



Muslim Conversion Narratives in Digital Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Belal Chin's YouTube Testimony

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Abstract:

This research examines the narrative of Muslim conversion through critical discourse analysis. The objective of this study is to analyze a YouTube video entitled "I don't care if I die! I have to become Muslim!"- British Rapper inspiring convert Story!" by using critical discourse analysis of Teun A. van Dijk's model. The study focuses on the textual analysis, social cognition, and social context of the video. This research is categorized as descriptive qualitative research. The data of this research are the words and sentences of Ashley Belal Chin. The classified data is then analyzed using Van Dijk's three-dimensional concept. The results of this study indicate that the story in the video has three structural dimensions, namely textual analysis, social cognition, and social context. The results of the text include microstructure that focuses on semantic elements (background, detail, meaning, presupposition, and nominalization), superstructure that is coherent from the beginning to the end of the video because each segment is a procession of converts that are interconnected, and macrostructure, which concludes that the theme of the video is the spirit of becoming a Muslim. Furthermore, social cognition shows the existence of schemes and memories that describe the speaker's background when delivering discourse to the audience. Social context refers to the way discourse evolves within society, considering social structures from the perspectives of power and access. Overall, the study provides insights into how digital media articulates and circulates narratives of Muslim conversion.

Keywords: Digital media, Muslim conversion, religious narrative, van Dijk's concept of CDA

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of language can be approached and applied through various tools and media, one of which is discourse. Discourse refers to a linguistic unit that functions as a means of communication within a social context (Pratama & Abidin, 2020). Whether oral or written, discourse often serves as a medium for expressing and disseminating perspectives on social issues. Discourse actively impacts social reality by expressing certain opinions, values, and ideological perspectives rather than serving as a neutral tool for information transmission. In analyzing discourse, it is inseparable from the factors that shape its formation, including culture, politics, ideology, intuition, and the broader social environment (Setiawan, 2014).

The transmission of ideological standpoints or perspectives of certain groups is mediated through diverse means, with media platforms constituting a primary vehicle. As such, media platforms exert a profound influence on shaping audience perceptions and guiding the dynamics of opinion formation (Wulandari et al., 2023). In line with this, the rapid development of digital media has enabled people to easily disseminate and access information from a wide range of global sources. Among these digital media, YouTube stands out as a prominent video-sharing platform owned by Google, offering a diverse range of online content. Due to its accessibility and popularity, YouTube has become a highly demanded platform for individuals to share their work and engage larger audiences. Therefore, digital religious discourse has significant potential to shape public perceptions of religious identity and influence how religious communities are represented in contemporary society.

Digital platforms, particularly YouTube, have become influential spaces for communication, knowledge sharing, and identity construction in the contemporary digital era. As an audiovisual medium with global reach, YouTube enables individuals not only to consume content but also to actively participate in the production and circulation of ideas, beliefs, and experiences. One of its notable functions is serving as a medium for *da'wah*, through which religious messages can reach broad and diverse audiences, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. In this context, YouTube facilitates new forms of religious engagement, where personal testimonies, sermons, and narrative storytelling serve as powerful tools for shaping religious understanding and inspiring personal transformation.

Discourse functions not only as a linguistic unit but also as a medium for disseminating social, cultural, political, and ideological perspectives (Pratama & Abidin, 2020; Setiawan, 2014). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is particularly relevant in this context, as it examines language beyond its surface meaning to uncover how discourse reflects power relations and ideological structures (Andriani, 2023). Among various approaches, Teun A. van Dijk's model provides a comprehensive framework by integrating textual structures, social cognition, and social context (Lumah & Sulistyawati, 2022; Sobur, 2012). His model addresses the macrostructure (thematic content), superstructure (schematic organization), and microstructure (semantic, syntactic, stylistic, and rhetorical aspects), while also considering social cognition and social context as integral dimensions.

