

Online news regarding the spread of the omicron variant in Southeast Asia

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Abstract Cases of Omicron-type Covid-19 have increased substantially worldwide. With the opening of the Omicron 68 case as of 30 December 2021, Indonesia has become the fourth largest country in Southeast Asia in terms of Covid cases. Singapore is in the first place, with 134 Omicron instances. This study aimed to find online news discourse regarding the spread of the Omicron variant in Southeast Asia. The method used in this research is van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis on online news via Kompas.com, news.abs-cbn.com, and channelnewsasia.com during December 2021. This study concludes that the three media reported the spread of the Omicron variant in the text dimension and tried to bring up vaccination efforts. In the dimension of social cognition, ensuring public health for the sake of survival is the ideology that is built. In the context dimension, the social context is built by providing equal opportunities to all people in getting the right to get vaccinated so that matters relating to health issues also have an impact on the economic aspect in line with the national economic recovery.

Keywords: online news; Omicron; Southeast Asia.

INTRODUCTION

One of the health problems that has grabbed the public's attention in 2020 is Covid-19. Various media have also highlighted the problem because it is considered a dangerous (Dwiputra, 2021). The global Covid-19 pandemic has affected various industries (de Leon *et al.*, 2021) and resulted in unprecedented global health and socioeconomic crises. People are unaware of the applicable regulations and believe the pandemic is not the main issue. As a result, this condition has exacerbated the Covid-19 pandemic situation in Indonesia (Tawai *et al.*, 2021).

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In education, it is well documented that students forced to adopt online learning methods during the Covid-19 pandemic felt the most bored, difficult to punish, lazy, and dishonest. As a result, teachers and students do not have a good emotional relationship, which is significantly different when using offline learning modalities. When the pandemic is over, consumers choose to use an offline learning system (Mujiono & Susilo, 2021). Because students believe they cannot easily monitor the progress of distant learning, get learning resources, or study content, the change in learning methods from face-to-face learning to distance learning as a result of the Covid-19 epidemic is not acceptable. Overall, students are dissatisfied with the remote learning approach they are now through and the lecturer's capacity to teach material via distance learning on both the technological and lecturer sides (Napitupulu, 2020). During the Covid-19 pandemic, students, teachers, and parents faced challenges from online teaching and learning activities. The challenges include a lack of technological mastery, additional internet quota fees, additional work for parents accompanying children to school, communication and socialisation between students., teachers and parents being reduced, and teachers' working hours becoming unlimited because they must communicate and coordinate with other teachers (Purwanto *et al.*, 2020).

In the economic realm, after the Covid-19 outbreak, the emergence of an economic recession was the impact of various policies to prevent the spread of the virus, such as extreme lockdown policies in Large-Scale Social Restrictions (Hidayat *et al.*, 2021). Reduced activities outside the home due to the call to stay at home, the online-based economy benefits more than the offline-based economy (Soekiman *et al.*, 2021). The impact of the Covid-19 outbreak has resulted in a lack of investor confidence in the market, causing the market to be bearish. To revive the economy, fiscal and monetary strategic measures are urgently required. As the Covid-19 outbreak spreads, the market becomes more volatile in a negative way. Furthermore, the global economic slowdown, particularly in export activity, has substantially influenced the Indonesian economy. This is based on a sensitivity study that shows how the present global economic slowdown affects Indonesia's economic growth (Nasution *et al.*, 2020). This continues until the emergence of a new variant of Covid-19, one of which is the Omicron variant.

