

## Ethical Discourse on Artificial Intelligence in Media Reporting A Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) Approach

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### Abstract

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) within the digital media landscape has generated increasingly complex ethical discourses, not only at the level of policy and institutional frameworks but also within the everyday experiences of users. This phenomenon is significant as media functions not merely as a channel of information, but as a powerful force shaping how individuals interpret, experience, and negotiate the meaning of technology in social life. This study aims to explore how ethical discourses surrounding AI in media coverage are interpreted through individuals' subjective experiences. Employing a qualitative approach with an interpretative phenomenological design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, digital observation, and document analysis involving ten participants who are active social media users. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis integrated with a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective. The findings reveal three central patterns: ethical ambivalence between convenience and anxiety, tensions between media framing and personal experience, and the negotiation of identity and self-value in the context of AI advancement. These results indicate that AI ethics is not merely understood as a normative construct, but as a lived and dynamic experience shaped by contradictions and ongoing meaning-making processes. Theoretically, this study extends CDA by incorporating the dimension of subjective experience into discourse analysis. Practically, it offers implications for strengthening critical digital literacy, developing more context-sensitive policies, and designing educational frameworks that are responsive to the ethical challenges of emerging technologies. Furthermore, this study opens new avenues for exploring the interconnections between technology, discourse, and identity formation in the digital era.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis, AI Ethics, Media Discourse, Lived Experience, Digital Literacy, Media Framing, Identity Construction, Artificial Intelligence Discourse



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### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the rapid development of digital technology particularly the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) and social media has significantly transformed the ways in which discourse is constructed, disseminated, and interpreted in everyday life. Within digital spaces such as Twitter, TikTok, and online news platforms, discourse is no longer merely textual; rather, it has evolved into a dynamic arena where meaning, ideology, and power are continuously negotiated. For many groups, especially younger generations and active social media users, engagement with digital discourse is not simply a communicative act, but also a process through which identity is formed and social reality is understood. This phenomenon is evident in the increasing discourse surrounding AI in Indonesian digital media. Preliminary observations of user comments on platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok reveal a polarization of narratives: while some users perceive AI as an innovation that enhances efficiency and productivity, others interpret it as a threat to employment, ethics, and human authenticity. Exploratory interviews with several university students (n = 5) further indicate a sense of ambivalence in their perceptions of AI on one hand, they utilize it as an academic support tool,

yet on the other, they express concern about its potential impact on critical thinking abilities. These narratives suggest that AI discourse is far from neutral; rather, it is embedded with ideological tensions, emotional responses, and subjective experiences.

The urgency of examining this issue is reinforced by the rapid expansion of AI-related discourse at both global and local levels. Globally, debates surrounding the ethics, regulation, and societal implications of AI have become central topics within communication and linguistic studies. At the same time, in the Indonesian context, digital discourse often reflects disparities in digital literacy, cultural diversity, and the influence of algorithmic systems in shaping public opinion. Consequently, understanding how such discourse is constructed and interpreted by individuals is essential for uncovering deeper social processes. Recent studies over the past five years have explored discourse analysis in relation to digital media and AI. For instance, Naureen and Shaukat (2026) demonstrate that AI-generated media content contributes to the construction of cultural identity, while Zeng et al. (2026) highlight how global media frame AI within political and power-related contexts through critical discourse analysis. Similarly, Paganoni and Becerra (2026) reveal that media narratives on big data and AI often reproduce institutional interests. Other studies, such as Kopf (2026), emphasize the importance of critical perspectives in understanding discourse within social media environments, while Periñán-Pascual (2026) discusses the role of AI in facilitating qualitative discourse analysis, particularly in interpreting emotions and meaning within digital corpora. Additionally, Mukhtyar et al. (2026) show how user-generated comments on social media reflect broader social constructions related to contemporary issues, including digital ethics and online behavior.