Although digital platforms such as YouTube have been widely studied, research on how individual conversion stories are discursively constructed and disseminated remains limited, particularly in the context of Muslim conversion narratives. Existing studies tend to focus on broader themes such as digital religion, online preaching, or community formation, rather than examining how conversion is narrated at the level of language and discourse. In this regard,

conversion testimonies represent a distinct and underexplored form of discourse, as they combine personal experience, emotional expression, and ideological positioning within a single narrative framework. Conversion testimonies, especially those delivered by public figures, offer unique insights into how religious discourse interacts with social stigma, power relations, and audience reception. As public narratives, these testimonies are not merely personal reflections but are strategically constructed to resonate with diverse audiences, often addressing misconceptions about Islam while simultaneously legitimizing the speaker's new religious identity. Furthermore, the digital environment enables these narratives to be widely circulated, reinterpreted, and contested, thereby amplifying their influence within broader social and cultural debates. In this sense, analyzing conversion narratives through a discursive lens is crucial for understanding how language functions as a tool for negotiating identity, authority, and belief in contemporary digital spaces.

Recent scholarship has widely employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the representation of Islam and Muslims across diverse contexts, particularly in media, political, and institutional discourse, where Islam is constructed through ideological framing, racialization, and public narratives (Ghauri et al., 2021; Yousuf et al., 2024; Sufi & Yasmin, 2022; Popal, 2023). More recent studies have extended this focus to digital Islamic discourse, highlighting how social media reshapes religious communication, authority, and audience engagement in contemporary contexts (Saringsih & Khozin, 2025). These studies show that digital platforms not only mediate Islamic messages but also transform them into more visual, emotional, and audience-oriented forms.

At the same time, research on Muslim conversion has largely been dominated by sociological and anthropological approaches, focusing on identity transformation, religious practice, and adaptation processes (Abdullah et al., 2022; van Nieuwkerk, 2023; Midden, 2023). More recent work has begun to explore conversion within digital environments, such as identity expression on platforms like TikTok (Safitri et al., 2025), demonstrating how digital spaces shape religious identity and experience.

However, despite these developments, existing studies still tend to emphasize either institutional discourse or sociocultural dimensions of conversion, with limited attention to how conversion is discursively constructed through personal narratives in digital media. Furthermore, emerging research on digital religion underscores that online platforms significantly influence how religious meaning is produced, narrated, and circulated, yet the narrative and linguistic construction of conversion testimonies remains underexplored (Chen et al., 2025). This indicates a critical gap in understanding how language, narrative structure, and ideology interact in shaping conversion narratives as discursive practices in the digital age.

Addressing this gap, the present study applies Critical Discourse Analysis to examine the discursive construction of a Muslim conversion narrative in digital media, focusing on how linguistic choices, narrative structures, and ideological meanings shape the articulation of religious transformation. By shifting the analytical focus from institutional discourse and sociological perspectives to personal narrative discourse, this study expands the scope of CDA in Islamic studies and provides new insights into how religious identity and belief are constructed, negotiated, and circulated within contemporary digital environments.

Building on these discussions, this study examines how a Muslim conversion narrative is discursively constructed in digital media by applying Critical Discourse Analysis. Specifically, the

research analyzes how linguistic choices, narrative structures, and ideological meanings shape the representation of religious transformation within a personal testimony shared online. By focusing on individual narrative discourse rather than institutional or media representations of Islam, the study offers a new perspective on how religious identity and belief are articulated and negotiated in contemporary digital spaces. In doing so, this research contributes to expanding the scope of discourse studies on Islam by highlighting the role of personal storytelling in shaping public understandings of conversion and Muslim identity.

This study investigates the conversion narrative of Ashley Belal Chin in the YouTube video entitled *"I Don't Care if I Die! I Have to Become Muslim!" - British Rapper Inspiring Convert Story*. The video was selected due to its popularity, garnering more than 400,000 views and 22,000 likes, and its relevance to the representation of Muslim identity. By applying van Dijk's CDA model, this research aims to reveal the textual structures, social cognition, and social context embedded in Chin's narrative. The findings are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital media, particularly YouTube, serves as a site for religious discourse and *da'wah*, while also challenging negative stereotypes associated with rappers and Muslim converts.

Therefore, here are the research questions in the study: 1) How are the macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure of Ashley Belal Chin's YouTube conversion narrative constructed? 2) What aspects of the speaker's background and cognitive processes shape the construction of the conversion narrative? And 3) How does the conversion narrative interact with broader social dynamics, particularly issues of power, ideology, and stigma in society?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study employs Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine textual structures, social cognition, and social context within a Muslim conversion narrative. In applying this theoretical framework, several relevant studies have been reviewed to situate the present research within existing scholarship. First, Ulfaafifa et al. (2025) analyzed the narrative of hope presented in the February 2025 edition of Muhammadiyah's magazine Suara Muhammadiyah. Employing van Dijk's CDA framework, the study found that the discourse strategically uses optimistic language, factual evidence, and quotations from national figures to construct a narrative aimed at restoring unity following the political polarization of the 2024 Indonesian general election. The authors argue that such discourse serves as a symbolic intervention in the public sphere, promoting social cohesion and constructive dialogue.

