

Cultural Awareness of Indonesia in the Eyes of the World: An Analysis of “*That Evan Guy*” Vloggers’ Perception of Indonesia’s Cultural Strength and Modernity

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Indonesian culture and modernity are discursively constructed in global digital space through the YouTube travel narrative of a foreign vlogger, *That Evan Guy*. The study departs from the observation that external digital representations of Indonesia often diverge from dominant domestic narratives, particularly regarding infrastructure quality, cleanliness, and cultural coexistence with modernity. These differences indicate a form of perceptual discordance that warrants critical examination at the level of discourse rather than opinion. Employing a qualitative approach grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis, the study analyzes selected excerpts from a verbatim transcript of a YouTube video documenting railway stations and high-speed train services in Indonesia. Data were collected through documentation, transcription, and non-participant content observation, then analyzed using thematic coding and discourse analytical procedures to identify evaluative framing, positioning, comparison, presupposition, and omission within the narrative. The findings show that Indonesian modernity is constructed through systematically positive evaluative language, emphasis on accessibility and ordinariness, and contrastive comparison with Western contexts. Cleanliness and infrastructure quality function as key discursive signifiers that challenge dominant global stereotypes associated with developing countries. The analysis further reveals that perceptual discordance emerges not from factual disagreement, but from competing discursive regimes that assign value and legitimacy differently to culture and development. The study concludes that foreign vlogger narratives operate as influential discursive sites where national culture and modernity are symbolically negotiated outside institutional frameworks.

1. Introduction

Indonesia has gained increasing attention in global public discourse due to its cultural diversity and visible social transformation¹. International media and digital platforms frequently portray Indonesia through narratives that combine tradition with signs of modern

¹ Debby Widitya, ‘Perubahan Sosial Budaya Dan Dampaknya Terhadap Identitas Masyarakat’, *Jurnal Ilmiah Nusantara*, 2.1 (2025); Suidat and others, ‘Transformation of Cultural Values in Forming Character Based on Local Wisdom’, *JHSS (Journal of Humanities and Social Studies)*, 06.03 (2022).

development². Digital media enable cultural representations to circulate rapidly and reach audiences beyond national boundaries. YouTube has emerged as a central platform where visual narratives and personal commentary shape perceptions of place and society³. Research on digital media highlights that such narratives influence cross-cultural understanding through everyday representations⁴. These conditions position digital content as a relevant site for examining cultural perception.

The circulation of foreign-produced digital content about Indonesia reveals a paradox within Indonesian cultural awareness⁵. External narratives often express appreciation for public order, hospitality, and infrastructural progress⁶. Domestic discourse, however, frequently emphasizes issues related to cleanliness, governance, and cultural neglect. Studies on Indonesian youth indicate weakening engagement with local cultural values amid strong global cultural exposure⁷. This contrast reflects a gap between external appreciation and internal evaluation of Indonesian culture. The presence of this gap raises questions about how cultural awareness is formed and negotiated.

Foreign vloggers occupy a distinctive position as external observers whose narratives are often perceived as credible by audiences⁸. Studies on digital travel narratives show that vlog content functions as cultural mediation rather than neutral documentation. Personal observation and comparison are used to assign value to cultural practices and public spaces. These narratives shape meanings of cultural strength and modern development through everyday encounters. Cultural awareness provides a framework for understanding how such meanings emerge through interaction with external perspectives⁹. Digital media intensify this process by accelerating the circulation of cultural interpretation.

Scholarly work on cultural awareness emphasizes reflection on one's culture alongside recognition of how it is perceived by others. Research argues that cultural awareness develops through exposure to external evaluation rather than internal affirmation alone. Digital environments increase the visibility of such evaluations and amplify their social impact¹⁰. Studies on cross-cultural perception indicate that external narratives can challenge dominant hierarchies of modernity. Positive representations of developing countries often disrupt

² Bhernadetta Pravita Wahyuningtyas and Wajid Zulqarnain, 'Communicating The Cultural Values by Vloggers in Disruption Era', *Jurnal The Messenger*, 16.1 (2024) <<https://doi.org/10.26623/themessenger.v16i1.6302>>.

³ Marie Canet, 'Jean BURGESS et Joshua GREEN (2018), YouTube, Online Video and Participatory Culture', *Communication*, vol. 37/2, 2020 <<https://doi.org/10.4000/communication.12308>>.

⁴ Esther de Oliveira Souza and others, 'Digital Content in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras): A Study of Brazilian Channels of Deaf People on YouTube', *Comunicacao e Sociedade*, 43 (2023) <[https://doi.org/10.17231/comsoc.43\(2023\).4102](https://doi.org/10.17231/comsoc.43(2023).4102)>; Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, *Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture (2nd Edition)*, *International Journal of Communication*, 2020, xiv.