The Omicron variety (B.1.1.529) was discovered for the first time in November 2021, was promptly labelled a VOC by the World Health Organization (WHO), and is swiftly spreading worldwide. Compared to the previously described SARS-CoV-2 strain, the Omicron variation had 37 substitution residues in the learning protein on the dominant haplotype (Piccoli *et al.*, 2020; Greaney *et al.*, 2021). Omicron was found to be immune to infection, vaccine-evoked antibodies, and therapeutic monoclonal antibodies. Nine mutations are located in the receptor-binding motif (RBM), a subdomain of RBD that interacts

directly with the host receptor, ACE2 (Walls *et al.*, 2020). This Omicron Variant is a novel Covid-19 Variant that indicates that Omicron is associated with a higher risk of reinfection. According to the World Health Organization, this new variety has experienced many mutations compared to other variants (Susilawati *et al.*, 2022). The Omicron variation is linked to a propensity to resist prior infection immunity. In contrast, there is no indication of immunological escape associated with the Beta or Delta mutations in a population-wide epidemiological study (Pulliam *et al.*, 2021).

The Ministry of Health announced the results of an investigation into the origin of the entry of the Omicron variant of the Covid-19 virus into Indonesia. As a result, the first case of Omicron entering Indonesia was allegedly caused by an Indonesian citizen (WNI) who arrived from Nigeria on 27 November 2021 (Wardhani, 2021). In Indonesia, there were 503 cases of the Omicron form of the Covid-19 virus (B.1.1.529). As of Thursday, 13 January 2022, this figure places Indonesia as the country with the second highest number of Omicron instances in Southeast Asia. Singapore continues to be the Southeast Asian country with the largest number of Omicron cases, total cases reaching 715. Thailand followed Indonesia with 348 cases of Omicron, and Malaysia is in second place with 282 cases. Then came 46 and 43 cases, respectively, from Cambodia and the Philippines. With 12 cases, Brunei Darussalam has the second lowest number of Omicron cases in Southeast Asia. Lastly, Vietnam has only seven cases. According to GISAID research, the world's Omicron Covid-19 has been found in 116 countries. There are 301,629 documented occurrences of this Omicron variation (Jayani, 2022). The Omicron variant, which includes the Delta variant, has a transmission speed of up to 5 times faster than the previous variant (Torjesen, 2021; Dyer, 2021). More specifically, this research focuses on online media in building news related to the spread of Omicron.

Online media is the result of the study of communication technology that provides users with media that serve as interpersonal communication tools, also known as interactive media, in which the receiver and sender can participate. News, such as e-journals, photos, sounds, and videos, can all be found online. Print media, on the other hand, only displays text and images. Online is the language of the Internet. It means that information can be accessed anywhere and anytime as long as it is connected to the network (Aisyah *et al.*, 2015). The press uses the media to convey information that already exists, one of which is news (Senova, 2016). Online media in charge of making information in the form of news regularly must be able to reveal a public event.

The online media Kompas.com and detik.com have a positive tendency to respond to the emergence of regulations regarding restrictions on foreign entry permits and residence permits. The narrative shows that the regulation issuance is an effort to prevent the

entry of the Omicron Covid-19 variant into the Indonesian Territory (Widyanto & Putri, 2021). Regarding Omicron, the government has promised to enforce strict rules before introducing the new virus. Some preventive measures include limiting international flights, reporting cases of Covid-19 patients regularly, and explaining the relevance of Covid-19 based on the latest research (Mujtaba *et al.*, 2022). Based on several previous studies on the spread of Omicron variants in the media, previous studies only discussed media coverage in Indonesia. Meanwhile, this study was expanded to the scope of Southeast Asia by involving 3 online media reports. This study aimed to find online news discourse regarding the spread of the Omicron variant in Southeast Asia.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach, using van Dijk's critical discourse analysis method. Qualitative research concerns test procedures and the idea that some individuals or groups have emerged due to social or human problems (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Susilo, 2021). This study uses Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis paradigm because it generally relates textual analysis, focusing on texts and a more systematic approach to how a document is constructed, not about individuals but also across cultures. Consequently, the key takeaway from this discourse analysis is the integration of these three elements as a single unit (Figure 1).