Despite these contributions, a significant research gap remains. Much of the existing literature tends to focus on large-scale textual or corpus-based analyses, with limited attention given to the subjective dimensions of experience, meaning-making processes, and the nuanced dynamics of social interaction underlying discourse production. In-depth qualitative approaches such as interviews, participatory observation, and narrative analysis remain underutilized in exploring how individuals genuinely interpret and respond to AI discourse in their everyday lives. In other words, the dimension of lived experience within digital discourse has yet to be comprehensively examined. Based on this background, the present study aims to analyze the construction and interpretation of AI discourse in social media from the perspective of individual lived experiences, employing a qualitative discourse analysis approach. The study focuses on how social media users construct narratives, negotiate meanings, and reproduce ideologies within their digital interactions. This research is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of experience-centered critical discourse analysis, and practically to enhancing critical digital literacy in navigating discourse in the era of artificial intelligence.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with an interpretative phenomenological design (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis/IPA). This approach is selected because the study focuses on exploring individuals' subjective experiences in interpreting artificial intelligence (AI) discourse within social media contexts. Such experiences involve perceptions, emotions, and meaning-making processes that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measures. Phenomenology enables the researcher to understand participants' lived experiences within the complex socio-digital environment in which discourse is produced and consumed. (Lim, 2025; Cabanillas-García & Sánchez-Gómez, 2025).

### Participants and Research Context

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, based on their relevance to the research phenomenon. The inclusion criteria consisted of: (1) individuals aged 18–30

years, particularly university students or active social media users; (2) active engagement with digital platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, or Instagram; and (3) prior experience in using or discussing AI technologies, including tools such as ChatGPT. A total of 8–12 participants were involved, following the principle of data saturation in qualitative research. To ensure a broader range of perspectives, snowball sampling was also applied by asking initial participants to recommend other individuals with relevant experiences. The study was situated within the context of digital environments (social media platforms) and academic settings, recognizing that online interactions constitute an integral part of contemporary social practices. This context is particularly significant as AI discourse evolves dynamically within digital ecosystems shaped by platform algorithms and participatory culture.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Data were collected through multiple qualitative methods to ensure depth and richness:

1. In-depth interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of AI discourse. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was recorded using digital devices with participants' consent.
2. Digital observation (digital ethnography). The researcher observed interactions and discursive practices on social media, including comments, posts, and discussion threads, to capture the contextual dynamics of discourse production.
3. Document analysis. Relevant documents, such as online news articles, social media posts, and digital content related to AI, were analyzed as part of the discourse data.

All interview data were transcribed verbatim using transcription software and subsequently verified to ensure accuracy and consistency.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis combined with open coding procedures, integrated with principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The analytical process involved several stages:

1. Data familiarization through repeated reading of transcripts and digital materials
2. Open coding to identify initial meaning units
3. Axial coding to organize codes into thematic categories
4. Selective coding to develop overarching themes
5. Discursive interpretation to examine relationships between language, power, and ideology

To facilitate systematic analysis, the study utilized NVivo software for data management, coding, and visualization of thematic relationships. The use of such tools enhances rigor and transparency in qualitative research, particularly in analyzing complex digital discourse. (AdeyinkaOjo, 2025; Dahal, 2025).

### **Trustworthiness and Rigor**

The validity and trustworthiness of the data were ensured through four key criteria:

- **Credibility:** achieved through data triangulation (interviews, observations, and documents) and member checking with participants
- **Transferability:** ensured by providing detailed contextual descriptions to allow applicability in other settings
- **Dependability:** maintained through an audit trail documenting all stages of the research process

- Confirmability: supported by reflexivity and grounding interpretations in empirical data

