. The ideological bias in media coverage aligns with Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model, which argues that media often serve the interests of

powerful elites. In conclusion, the Ridwan Kamil scandal illustrates that the media no longer function strictly as democratic watchdogs; rather, they have become contested spaces of power, shaped by economic, ideological, and technological imperatives. Consequently, it is essential to develop a new approach in political communication studies that integrates discourse analysis, hegemony theory, and a critical examination of algorithmic logic in the dissemination of information.

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