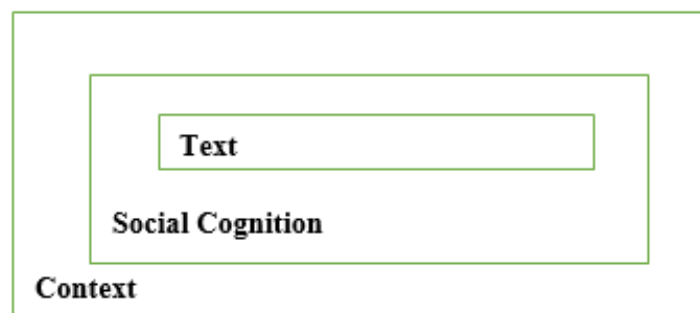


Figure 1. Teun A. van Dijk's discourse analysis framework model
Source: Eriyanto (2001)

One of the most important ways to think about discourse is to recognise that it is more than just a collection of signals or parts of a text; it is a process that has been used to develop systematically handled objects (Mills, 1997). The components of this theoretical approach are divided into three stages by Van Dijk (Table 1): macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure in this method.

Table 1. Van Dijk's Analytical Components

Macro Structure A text's global/general meaning that can be observed in a topic/theme departs from a particular text.
Superstructure Text frame, such as introduction, body, conclusion, and conclusion.
Microstructure The local meaning of a text can be observed from the choice of words, sentences, and word styles used in a text.

Source: Eriyanto (2001)

This analysis can help us understand the structure of the text. The macrostructure of a text is an important meaning that can be discussed in a document by subject or theme. The superstructure is a feature of discourse that refers to the context of the text in which other parts have been preserved and assembled. The microstructure is a meaningful discourse that can be interpreted as phrases, paragraphs, prepositions, sub-sentences, and descriptions of a small part of a text.

Table 2. Elements of van Dijk's Discourse

DISCOURSE STRUCTURE	OBSERVED MATTERS	ELEMENTS
Macrostructure	THEMATIC Theme/topic raised in a text.	Topics
Superstructure	SCHEME How the news sections and sequences are being schematised in the full text of the news.	Scheme
Microstructure	SEMANTICS The meaning that wants to be emphasised in the is news by providing details on one side or making explicit forms on the one hand and reducing the other.	Background, details
	SYNTAX How a sentence (form, arrangement) is chosen.	Sentence form, coherence, preposition
	STYLISTICS How a word is selected as part of the news text.	Lexicon
	RHETORICS How and in what way the emphasis is carries out.	Graphics, metaphors, expressions

Source: Eriyanto (2001)

The unit of analysis in this study is signs in the form of online news texts on Kompas.com, news.abs-cbn.com, and channelnewsasia.com during December 2021. When it was first launched on the Internet on 14 September 1995 under the name Kompas Online, Kompas.com was one of the pioneers of online media in Indonesia. Kompas Online or KOL, accessed through Kompas.co.id, initially featured reproductions of the Kompas daily news released that

day. Its purpose is to supply Kompas daily readers in areas not covered by the Kompas network distribution service. Kompas daily readers, especially in eastern Indonesia and abroad, can now enjoy Kompas daily on the same day, instead of waiting several days. In order to provide the best service, Kompas Online's address was changed to www.kompas.com in early 1996. Kompas Online has become increasingly popular among loyal readers of Kompas daily, thanks to the new address (Kompas.com, 2022).

Alto Broadcasting System – Chronicle Broadcasting Network, or ABS-CBN, is one of the most well-known media and entertainment companies in the Philippines. The company has more than 60 years of history, from humble beginnings to apparent success. ABS-CBN is one of the country's premier media and entertainment companies, with a service offering that spans multiple media platforms and caters to a diverse consumer base. ABS-CBN, as an organisation, affirms its aim to serve Filipinos and all their stakeholders worldwide. As it continues to provide information, news and entertainment that connects Filipinos and their communities - wherever they may be - the company is determined to pioneer, develop and adapt. ABS-CBN is dedicated to achieving greatness (Abs-cbn.com, 2022).

