

## The Media Framing War in Coverage of Fuel Adulteration by Pertamina (A Comparative Study of Tempo.com and Instagram Account @TotalPolitikcom in February 2025)

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the dynamics of media framing and its influence on public perception regarding the fuel adulteration scandal involving Indonesia's state-owned energy company, Pertamina, in February 2025. The research aims to compare and contrast the framing strategies adopted by the mainstream online media outlet Tempo.com and the Instagram-based political commentary account @TotalPolitikcom. Employing (Robert Entman's, 1993) framing model within a qualitative research paradigm, this study demonstrates how traditional and social media deploy different narrative structures and rhetorical strategies. The findings reveal that Tempo.com adopts a more investigative and institutional framing by highlighting policy failures and regulatory loopholes, while @TotalPolitikcom engages in emotionally charged populist framing, portraying the issue as a betrayal of public trust by political elites. These divergent framing strategies underscore the fragmentary nature of media reality construction and its implications for democratic discourse in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *media framing, fuel adulteration, media reality construction, Tempo.com, @TotalPolitikcom*

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### INTRODUCTION

Media has long been recognized as a powerful institution in shaping public opinion and constructing social reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In democratic societies, especially those in transition such as Indonesia, the role of the media in mediating public discourse becomes even more critical. As the primary channel through which information flows, media has the capacity to set agendas, frame issues, and influence the interpretation of events by its audiences (Entman, 1993).

In early 2025, the Indonesian public was alarmed by a significant scandal involving fuel adulteration allegedly committed by individuals linked to Pertamina, the state-owned oil and gas company. Given the essential role of fuel in national economic infrastructure and daily life, the issue rapidly evolved from a corporate problem into a national concern, demanding government accountability and policy reform. In response, both traditional

media and social media platforms became arenas of competing narratives, attempting to define the scandal, identify culprits, and propose solutions.

Tempo.com, a mainstream media outlet known for its investigative journalism and long-standing credibility, offered coverage grounded in policy analysis and expert commentary. Meanwhile, @TotalPolitikcom, a political commentary account on Instagram with a large following, employed more emotive and visually driven narratives that emphasized elite betrayal and rallied citizen outrage. These divergent approaches reflect the transformation of media environments in the digital age, where traditional gatekeeping functions are shared—or sometimes challenged—by non-institutional actors (Couldry & Hepp, 2017).

This study focuses on comparing how Tempo.com and @TotalPolitikcom framed the Pertamina fuel adulteration scandal during February 2025. By applying (Entman's, 1993) four-part framing model—problem definition, cause diagnosis, moral judgment, and suggested remedies—this research reveals how each media outlet constructs a distinct version of reality. Furthermore, it investigates the broader implications of these frames for public understanding, institutional trust, and democratic accountability.

Understanding the differences in how media entities frame critical socio-political issues is essential in an era where misinformation and emotional manipulation can shape civic behavior. As Indonesia continues to navigate the challenges of media convergence and political polarization, studies such as this are vital in fostering media literacy and informed citizenship (Happer & Philo, 2013).

The study is grounded in (Berger and Luckmann's, 1966) theory of the social construction of reality, which posits that societal knowledge and perceptions are produced through social interaction and institutional communication. Media, as a central institution in modern society, plays a pivotal role in this construction by selecting, organizing, and disseminating information (Tuchman, 1978).

(Entman's, 1993) model of framing provides the analytical tool used in this research. According to Entman, framing involves selecting aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text. His model identifies four core components: (1) defining problems, (2) diagnosing causes, (3) making moral judgments, and (4) suggesting remedies. This model allows researchers to systematically analyze how media discourses shape public interpretations of events. Additionally, (Hall's, 1980) encoding/decoding theory contributes insight into the dynamic relationship between media producers and audiences in meaning-making processes.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach using framing analysis as the primary method. A qualitative method is selected because it allows the researcher to explore in depth how social meanings are shaped and constructed through media discourse. As (Creswell, 2013) notes, qualitative research seeks to explore and interpret social reality based on the perspectives of the subjects and the context in which they exist. In this context, the main focus is on how two different media—Tempo.com as a professional online

news outlet and @TotalPolitikcom as a politically opinionated Instagram account—frame the issue of alleged fuel adulteration by Pertamina.