Then, Yousuf et al. (2024) analyzed *The Nation* newspaper's anti-racist stance and its emphasis on social harmony. Using CDA and research tools for data collection, they examined the newspaper's perspective on constitutional rights and concluded that *The Nation* effectively propagated Islamic ideologies of social justice and equality. Their work illustrates how van Dijk's framework can uncover ideological positioning in media discourse. Besides, Fauzan & Nadia (2024), for example, analyzed how values of religious moderation are integrated into English language classrooms in Indonesian universities. Using Norman Fairclough's CDA framework, the study found that lecturers consciously embed ideological messages related to tolerance, non-violence, cultural rootedness, and national unity within classroom discourse. These findings indicate that English-language pedagogy can serve as a vehicle for promoting state-supported ideals of moderate religiosity.

Similarly, Mukminin & Yafuz (2024) investigated representations of religious moderation on the Instagram account Nahdlatul Ulama through its platform @nuonline_id. Applying van Dijk's CDA, the researchers identified four key values consistently emphasized in the posts: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and acceptance of tradition. The study concludes that social media platforms can function not only as information sources but also as instruments for promoting moderate religious values in contemporary society. Next, Setiyanto (2024) further examined the role of digital Islamic media through a CDA of articles published on Sanadmedia.com. The findings show that the platform constructs narratives of patriotism and religious moderation by combining classical Islamic teachings with national values. Through references to Qur'anic verses, hadith, and scholarly opinions, the discourse encourages balanced religious commitment while strengthening national identity, thereby demonstrating the potential of digital media to counter radical narratives.

Suryanatha et al (2023) also investigated the role of social media and technology in shaping jihad narratives among millennials, with a particular focus on self-recruitment and radicalization. Applying van Dijk's CDA, their study demonstrated how texts within digital platforms are embedded in broader discourse practices. They argued that effective de-radicalization efforts should prioritize the online sphere and involve collaboration across stakeholders. Then, van Nieuwkerk (2023) proposed a longitudinal approach to understanding religious conversion through an ethnographic study of Dutch female converts to Islam. The study conceptualizes conversion as a dynamic narrative shaped over time through interactions with various social actors. It demonstrates that converts often undergo phases of strong commitment, doubt, and identity renegotiation. Moreover, the research highlights how broader societal discourses, particularly Islamophobia and debates surrounding gender and radicalization, affect how converts interpret their religious journeys and construct their sense of belonging.

Popal (2023) explored the political rhetoric surrounding the discourse that "Islam needs reforming" within Australian political communication. By analyzing speeches delivered by former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott in response to the Lindt Café siege, the study demonstrates how political discourse may implicitly associate Islam with terrorism. Through CDA, Popal argues that calls for Islamic reform in response to acts of terrorism can perpetuate Islamophobic narratives by linking the religion itself with violent acts, thereby shaping public perceptions of Muslims within Western societies. Other studies focus on the lived experiences and identity formation of Muslim converts. Abdullah et al. (2022), for instance, examined adaptation strategies among Muslim converts in Sarawak, Malaysia, known locally as "Saudara Kita." Using qualitative interviews with five participants, the study identified several key themes in the conversion experience, including internal and external challenges, coping strategies, adaptation needs, support systems, and the role of counselors. The findings emphasize that conversion is not only a spiritual transformation but also a social process requiring institutional and community support to help converts maintain a stable religious identity.

In a related perspective, Midden (2022) examined the concept of "turning away" among European converts to Islam. The study argues that conversion is often framed negatively in Western societies as a rejection of modern or secular values. However, by drawing on decolonial perspectives, the article reinterprets conversion as an act of self-determination and identity negotiation. Converts may "turn away" from dominant societal narratives in order to construct a meaningful spiritual identity aligned with their personal values. Next, Lumah & Sulistyawati (2022) analyzed public discourse surrounding regulations on mosque loudspeakers, as delivered

by Yaqut Cholil Qoumas. Using van Dijk's framework, the study identified microstructural elements—such as semantic, syntactic, stylistic, and rhetorical aspects—as the most dominant features within the discourse. The analysis also revealed how macrostructural and superstructural elements construct broader themes related to religious regulation, power, and ideological positioning in Indonesian public discourse.