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study adhered to established ethical standards in qualitative research. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and provided informed consent prior to participation. Their identities were protected through the use of pseudonyms, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were also given the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. All collected data were securely stored and used exclusively for academic purposes. (Mutanana & Shoko, 2026; Almusaed et al., 2025).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The discourse on the ethics of artificial intelligence (AI) in media coverage cannot be understood merely as the representation of information; rather, it constitutes a social practice through which individuals construct, negotiate, and internalize meanings related to technology, risk, and human values. Within this context, the theoretical framework of this study is directed toward examining how media discourse not only reflects reality but actively shapes public perception of AI. To achieve this, the study integrates three principal theoretical approaches: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), mediatization and framing theory, and AI ethics discourse.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): Language, Power, and Ideology**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly as developed by Fairclough and van Dijk, conceptualizes discourse as a site where power relations and ideologies are produced and reproduced through language. In the context of AI-related media coverage, CDA provides a critical lens to examine how ethical issues are constructed for instance, whether AI is framed as a threat, a neutral tool, or a symbol of progress and how such representations shape public perception and emotional responses. Recent studies suggest that AI discourse in global media is inherently non-neutral and often influenced by political, economic, and institutional interests (Zeng et al., 2026; Paganoni & Becerra, 2026). Narratives portraying AI as a threat to employment, for example, may amplify collective anxiety, while narratives emphasizing innovation tend to align with technological optimism and industry agendas. Within participants' lived experiences, this duality often manifests as ambivalence: individuals simultaneously perceive AI as beneficial and concerning. CDA enables the researcher to interpret this ambivalence not merely as individual inconsistency, but as the outcome of competing ideological forces embedded within public discourse.

### **Mediatization and Framing Theory: Constructing Social Reality**

The second perspective draws on mediatization and framing theory, which explains how media actively constructs social reality rather than simply transmitting information. Framing theory emphasizes that media selectively highlights certain aspects of reality, thereby shaping how audiences interpret specific issues. Recent scholarship indicates that media framing of AI frequently emphasizes ethical concerns such as algorithmic bias, data privacy, and labor displacement (Li et al., 2026; Elmholdt et al., 2025). However, these representations do not always align with users' lived experiences. For instance, a student may perceive AI as a practical learning tool, while media narratives tend to foreground risks such as academic dishonesty or technological dependency. This discrepancy creates a tension between mediated representations and everyday experience, which becomes a critical site for qualitative inquiry. Furthermore, mediatization theory highlights that contemporary social reality is increasingly shaped by media logic and digital algorithms (Kopf, 2026). Consequently, AI discourse is not

produced solely by journalists, but also by platform infrastructures that determine visibility, amplification, and the circulation of narratives.

### **AI Ethics Discourse: Values, Responsibility, and Humanity**

The third perspective is grounded in **AI ethics discourse**, which focuses on how moral values such as fairness, accountability, and transparency are constructed within public discussions of technology. Recent literature demonstrates that AI ethics discourse is often normative in nature and dominated by institutional actors, including governments and technology corporations (Floridi et al., 2022; Jobin et al., 2021). However, there is growing recognition that the voices of everyday users are underrepresented in these discussions (Naureen & Shaukat, 2026). This gap creates a divide between formal ethical frameworks and lived ethical experiences. In this study, participants' narratives such as discomfort regarding data privacy or concerns about dependency highlight how ethical considerations emerge in situated, experiential contexts rather than solely within formal guidelines.

### **Theoretical Comparison and Positioning**

While these three approaches offer complementary insights, they differ in their analytical focus. CDA emphasizes the interplay between language, power, and ideology; framing and mediatization theories focus on how media constructs and shapes social reality; and AI ethics discourse addresses the normative dimensions of technological development. This study adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary analytical lens due to its capacity to integrate linguistic analysis with broader socio-political contexts. CDA not only examines media texts but also connects them to the lived experiences of individuals, enabling a deeper understanding of how discourse is produced, circulated, and interpreted. The framing and AI ethics perspectives are employed as complementary lenses to enrich the analysis, particularly in examining how ethical issues are highlighted and how moral values are embedded within discourse.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Based on this theoretical positioning, the study conceptualizes AI ethics discourse as a living social practice, shaped by the interaction between media texts, power structures, and individual experiences. Data are not treated as objective facts, but as socially constructed meanings emerging from specific contexts. In analyzing the data, the researcher adopts a multi-layered interpretive approach:

1. examining how media language frames ethical issues related to AI at the textual level;
2. identifying the ideological and institutional forces underlying these representations at the level of social practice; and
3. connecting these findings with participants' lived experiences, emotions, and interpretations.