The framing analysis method adopted in this study is based on the model developed by (Robert M. Entman, 1993). According to this model, four key elements are used to analyze media texts: (1) **Define problems** – how an event or issue is defined as a problem; (2) **Diagnose causes** – who or what is considered responsible for the issue; (3) **Make moral judgments** – the moral evaluations or normative assessments conveyed; and (4) **Suggest remedies** – the solutions or recommendations offered. These four elements serve as the analytical framework to understand how each media outlet constructs social reality through selected narratives and visuals.

Data collection was conducted using documentation techniques, which involved collecting content from two main sources: news articles from Tempo.com and Instagram posts from @TotalPolitikcom, all published during February 2025—when the issue of fuel adulteration gained significant public attention. The collected data included article texts, headlines, quotes from sources, supporting images, Instagram captions, and public comments or reactions.

All data were analyzed using both textual and visual analysis. For the textual analysis, the researcher examined the narratives constructed by each media outlet, including word choice, tone, language style, and representation of actors. In the visual analysis (especially for Instagram content), elements such as photographs, graphic design, dominant colors, and symbolic placement were considered, as they play a significant role in evoking emotional responses from the audience. The analysis was conducted interpretatively and inductively, drawing meaning from the data based on the theoretical framework.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, the study also applied source triangulation. This involved comparing the framing of the same issue across two different media sources. This technique was intended to identify whether each medium presented the issue consistently or framed it in divergent ways. Through this approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive picture of the framing war between Tempo.com and @TotalPolitikcom in shaping public perceptions of Pertamina's alleged fuel adulteration scandal.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### **RESEARCH RESULT**

The comparative analysis between Tempo.com and @TotalPolitikcom highlights significant distinctions in how traditional and social media construct public narratives surrounding the Pertamina fuel adulteration scandal. Using (Entman's, 1993) framing categories, the research found distinct patterns in problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and suggested resolutions.

Tempo.com consistently approached the scandal from an institutional and systemic perspective. It focused on how policy lapses, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and regulatory weaknesses contributed to the case.

1. Problem Definition: The issue was framed as a failure of governance within Pertamina and state oversight agencies (Tempo.com, 2025).
2. Causal Attribution: The articles identified weak internal audit systems, outdated regulations, and unaccountable supply chain practices as root causes (Handayani, 2020).
3. Moral Judgment: Tempo.com adopted a neutral journalistic tone, positioning the scandal as a structural failure rather than focusing on personal culpability.
4. Proposed Remedies: Emphasis was placed on energy policy reform, enhancement of institutional monitoring mechanisms, and better public transparency (Lestari & Wicaksono, 2021).

Tempo.com's approach aligns with professional journalism norms that prioritize analytical depth and neutrality. Its use of expert interviews and data-supported reporting reinforces the legitimacy of its framing.

In contrast, @TotalPolitikcom offered an emotionally charged, populist portrayal of the scandal. Posts were dominated by visual memes, brief captions, and calls for public action.

1. Problem Definition: The scandal was depicted as a betrayal by corrupt elites exploiting public resources for personal gain.
2. Causal Attribution: Blame was directly assigned to political and corporate elites, with imagery portraying them as disconnected from public suffering (Kusuma & Suryani, 2021).
3. Moral Judgment: A strong binary opposition was evident, with the public framed as victims and elites as villains. Tone was accusatory and sensational.
4. Proposed Remedies: Digital activism was encouraged, including reposting, hashtag campaigns, and tagging government accounts to demand accountability.

@TotalPolitikcom's framing illustrates characteristics of digital populism (Moffitt, 2016), leveraging social media's algorithmic dynamics to incite emotion and engagement.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal a significant contrast in the framing strategies employed by Tempo.com and the Instagram account @TotalPolitikcom in reporting the alleged fuel adulteration case involving Pertamina. Although both media addressed the same issue during the same period, the narrative approaches and meaning structures constructed were markedly different, reflecting the distinct characteristics of each platform and its intended audience.

Tempo.com, as a professional online media outlet, tended to frame the fuel adulteration issue within a structural and systemic context. In its reporting, Tempo did not directly place blame on individual actors but instead highlighted broader issues such as oversight. The framing used was institutional and data-driven, emphasizing official statements from the Attorney General's Office, the House of Representatives (DPR), and Pertamina itself. Tempo also provided historical, technical, and policy-related context as part of its effort to deliver in-depth and balanced information. This suggests that

Tempo.com acts as a credible source, upholding journalistic integrity by presenting rational and non-emotional analysis.