Channel News Asia (CNA) is an English-language Asian news network founded by Mediacorp in March 1999. Its mission is to "Understand Asia" and covers global events from an Asian perspective. It is headquartered in Singapore and has correspondents in major Asian and Western cities such as New York, Washington, D.C., London and Brussels. Channel News Asia provides its viewers with a wide variety of programming, including business, lifestyle, human stories, current events, and documentaries, in addition to breaking news. Channel News Asia is a transmedia company that provides the content to users via the Internet, television, radio and mobile devices. It is also on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Telegram, among other social and messaging platforms. The Group for International Broadcasting (AIB), the world's largest trade association for broadcast journalism, was named the Channel News Asia Channel of the Year. Channel News Asia TV is available in 29 Asian countries, with a satellite footprint spanning Asia, the Middle East and Australia (Channelnewsasia.com, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In table 3, it can be seen that GISAID, a platform launched at the World Health Assembly, was created as an alternative to the public domain sharing model, which became the news focus. The Omicron variant was initially described as a variant of concern (VoC) or a worrisome mutation in South Africa. This is because the Omicron version's spike protein has a substantially larger number of mutations than other variants, including the Delta variant. Because of the high number of mutations, the Omicron form is possibly more contagious,

and it is anticipated that an uncontrolled outbreak of Covid-19 cases would result. Scientists originally used GISAID to improve the sharing of influenza data. GISAID is considered friendly and is widely used as a reference for academics, media, and the public in monitoring the spread of Omicron variants worldwide.

Table 3. Kompas.com news analysis on 9 December 2021

DISCOURSE STRUCTURE	OBSERVED MATTERS	ELEMENTS
Macrostructure	THEMATIC	How to monitor the deployment of Omicron variants.
Superstructure	SCHEMATIC	The Omicron variant is potentially more infectious, and feared it could cause an uncontrolled explosion of Covid-19 cases.
Microstructure	SEMANTICS	GISAID is rated as user-friendly and widely used/referenced.
	SYNTAX	The choice of the word "GISAID" and its mention of it nine times.
	STYLISTIC	The choice of the word "GISAID" and its mention of it nine times.
	RHETORICS	A screenshot of the GISAID page about the country reporting the Omicron variant.

Source: (Kompas.com, 2021b)

Table 4. Kompas.com news analysis on 16 December 2021

DISCOURSE STRUCTURE	OBSERVED MATTERS	ELEMENTS
Macrostructure	THEMATIC	Be aware of the Omicron impact of the Delta variant deployment.
Superstructure	SCHEMATIC	Minister of Finance Sri Mulyani Indrawati continues to be aware of the impact of the new Covid-19 variant, namely B.1.1.529 or Omicron, on Indonesia's economic recovery.
Microstructure	SEMANTICS	Indonesia has been able to control the Covid-19 pandemic, especially after a spike in cases of the Delta variant.
	SYNTAX	The appearance of the word 'vaccination.'
	STYLISTIC	The choice of the word 'vaccination' and its mention seven times.
	RHETORICS	A woman with glasses is talking into a microphone.

Source: (Kompas.com, 2021a)

Table 4 shows the supervision of implementing the vaccination program for the community. The influence of the new Covid-19 version, B.1.1.529 or Omicron, on Indonesia's economic recovery is being monitored. The impact of the Omicron deployment will be less than that of the Delta variant. Omicron has been classified as a

variation of interest (VOI) by the World Health Organization (WHO) and has spread to 60 nations. Through vaccination, the Covid-19 pandemic can be controlled so that vaccinations continue to be carried out, especially for children 6-11 years old. In addition, the discipline of health protocols must be carried out to control the pandemic.