⁵ Putra Aditya Lapalelo and Grishiella Patricia Liwang, 'The Story of Content Creators Antagonizing Kominfo's Pse Policy (Narrative Analysis)', *Avant Garde*, 13.1 (2025) <<https://doi.org/10.36080/ag.v13i1.3855>>.

⁶ Salsabila Andi Akil and Gustav Gallenius, 'Digital Diplomacy: Hololive Indonesia and Virtual Youtuber (Vtuber) as Indonesia's New Public Diplomacy', *Ilomata International Journal of Social Science*, 5.1 (2024) <<https://doi.org/10.61194/ijss.v5i1.1130>>.

⁷ Wahyuningtyas and Zulqarnain.

⁸ Nina A. Seliverstova and Elena V. Chankova, 'Socio-Cultural Reproduction of Communicative Competencies in Young People', *Research Result Sociology and Management*, 8.3 (2022) <<https://doi.org/10.18413/2408-9338-2022-8-3-0-3>>.

⁹ Jimi Narotama Mahameruaji and others, 'Bisnis Vlogging Dalam Industri Media Digital Di Indonesia', *Jurnal ILMU KOMUNIKASI*, 15.1 (2018) <<https://doi.org/10.24002/jik.v15i1.1007>>.

¹⁰ Detta Rahmawan, Hanny Hafiar, and Jimi Narotama M, 'Peran Vlogger Sebagai Online Influencer Dalam Industri Media Digital Di Indonesia', *Promedia*, 3.2 (2017).

established global stereotypes. These insights support the relevance of examining foreign digital narratives as analytical material.

Research on Indonesian cultural representation has largely focused on tourism promotion and state-driven nation branding¹¹. These studies emphasize strategic image construction through institutional communication and cultural diplomacy. Limited attention has been given to independent foreign content creators operating outside official frameworks. Independent creators produce narratives shaped by personal experience rather than policy objectives. This distinction affects perceptions of authenticity and credibility among audiences. The limited focus on this group signals a gap in existing literature.

Existing studies rarely apply discourse analysis to examine how foreign vloggers construct meanings of Indonesian culture and modernity. Visual and narrative elements of vlog content remain underexplored as discursive resources in cultural studies. This limitation restricts understanding of how cultural meanings are negotiated in everyday digital encounters. This study addresses the gap by analyzing representations of Indonesian culture and modernity in the YouTube content of *That Evan Guy*. Perceptual discordance is used as an interpretative lens to examine differences between external representations and domestic cultural narratives. The study aims to assess the implications of these differences for Indonesian cultural awareness in a global context.

2. Research Method

2.1. Methodological Framework

This study adopts a qualitative methodological framework to examine representations of Indonesian culture and modernity in digital media¹². The framework is grounded in an interpretative research tradition that prioritizes meaning construction and cultural evaluation rather than empirical measurement. Discourse analysis is employed as the primary method to investigate how cultural meanings are produced, emphasized, and legitimized within foreign vlog narratives¹³. Perceptual discordance is applied as an analytical lens to identify contrasts between external representations and dominant constructions of Indonesian culture in academic and social discourse. This framework positions cultural awareness as a dynamic discursive process shaped through cross-cultural perception and comparison. The methodological orientation directly informs the structure of analysis and the organization of findings.

2.2. Research Design

The research design is qualitative and interpretative¹⁴, focusing on the analysis of discourse rather than audience response or production intention. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study seeks to understand how representations of culture and modernity are

¹¹ Erwin Kartinawati, Farid Fitriyadi, and Erna Indriastiningsih, 'Development of the Tourism Industry Using Branding Strategies by Competitive Multimedia in the Digital Era Based on Community Empowerment', *GANDRUNG: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat*, 5.1 (2024) <<https://doi.org/10.36526/gandrung.v5i1.3143>>.

¹² Pablo Capilla, 'Post-Truth as a Mutation of Epistemology in Journalism', *Media and Communication*, 9.1 (2021) <<https://doi.org/10.17645/MAC.V9I1.3529>>.

¹³ Norman Fairclough, 'Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Policy Studies', *Critical Policy Studies*, 7.2 (2013) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2013.798239>>.