In contrast, @TotalPolitikcom adopted a more emotional and populist framing approach. The account explicitly portrayed the fuel adulteration scandal as a betrayal of the people by the elite. In its posts, @TotalPolitikcom used provocative language, bold headlines, and enlarged images of suspects' faces and names. This approach reflects a framing strategy that appeals to the emotional involvement of the audience. The narrative emphasized a stark dichotomy between ordinary citizens and powerful elites, encouraging the public to be critical—and even angry—toward the institutions deemed responsible.

This difference in approach cannot be separated from the inherent nature of each media type. Tempo.com, as a journalistic platform, operates within an editorial structure and adheres to ethical standards in news production. On the other hand, @TotalPolitikcom, as a political social media account, is driven by the logic of virality and social media algorithms that favor short, provocative content capable of generating quick audience engagement. As a result, the narratives presented tend to be simplified, emotionally charged, and binary (e.g., good versus evil), leaving little room for nuance.

From the perspective of media reality construction theory, these findings indicate that social reality in the public sphere is not singular but plural. Tempo.com and @TotalPolitikcom simultaneously construct two very different realities regarding the fuel adulteration issue—one that is structural and technocratic, and another that is emotional and political. Consequently, the public that consumes these different media sources may form divergent understandings and responses to the same issue.

This phenomenon illustrates that the media framing war in the digital age occurs not only between journalists but also between professional media and socially driven alternative media. Social media, with its capacity to build counter-narratives, has become a powerful force that can challenge the dominance of mainstream media in shaping public opinion. Without adequate media literacy, this may result in fragmented information and even societal polarization.

Therefore, this discussion underscores the importance of framing analysis in understanding how media influence public thinking. Framing is not merely a matter of language or visuals—it involves symbolic power that determines which version of social reality is considered legitimate. This study demonstrates that when different types of media frame the same issue in drastically different ways, the resulting public realities can become sharply divided.

Table Comparative Summary

<b>Framing Element</b>	<b>Tempo.com</b>	<b>@TotalPolitikcom</b>
<b>Define the Problem</b>	Institutional oversight failure	Elite corruption and betrayal
<b>Diagnose Causes</b>	Governance gaps, lack of regulation	Personal greed and elite impunity
<b>Moral Judgment</b>	Objective and policy-focused	Populist, accusatory
<b>Suggest Remedies</b>	Institutional reform and policy overhaul	Civic digital protest and mass awareness

These findings reveal a fundamental dichotomy in media discourse. Tempo.com represents the rational-institutional model of journalism, while @TotalPolitikcom exemplifies emotive-populist digital activism. This reflects not only differences in media structure and editorial policy but also their target audiences and communicative goals.

Moreover, the implications of such framing disparities are significant. While Tempo.com’s coverage may influence elite discourses and policy circles, @TotalPolitikcom’s content reaches mass publics who may react more viscerally and collectively. The interplay between these framings shapes the public sphere, either encouraging rational deliberation or amplifying emotional mobilization.

These contrasting strategies also raise concerns about fragmentation in public discourse, where different social groups engage with fundamentally different interpretations of the same event. Therefore, this study highlights the need for stronger media literacy initiatives and inclusive dialogue platforms that bridge professional and populist narratives (Livingstone, 2004).

## CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the framing strategies employed by professional online media and opinion-based social media can lead to significantly different constructions of reality, even when addressing the same issue. In the case of Pertamina’s alleged fuel adulteration in February 2025, Tempo.com framed the issue from a systemic and institutional perspective, using an analytical, data-driven, and neutral tone. Tempo focused on policy reform and strengthening governance in the national energy distribution system as the primary solutions.

In contrast, @TotalPolitikcom adopted an emotional and populist framing approach, portraying the incident as an act of betrayal by the elite and a source of suffering for ordinary citizens. The causes of the problem were presented in a personalized and explicit manner, while the proposed solutions centered on public participation and digital pressure on authorities. This framing strategy encouraged emotional engagement and the mobilization of public opinion, particularly among netizens.

Both media outlets constructed different versions of reality, demonstrating that the media framing war in the digital public sphere is not just a battle of narratives but also a struggle for influence over public perception. In an era dominated by fast-moving and massive information flows, understanding how framing works is essential for enhancing media literacy and critical awareness among audiences.

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