Table 5. News.abs-cbn.com news analysis on 13 December 2021

DISCOURSE STRUCTURE	OBSERVED MATTERS	ELEMENTS
Macrostructure	THEMATIC	Omicron spreads faster.
Superstructure	SCHEMATIC	According to preliminary data, Omicron is more infectious than the Delta strain and reduces vaccine efficacy but causes less severe symptoms.
Microstructure	SEMANTICS	Last week, vaccine maker Pfizer/BioNTech said three doses of their injection were still effective against Omicron.
	SYNTAX	The appearance of the word 'vaccine.'
	STYLISTIC	The choice of the word 'vaccine' and its mention four times.
	RHETORICS	A vial labelled "Coronavirus Covid-19 Vaccine." and a syringe can be seen in front of the words "OMICRON SARS-COV-2".

Source: (News.abs-cbn.com, 2021b)

In table 5, the news is focused on the vaccine's effectiveness, which can be reduced due to the Omicron variant even though the symptoms are not too severe. According to preliminary research, the Omicron coronavirus variation is more contagious than the Delta strain and lowers vaccine efficacy while causing less severe symptoms. The Delta type, discovered in India earlier this year, is responsible for most coronavirus infections worldwide. This makes it necessary to continue the three-dose injection during the Covid-19 pandemic against Omicron.

In table 6, the news is focused on booster vaccine efforts which are considered effective in preventing the spread of the Omicron variant. The novel coronavirus variant omicron is spreading at an unparalleled rate and is likely present in almost every country on the planet. Since its discovery in southern Africa last month, the new, highly altered variety has been reported in 77 nations. In reality, Omicron is most likely prevalent in most countries, even though it has yet to be found. Omicron spreads at a rate that has never been observed previously with a variation. The new version may be more effective in evading vaccine protection than the previous one, although it may cause fewer symptoms. The administration of booster vaccine

doses plays an important role in the spread of Omicron because it can reduce the effect of the Omicron variant.

Table 6. News.abs-cbn.com news analysis on 15 December 2021

DISCOURSE STRUCTURE	OBSERVED MATTERS	ELEMENTS
Macrostructure	THEMATIC	Omicron is spreading at an unprecedented rate.
Superstructure	SCHEMATIC	Omicron's new coronavirus variant is spreading at an unprecedented rate.
Microstructure	SEMANTICS	Many countries are rushing to provide booster vaccine doses in response to the spread of Omicron.
	SYNTAX	The appearance of the word 'vaccine.'
	STYLISTIC	The choice of the word 'vaccine' and its mention four times.
	RHETORICS	A man in glasses on a blue background.

Source: (News.abs-cbn.com, 2021a)

Table 7. Analysis of channelnewsasia.com news on 21 December 2021

DISCOURSE STRUCTURE	OBSERVED MATTERS	ELEMENTS
Macrostructure	THEMATIC	World Health Organization warns about the rapid spread of Omicron.
Superstructure	SCHEMATIC	Omicron is a lighter variant of the previous one.
Microstructure	SEMANTICS	Booster programs launched in many countries should target people with weaker immune systems.
	SYNTAX	The occurrence of the word 'Immunity.'
	STYLISTIC	The choice of the word 'Immune' and its mention three times.
	RHETORICS	The World Health Organization logo is pictured at the World Health Organization building entrance in Geneva, Switzerland.

Source: (Channelnewsasia.com, 2021b)

In table 7, the news is focused on achieving community immunity during the Covid-19 pandemic, given that the Omicron variant of the Coronavirus spreads faster than the Delta variant and causes infection in people who have been vaccinated or who have recovered from the Covid-19 disease. The Omicron variant evades some immune responses, meaning booster programs should target people with weaker immune systems. To end the pandemic, one thing that can be done is to reduce holiday activities that cause "increased cases, overwhelmed health systems, and more deaths", resulting in the development of second and third-generation vaccines and the further development of antimicrobial treatments and other innovations can increase immunity.