For example, when a participant expresses that AI facilitates academic tasks yet raises concerns about fairness, this statement is interpreted not merely as a personal opinion, but as a reflection of the interaction between media discourse, ethical narratives, and personal experience. Thus, this framework positions participants as active agents who continuously negotiate meaning within broader discursive structures. It allows for a nuanced understanding of how AI ethics is experienced, interpreted, and contested in everyday life, revealing the dynamic interplay between discourse, technology, and human subjectivity.

## **RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The data analysis was conducted using a phenomenological thematic approach, focusing on participants' subjective experiences in interpreting the ethical discourse of artificial intelligence (AI) in media contexts. The findings reveal three major interconnected themes:

1. ethical ambivalence between convenience and anxiety,
2. tension between media framing and personal experience, and
3. the negotiation of identity and self-value in the age of AI.

These themes do not emerge as isolated categories; rather, they form a dynamic experiential trajectory from initial fascination with AI, to reflective unease, and eventually to deeper existential negotiation.

### **Theme 1: Ethical Ambivalence Between Convenience and Anxiety**

This theme reflects participants' simultaneous sense of benefit and discomfort in using AI. The experience frequently arises in academic contexts, where AI is utilized as a tool to support tasks, yet evokes moral uncertainty. One participant (P3) expressed: "Honestly, AI is very helpful. But sometimes I feel like I'm 'cheating,' even though everyone is using it. So I'm confused whether it's actually wrong or just my own feeling." This statement reveals not merely a simple moral dilemma, but a deeper internal tension between efficiency and integrity. Participants do not fully reject AI, yet they are unable to embrace it without a sense of unease. Another participant (P7) stated: "When I see the news, AI is often described as something that could replace humans. But at the same time, I find myself becoming dependent on it. That's what makes me uneasy." This ambivalence suggests that ethical discourse surrounding AI is not experienced as a clear or stable guideline, but rather as a fluid and contradictory process. Participants oscillate between practical necessity and moral concern, without arriving at a definitive resolution.

### **Theme 2: Tension Between Media Framing and Personal Experience**

The second theme highlights a discrepancy between how AI is portrayed in media narratives and how it is experienced in everyday life. Media representations often adopt dramatic tones—either utopian or dystopian—which do not always align with participants' lived realities. Participant P1 noted: "In the news, AI is often discussed in terms of risks, like manipulation or job loss. But in my experience, it's just a tool that helps. Sometimes it feels like the media exaggerates things." However, this discrepancy does not lead to a complete rejection of media discourse. Instead, it triggers a reflective process. As P5 explained: "At first, I used AI casually. But after seeing a lot of discussions about its risks and ethical issues, I started to rethink how I use it. It created a kind of awareness I didn't have before." These narratives indicate that media framing continues to exert influence, even when it does not fully correspond with personal experience. Participants occupy a position of partial autonomy, where they actively interpret, negotiate, and sometimes resist dominant narratives, yet remain shaped by them. This theme demonstrates that AI ethics discourse functions as an internal dialogical space, where public narratives and personal experiences intersect sometimes reinforcing each other, but often generating tension.

### **Theme 3: Negotiating Identity and Self-Value in the Age of AI**

The third theme reveals a deeper and more existential dimension of participants' experiences: the impact of AI discourse on their sense of identity and self-worth. The use of AI does not only influence practices, but also reshapes how individuals perceive their own abilities, authenticity, and value. Participant P2 reflected: "Sometimes I wonder, if everything can be assisted by AI, then what is my value as a human? What is truly 'mine'?" This statement points to a subtle yet significant crisis of meaning, where the boundaries between human capability and machine assistance become increasingly blurred. Similarly, P6 stated:

“I try to be careful when using AI because I’m afraid of losing my own abilities. But at the same time, if I don’t use it, I feel like I’m falling behind.” Here, a paradox emerges: AI is perceived both as a necessity for remaining relevant and as a potential threat to authenticity. Participants are not fully able to redefine their identities, yet they become increasingly aware of the shifting nature of selfhood in a technologically mediated world.