Then, Anam & Ghozali (2022) examined Mun'im Sirry's interpretation of *Al-Kafirun* with reference to theological and religious tolerance. Drawing on van Dijk's CDA, they identified five essential elements—actions, context, history, power, and ideology—and argued that Sirry's discourse was shaped by Western critiques of the Qur'an and broader ideological influences. Their findings underscore the importance of CDA in revealing the interplay between theology, ideology, and socio-political power. Next, Sufi & Yasmin (2022) conducted a systematic review of Islamophobic discourse from 2001 to 2022, analyzing 56 research articles published in major academic journals. Their findings reveal that many studies highlight how linguistic strategies are used to construct Muslims and Islam as “others,” often through negative representations in media and public discourse. The study also found that qualitative approaches dominate Islamophobia research and that most studies focus on the United Kingdom and the United States. Additionally, their analysis of media coverage of incidents in Canada (2021) and New Zealand (2019) demonstrates how discourse strategies reinforce negative images of Muslims, contributing to the racialization of Islam and broader social tensions.

In another context, Ghauri et al (2021) examined the discourse of Islam in the Australian press, utilizing van Dijk's concepts of the ideological square and lexicalization. Their study found that *The Age* promoted unity and multicultural understanding, whereas *The Australian* often reinforced negative portrayals of Muslims, particularly with respect to women's representation. The authors cautioned that such portrayals risk undermining multiculturalism and acceptance of migrants in Australia. Meanwhile, Utami & Harianto (2021) applied van Dijk's CDA to examine *Omar and Hana*, an Islamic children's cartoon series. Their study aimed to determine whether the program primarily served as entertainment or as Islamic education. They concluded that the series served as an effective vehicle for *da'wah*, emphasizing values such as compassion and generosity.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate the versatility of van Dijk's CDA in analyzing religious discourse across diverse media, including newspapers, digital platforms, theological texts, mainstream press, and children's entertainment. However, a research gap remains in applying CDA to personal religious testimonies disseminated on YouTube. Unlike previous studies, the present research focuses specifically on the textual structures (microstructure, superstructure, macrostructure), social cognition, and social context within Ashley Belal Chin's conversion narrative, as presented in the YouTube video “*I Don't Care if I Die! I Have to Become Muslim!*” - *British Rapper Inspiring Convert Story*. By examining this unique case, the study aims to expand the scope of CDA to understand how digital media constructs and circulate narratives of religious conversion.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how a Muslim conversion narrative is constructed and communicated in digital media.

CDA is particularly well-suited to investigating the relationships among language, ideology, and social context in discourse. The analytical framework is based on the socio-cognitive model proposed by Teun A. van Dijk, which conceptualizes discourse as a multidimensional phenomenon involving textual structures, social cognition, and social context. Through this approach, the study aims to reveal how linguistic choices and narrative structures contribute to the construction of religious transformation and identity within a personal conversion narrative.

3.2 Data Source and Unit of Analysis

The data of this study were taken from a YouTube video featuring a Muslim conversion testimony. The primary data of this study consist of the words and sentences spoken by Ashley Belal Chin, a British rapper. The data were obtained from a YouTube interview video entitled “*I don’t care if I die! I have to become Muslim!*” - *British Rapper Inspiring Convert Story!* published on the *Towards Eternity* channel (https://youtu.be/x_q0yixM3ok?si=oKONB7NdN6HIqrOL).

The unit of analysis in this study consists of clauses, sentences, and thematic segments that represent key moments in the conversion narrative. These units were selected based on their relevance to the construction of meaning, identity, and religious transformation in the discourse. By focusing on these textual elements, the study aims to identify how particular linguistic and narrative strategies contribute to the overall representation of conversion to Islam.