¹⁴ Robert Elliott and Ladislav Timulak, 'Descriptive and Interpretive Approaches to Qualitative Research', *A Handbook of Research Methods for Clinical and Health Psychology*, 2005.

framed, evaluated, and compared within narrative contexts¹⁵. Discourse analysis is used to examine patterns of description, comparison, and value judgment embedded in vlog narratives¹⁶. The analysis concentrates on how the foreign vlogger positions Indonesia in relation to global modernity and cultural norms. Perceptual discordance is operationalized as differences in emphasis and interpretation between external digital narratives and internal cultural discourse. This analytical orientation ensures coherence between research questions, data analysis, and findings.

2.3. Object of Analysis and Data Corpus

The object of analysis in this study is the representation of Indonesian culture and modernity as constructed through digital video content. The analysis focuses on verbal narratives, visual depictions, and cultural symbols that portray social behavior, public spaces, and infrastructure development. These elements are examined as interconnected components of discourse that jointly construct meaning. The data corpus consists of selected YouTube videos produced by the foreign vlogger *That Evan Guy* that explicitly discuss Indonesia. The videos are treated as discursive texts rather than neutral documentation. This focus allows for close analysis of evaluative language and representational patterns within a consistent narrative voice.

The data corpus was selected using purposive sampling based on three criteria. The videos present Indonesian culture, social life, or modernity as a central theme. The videos contain sustained narration that allows for interpretation of cultural meaning and comparison. The videos were published within a period relevant to the research focus. This selection reflects the vlogger's position as an external observer whose representations contribute to shaping digital perceptions of Indonesia.

2.4. Data Sources and Collection Procedures

The study draws on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained from YouTube videos produced by *That Evan Guy* that depict Indonesian culture, social interaction, and modern infrastructure. These videos serve as the main data source because they convey external perceptions through verbal narration and visual framing. Secondary data consist of scholarly literature related to cultural studies, digital media, cultural awareness, and modernity. These sources provide theoretical grounding and comparative references for identifying perceptual discordance.

Data collection was conducted through documentation and non-participant content observation. The selected videos were identified, archived, and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy of verbal data. Visual elements related to cleanliness, public facilities, social interaction, and spatial organization were systematically recorded through observation notes. Non-participant observation was applied to examine narrative framing and emphasis without researcher involvement in content production. These procedures ensured that the data reflected naturally occurring digital discourse.

2.5. Analytical Procedures and Coding Strategy

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive qualitative analysis through a structured discourse analysis procedure. The first stage involved data reduction by selecting transcript segments and visual elements directly related to representations of culture and modernity. Data

¹⁵ Tanner Morrison, 'Mixed Methods Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Bridging Lived Experience and Contextual Complexity', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 24 (2025) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069251400179>>.

¹⁶ Alireza Bonyadi, 'Discourse Analysis and Language Pedagogy: A Review', *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability*, 21.1 (2019) <<https://doi.org/10.2478/jtes-2019-0010>>.

unrelated to the research focus were excluded to maintain analytical clarity¹⁷. This stage established the empirical basis for thematic analysis.

The second stage involved thematic coding and categorization. Verbal and visual data were coded according to recurring representational themes, including infrastructure modernity, cleanliness, cultural practice, social interaction, and evaluative comparison. These codes were grouped into thematic categories that functioned as analytical lenses rather than predetermined conclusions¹⁸. The categories guided the identification of discursive patterns across the data corpus¹⁹.

The third stage applied discourse analysis to examine how meanings were constructed and evaluated within the vlog narratives. At this stage, representations produced by the foreign vlogger were analytically compared with dominant constructions of Indonesian culture and modernity documented in academic literature. Perceptual discordance was identified through contrasts in emphasis, valuation, and framing between external narratives and internal discourse. This analytical stage directly informed the organization of findings.

The final stage involved interpretation and verification. Findings were synthesized by identifying consistent discursive patterns and recurring perceptual tensions across the data. Verification was conducted by revisiting data excerpts, thematic categories, and interpretative claims to ensure analytical consistency and validity. The findings are contextual and interpretative, reflecting the qualitative nature of the study.

3. Results

The findings of this study are derived from selected excerpts taken from the complete verbatim transcript of the YouTube video *Indonesia Luxury Trains, This Is Truly Shocking by That Evan Guy*, as presented in Appendix A. Only transcript segments relevant to representations of Indonesian culture and modernity were analyzed. The excerpts reflect the vlogger's subjective observations and evaluations based on personal travel experience. The findings are organized according to data segments A1 to A8 and presented as patterns of representation identified through discourse analysis.

3.1. Infrastructure Modernity Represented as Efficient and Publicly Accessible

In segment A1, the vlogger introduces his travel context by stating, "I'm about to go to Bandung... I decided to try the new train here in Jakarta. It's supposed to be amazing and super fast." He further explains his choice of an economy ticket, noting that the journey is short and does not justify higher costs. This framing positions the high-speed train as a practical option rather than a luxury experience.