### Thematic Summary Table

| Main Theme           | Subtheme                         | Core Meaning                                    |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| Ethical Ambivalence  | Convenience vs. moral discomfort | Tension between efficiency and integrity        |
| Media vs. Experience | Framing vs. lived reality        | Ongoing negotiation of meaning                  |
| Identity Negotiation | Authenticity vs. dependency      | Transformation of self-perception in the AI era |

### Thematic Continuity

These three themes form a coherent and interconnected narrative. Ethical ambivalence (Theme 1) emerges not in isolation, but within the influence of media discourse (Theme 2). As this tension intensifies, participants begin to reflect more deeply on their own identities and values (Theme 3). Rather than producing linear or simplified conclusions, the findings reveal that participants’ experiences are fragmented, evolving, and continuously negotiated. The ethical discourse of AI is not internalized as a fixed framework, but rather lived as an ongoing process shaped by practical needs, media influence, and the search for meaning in a rapidly changing digital environment.

### CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the ethical discourse of artificial intelligence (AI) in media coverage is not interpreted in a singular or uniform manner; rather, it is understood through complex and layered processes of meaning-making. The three central patterns identified ethical ambivalence, tension between media framing and personal experience, and the negotiation of identity and self-value indicate that engagement with AI extends beyond functional use, encompassing emotional, moral, and even existential dimensions. Individuals do not merely accept or reject dominant discourses; instead, they actively negotiate meanings within a landscape of often contradictory narratives. From these findings, a key insight emerges: AI ethics should not be viewed solely as a set of abstract normative principles, but as a form of lived ethics an experience that is continuously shaped by everyday interactions with technology. In this sense, ambivalence is not a sign of indecision, but rather reflects a critical awareness of the complexities embedded in contemporary technological discourse. This study also extends the application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by demonstrating its relevance not only for analyzing texts, but also for understanding how power, ideology, and media narratives are internalized and experienced at the individual level. Conceptually, this research contributes by bridging macro-level discourse analysis with micro-level lived experience, thereby enriching existing studies that predominantly focus on media texts. Practically, the findings suggest several implications. For policy makers, there is a need to develop AI governance frameworks that consider public perceptions and lived experiences, rather than relying solely on technical or regulatory perspectives. For educational contexts, particularly in higher education, there is a need to integrate critical and reflective digital ethics into curricula, enabling students to engage thoughtfully with emerging technologies. Furthermore, for digital literacy initiatives, the study underscores the importance of fostering critical awareness of media framing, empowering individuals to actively interpret and negotiate discourse. This is also closely related to issues of mental well-being and identity, as the pressure to adapt to technological change may generate anxiety and uncertainty regarding self-worth.

Nevertheless, this study is not without limitations. First, the research context is limited to a specific group primarily students and active social media users thus restricting the generalizability of the findings to other populations, such as industry professionals or individuals with lower levels of digital literacy. Second, the relatively small and homogeneous sample limits the diversity of perspectives captured. Third, the time constraints of the study may have affected the depth of exploration, particularly in capturing the longitudinal evolution of participants' meaning-making processes. Future research is therefore encouraged to expand the scope of participants across diverse social, cultural, and professional backgrounds. The use of alternative methodological approaches, such as in-depth digital ethnography or mixed-method designs incorporating corpus analysis, may provide a more comprehensive understanding of AI discourse. Further studies could also explore underexamined dimensions, including the relationship between AI discourse and social inequality, or the role of platform algorithms in shaping the visibility and distribution of ethical narratives. Ultimately, this study highlights that understanding the ethics of artificial intelligence requires moving beyond formal regulations and elite discourse, toward an engagement with human experience as it is lived, felt, and negotiated. It is within this space that discourse becomes meaningful not merely as text, but as an ongoing process through which individuals seek to make sense of rapid technological transformation.

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