3.3 Transcription Process

The video was downloaded and transcribed manually to ensure accuracy of linguistic details. The transcription process included verbal expressions, pauses, emphatic stress, and significant paralinguistic cues that contribute to meaning-making in discourse. The transcript was then carefully reviewed several times to ensure its consistency with the original video. This iterative process ensured that the textual data accurately represented the spoken discourse in the video.

3.4 Analytical Framework of van Dijk’s CDA

The analysis follows the socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis proposed by Teun A. van Dijk. According to this framework, discourse can be analyzed through three structural levels: macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure. These textual structures are further interpreted in relation to social cognition and social context.

First, macrostructure refers to the global theme or overall topic of the discourse. In this study, macrostructure analysis aims to identify the central themes that organize the conversion narrative. Second, superstructure concerns the schematic organization of the discourse. This level examines how the narrative is structured, including the introduction of the story, turning points in the conversion journey, and the resolution or reflection presented by the speaker. Third, microstructure focuses on the local linguistic features of the text, such as lexical choices, rhetorical devices, emphasis, and stylistic patterns that reveal ideological meanings embedded in the discourse.

Those textual analyses are then interpreted through the lens of social cognition, which refers to the beliefs, knowledge, and mental models that influence how discourse is produced and understood. Finally, the analysis considers the broader social context, particularly the role of digital media in shaping the circulation and interpretation of personal religious narratives.

3.5 Coding and Interpretation Procedures

The analysis was conducted through several stages. First, the transcript was read multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the narrative and to identify key thematic segments. Second, the data were coded according to the analytical categories derived from van Dijk's framework, including macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure. Third, each coded segment was examined in relation to the broader narrative context in order to interpret its ideological and discursive significance. Finally, the findings were interpreted by linking textual patterns to social cognition and the wider social context in which the discourse is produced and circulated. This iterative process allowed the researcher to move between textual evidence and theoretical interpretation, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in the data while engaging with the broader CDA conceptual framework.

3.6 Reliability and Validation

To enhance the reliability of the analysis, the coding process was conducted iteratively through repeated readings of the transcript. Interpretations were continuously compared with the original video to ensure consistency between the textual evidence and the analytical claims. In addition, preliminary interpretations were discussed with peer researchers familiar with discourse analysis in order to obtain critical feedback and reduce potential subjective bias. This peer-review process strengthened the credibility and transparency of the analytical procedures.

3.7 Research Ethics and Positionality

The data analyzed in this study were obtained from publicly accessible online content. The analysis focuses on the discourse itself rather than evaluating the personal beliefs or character of the speaker. Ethical considerations were observed by accurately representing the original context of the narrative and by using the data solely for academic research purposes.

As discourse analysis involves interpretive engagement with textual data, the researcher acknowledges the importance of reflexivity in the analytical process. The researcher approaches the study from an academic background in language and discourse studies and maintains awareness of potential interpretive biases when analyzing religious narratives. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research by grounding interpretations in textual evidence and by consistently referring to the theoretical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis.