Table 8. Analysis of channelnewsasia.com news on 28 December 2021

DISCOURSE STRUCTURE	OBSERVED MATTERS	ELEMENTS
Macrostructure	THEMATIC	Indonesia detected the first locally transmitted case of Omicron Covid-19.
Superstructure	SCHEMATIC	Omicron is spreading rapidly in communities in Southeast Asian countries.
Microstructure	SEMANTICS	People still adhere to health protocols.
	SYNTAX	The appearance of the word 'Health.'
	STYLISTIC	The choice of the word 'Health' and its mention four times.
	RHETORICS	Travellers wearing protective clothing at Soekarno Hatta International airport in Tangerang

Source: (Channelnewsasia.com, 2021a)

In table 8, the news is focused on health problems to the local spread of Omicron variants. The local transmission triggers a tightening of mobility, especially during the Christmas and New Year holidays. In addition, to improve health, the public is still encouraged to continue implementing health protocols. Considering the Omicron variant that spreads quickly in the community, one of which is in Southeast Asia.

In the text dimension, the news about the spread of the Omicron variant by the three media was found to have similarities. Media Kompas.com, news.abs-cbn.com, and channelnewsasia.com, in reporting the spread of the Omicron variant, the three online media tried to bring up vaccination efforts. So, the researchers concluded that vaccination was given to the community to raise the immunity of every community. Vaccination is one of the most efficient ways to combat the continuing Covid-19 outbreak. The introduction of vaccinations (antigens) can trigger the immune system's production of immunity (antibodies). Vaccination is a highly effective primary prevention strategy for diseases that can be prevented. It is intended that optimum immunity will be achieved by using the proper vaccination process.

The immune system plays a critical role in the human body's defence. The body will be exposed to bacteria, parasites, and viruses if it lacks an immune system. The immune system also aids in the battle against many pathogens, ensuring that our body remains healthy. A well-functioning immune system can protect our body from internal and external threats. When the immune system is weakened, microorganisms can easily attack the body and exacerbate health problems. When the immune system is compromised, the likelihood of cancer cells growing is increased. People with a strong immune system can defend their bodies against various ailments. Individuals with a

strong immune system will be able to carry on with their daily activities in the future.

In the dimension of social cognition, the ideology for Kompas.com, news.abs-cbn.com, and channelnewsasia.com ensures public health for survival. Kompas.com Indonesia reported that related to controlling the Covid-19 pandemic, news.abs-cbn.com reported giving booster vaccine doses in response to the spread of Omicron. Meanwhile, channelnewsasia.com reported that the launched booster program should target people with weaker immune systems. A booster vaccination is a different vaccine that can be given if the protection provided by a previous vaccination's shot has worn off over time. Booster vaccines are given to keep the body's immunity to disease at a high level.

Furthermore, to boost the body's immunity to specific diseases when the first vaccine may be losing its effectiveness. Some vaccines' protective effects may begin to wane if they are not followed up with a booster shot. A booster vaccine ensures that a person is protected against diseases and infections that can be prevented. The government highlighted the importance of booster vaccinations. Booster vaccines are administered to people over 18 who have had at least seven months of primary vaccinations in Indonesia (doses 1 and 2).

In the context dimension, Kompas.com, news.abs-cbn.com, and channelnewsasia.com are more focused on social context. Where all people have the same opportunity to get the right to survive as citizens, and one of them is by getting vaccinations. Everyone who has had their primary vaccinations should get a booster as soon as they are eligible. Booster dosages can help increase protection against infection, severe illness, and hospitalisation. Everyone has the right to receive booster vaccinations in order to protect themselves and their communities. The immune system is given a booster injection to alert the pathogen it needs to fight. It strengthens or improves the immune system. Boosters help people keep their immune systems healthy for longer periods. Every community has the right to a booster vaccine to protect them from Covid-19.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis that has been done, the media constructs news discourse regarding the spread of the Omicron variant to provide a sense of calm and comfort for the public. This sense of calm and comfort in media coverage by prioritising the public's right to get vaccinated in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic so that everyone has a good immune system and can live life smoothly. Because with a sense of calm and comfort, a good psychological condition of society can impact various aspects of human life, one of which is the economic aspect. With good conditions, good immunity, and good psychological conditions, this situation can help many government programs restore the national economy.

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