A similar evaluation appears in segment A5, where he states, "Even the economy class feels like business class," followed by descriptions of legroom, cleanliness, and ride smoothness. Across these segments, comfort and efficiency are repeatedly associated with low-cost access. This pattern constructs Indonesian infrastructure modernity as inclusive and oriented toward public use rather than elite consumption.

¹⁷ Aulia siti Shalwa, 'Model Teknik Miles Dan Huberman Dalam Penelitian Kualitatif', *Ebizmark Blog*, 2025; Hen AjoLeda, 'Bagaimana Langkah-Langkah Analisis Kualitatif Menurut Miles Dan Huberman?', *Kompasiana*, 2024.

¹⁸ Daniel J. Palazzolo, 'Miles & Huberman', *Experiencing Citizenship: Concepts and Models for Service-Learning in Political Science*, 2023.

¹⁹ M. B Miles and M. Huberman, *Analisis Data Kualitatif* (Jakarta: Penerbit Universitas Indonesia, 1992).

3.2. Cleanliness as a Dominant Marker of Public Space Quality

Cleanliness emerges as a recurring theme across multiple segments. In segment A2, the vlogger describes the station as “super impressive and very clean,” while also referring to sensory details such as the aroma of bakery products. In segment A6, he emphasizes onboard facilities by stating, “The toilet situation is amazing. There is soap, tissue, and water.”

The repetition continues in the closing segment A8, where he concludes, “Everything is clean—very clean.” The recurrence of evaluative terms related to cleanliness across stations, trains, and toilets indicates that hygiene is a central criterion through which Indonesian public facilities are assessed. Within the data, cleanliness is framed not as an exception but as a consistent feature of public infrastructure.

3.3. Coexistence of Local Culture and Modern Infrastructure

In segment A2, modern station facilities are described alongside local cultural elements, such as durian snacks, which the vlogger characterizes as “smelly but tasty” and “like real durian.” These sensory experiences are embedded within a modern, well-maintained environment.

Segment A4 further combines cultural and social observations with infrastructure evaluation. The vlogger states, “Indonesian people are peaceful and polite. They respect each other’s space and privacy.” These comments are made while discussing cleanliness and public order. The data suggest that local cultural practices are represented as compatible with modern infrastructure rather than displaced by it.

3.4. Cross-National Comparison as a Discursive Strategy

Explicit comparisons between Indonesia and the United States appear in segment A3. The vlogger notes the presence of restaurants, waiting areas, and convenience stores, followed by the statement, “There are no homeless people around the station.” He contrasts this with his experience in Chicago and Michigan, where homelessness around train stations is described as common and sometimes unsafe.

In segment A8, this comparison is reiterated when he remarks that high-speed trains are associated with Japan and China but “not Indonesia.” The juxtaposition positions Indonesia against expectations shaped by global hierarchies. Through these comparisons, Indonesia is framed as performing better than a country commonly perceived as more developed in terms of public space management.

3.5. Government Investment Linked to Infrastructure Quality

In segment A4, the vlogger reflects on the source of cleanliness and order by stating, “Some people say this comes from Muslim values, but I also think it’s because the government invests in what helps the people.” This statement explicitly attributes infrastructure quality to state action.

He further adds, “Indonesia is often portrayed as corrupt, but this infrastructure shows otherwise.” These utterances connect material conditions to governance performance. Within the data, government investment is constructed as a visible and effective factor shaping public infrastructure outcomes.

3.6. External Recognition and Reflexive Evaluation of the Home Country

In the final segment A8, the vlogger states, “I’m happy for Indonesians, but we deserve something like this in the United States too.” This comment shifts the focus from Indonesia to his own country. The evaluation positions Indonesia as a reference point rather than a peripheral example.

The data show that admiration for Indonesian infrastructure is accompanied by critical reflection on the vlogger's home context. This reflexive move reinforces the representation of Indonesia as a country capable of achieving standards commonly associated with advanced economies.

4. Discussion

This discussion advances a critical discourse analysis by interrogating how representations of Indonesian culture and modernity are discursively produced, legitimized, and circulated through foreign vlogger narratives. Rather than treating the vlog as a transparent account of reality, this analysis understands it as a site where meaning is selectively constructed through evaluative framing, comparison, and omission, all of which operate within broader global discourses of development and cultural hierarchy.

A central discursive mechanism identified in the findings is the normalization of positive evaluation through repetitive appraisal. The frequent use of unmitigated positive descriptors functions ideologically by stabilizing a preferred reading of Indonesian infrastructure as exceptional rather than incidental. From a CDA perspective, repetition here does not merely reinforce meaning but works to naturalize a counter-discourse²⁰ that challenges entrenched global assumptions linking modernity exclusively to Western or economically dominant nations. The absence of balancing or critical qualifiers further suppresses alternative interpretations, thereby narrowing the discursive space available to question this representation.

The construction of modernity in the vlog relies heavily on positioning strategies that align technological advancement with ordinariness and accessibility. By foregrounding the economy-class experience, the discourse redefines modernity as a public entitlement rather than an elite privilege. This repositioning is significant because it disrupts dominant development discourses that frame infrastructural success in the Global South as limited, uneven, or symbolic. CDA reveals that this framing reallocates symbolic capital to Indonesia by associating modernity with social inclusiveness rather than economic exclusivity.

Cleanliness operates as a moralized signifier within the discourse. It is not presented as a situational outcome but as a stable characteristic of public life. When cleanliness is attributed to governance rather than individual discipline, the discourse shifts responsibility from cultural deficiency narratives toward institutional competence. This move implicitly contests long-standing representations of Indonesia as structurally corrupt or administratively weak. Importantly, CDA highlights that this contestation occurs without direct argumentation²¹; it is achieved through presupposition and selective attribution, which renders the alternative narrative both persuasive and resistant to challenge.

Comparative discourse functions as a key site of ideological reversal. The juxtaposition of Indonesia with the United States does not operate symmetrically; it selectively foregrounds social disorder and infrastructural decay in the latter while backgrounding systemic complexities. This asymmetry is analytically significant because it reveals how discourse can invert global hierarchies through controlled comparison. CDA interprets this strategy as a reconfiguration of the global gaze, in which the traditionally observed subject temporarily assumes the position of evaluative authority²².

²⁰ Bonyadi.

²¹ Teun A. Van Dijk, 'Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis', *Discourse & Society*, 4.2 (1993) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926593004002006>>.

²² Arum Priadi, 'Proximization as a Cognitive Mechanism in the Construction of Political Threat', *Kajian Linguistik Dan Sastra (Kalistra)*, 4.3 (2025), 657–69 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.22437/kalistra.v4i3.50084>>.

Equally important is what remains unarticulated within the discourse. The vlog omits structural inequalities, regional disparities, and historical conditions shaping infrastructure development. This silence is not analytically neutral. CDA treats omission as a constitutive element of discourse that enables coherence and positivity by excluding destabilizing contexts. The resulting representation, therefore, should not be read as comprehensive but as strategically partial, oriented toward producing admiration and shock rather than structural explanation.

The vlogger's reflexive comments regarding his home country further strengthen the authority of the discourse. Self-critique operates as a legitimizing device that enhances credibility by signaling comparative awareness and moral reflexivity. From a CDA standpoint, this strategy repositions the speaker not merely as a tourist observer but as a transnational evaluator²³, thereby amplifying the discursive impact of his judgments within global digital circulation.

This analysis demonstrates that perceptual discordance arises not from factual disagreement but from competing discursive regimes that assign value, normality, and legitimacy differently. External digital narratives mobilize alternative frameworks of evaluation that expose tensions within domestic self-representation. By foregrounding everyday infrastructure and routine practices, foreign vlogger discourse participates in redefining how national culture and modernity are symbolically negotiated in the global digital sphere.

5. Conclusion

This study applied a Critical Discourse Analysis framework to examine how Indonesian culture and modernity are discursively constructed through a foreign vlogger's digital travel narrative. The vlog was treated not as a descriptive record of travel experience, but as a discursive site where meanings of development, culture, and national value are produced through evaluative framing, positioning, comparison, and selective omission. The analysis demonstrates that representations of Indonesian modernity operate as a counter-discourse that challenges dominant global narratives associating modern infrastructure and governance primarily with Western contexts.

The study contributes theoretically by conceptualizing perceptual discordance as a discursive effect rather than a difference in opinion or attitude. By focusing on a non-institutional digital actor, the research extends CDA into everyday digital media and shows how global hierarchies of cultural and developmental value can be negotiated through ordinary online narratives. Future research may apply similar critical discourse frameworks to a wider range of digital actors or platforms to further examine how discursive constructions of culture and modernity circulate and stabilize across different global contexts.

²³ Norman Fairclough and Isabela Fairclough, 'A Procedural Approach to Ethical Critique in CDA', *Critical Discourse Studies*, 15.2 (2018) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2018.1427121>>.

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