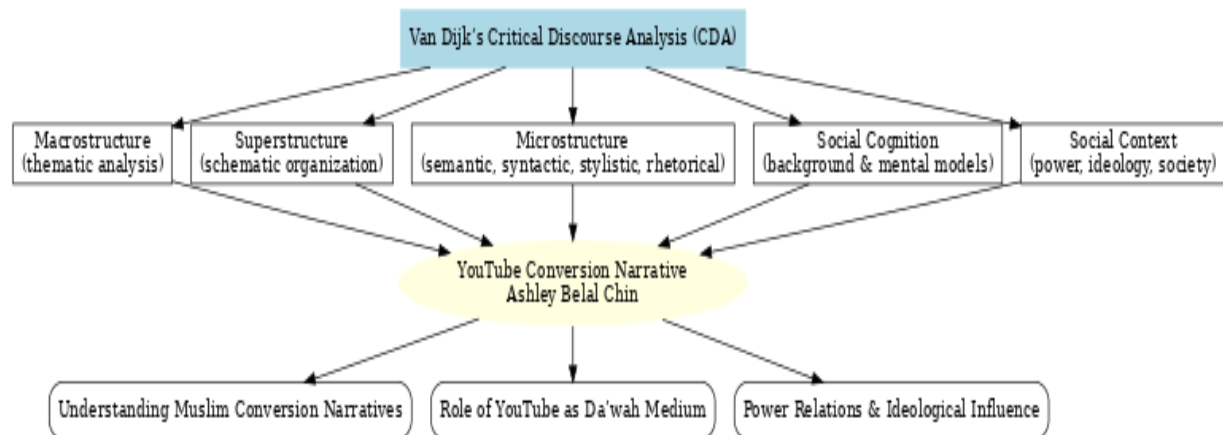


Diagram 1. Analytical Framework of Conversion Narrative Ashley Belal Chin

4. RESULTS

This study, grounded in Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), demonstrates how textual structures, social cognition, and social context interact to construct the narrative in the YouTube video "*I don't care if I die! I have to become Muslim!*". The following is an analysis of each structure according to Van Dijk's concept.

4.1. Textual Analysis

According to Teun A. Van Dijk's theory, the textual analysis framework comprises three parts: microstructure, superstructure, and macrostructure. These three structures are interconnected and complement each other. The following is an analysis of each structure in accordance with Van Dijk's concept.

4.1.1. Microstructure

4.1.1.1. Semantic Element

4.1.1.1.1. Background

The background in a story is chosen to help people understand how the speaker conveys the story, so they can easily grasp the message the speaker wants to convey. According to Eriyanto (2001), background helps determine how a person gives meaning to an event.

So, life before Islam on the streets is sadness. (A1)

Ashley Belal Chin's story recounts a life of misery before Islam. Everything he experienced as a child was uncomfortable. His struggles are described starting from his family's unstable economic condition, disharmony within the family, and a life that was far from adequate. This difficult life became the background story of Chin's struggle.

So, I had a tight relationship with God from then on. (A2)

Chin explained that before becoming a Muslim, he had an experience that made him believe in the existence of God. His belief in God grew stronger after his prayers were answered.

And there's a transitional period that early stage of our life is ignorance, but we get to a stage where we have to decide, what are we doing? (A3)

There was a moment when Chin began to question the purpose of his life. This transition period determines where Chin will go next.

The guy said to me, "Look in the dictionary what a Muslim is. You sound like a Muslim. Just believe in God." (A4)

After experiencing confusion about the purpose of life, Chin was enlightened by his idolized "brother" who led Chin to finally study Islam. Through this conversation, Chin finally realized that his life principles were in line with the teachings of Islam.

So, these type of things, after reading the books, made me say "I want to become a Muslim." (A5)

After feeling the emptiness in his life, Chin, who had paid attention to the teachings of Islam, decided to become a Muslim after considering his life goals and principles beforehand.

And I remember, like I said, when we were on the streets and we doing stuff, writing was like our therapy. That's how we let out what we were feeling. (A6)

This section explains Chin's early background in rap, which led him to become a famous Muslim rapper who shares his inspiring story as a convert.

From the background analysis, Chin's story begins with his unpleasant childhood. However, Chin was a person who prayed diligently to God. Chin shared that before becoming a Muslim, he was a person who had a close relationship with God. Chin believes in the existence of God. However, not believing in any religion, he explained that he went through a period when he realized the purpose of his life. He felt an emptiness within himself. Feeling that nothing mattered after his long journey, he began to seek direction in the teachings of Islam. He decided to become a Muslim after realizing that the teachings of Islam are in line with his life principles of believing in only one God, and every rule in Islam has good benefits for Muslims, so Chin believes that the rules are not a command or prohibition but instructions for his life to be better. Then, becoming a rapper is also Chin's goal to inspire many people through his stories and da'wah sentences packaged into rap verses.

4.1.1.1.2. Detail

In detail, the story in the YouTube video titled *"I don't care if I die! I have to become Muslim!" - British Rapper inspiring convert Story!* is a way of implicitly expressing one's attitude.

And I remember she said, "Only God can help us. You better pray to God because I don't know how you're getting to school tomorrow, we've got no money for dinner. You better pray because only God can help us." (A7)

This element of detail in the story demonstrates Chin's belief in the existence of God, a concept he elaborates on to underscore his conviction. The subsequent data delves into the concept of death as outlined in Surah Ali Imran. The dream Chin had serves as the crux of the narrative, offering a profound and unforgettable experience that shaped his understanding of God.

And I wrote one of my poems called uhm... "Signs" where I said, "We was broke, prayed for money then the door knocked. We were scared, prayed for safety and the car stopped." (A8)

Chin provides detailed descriptions of his poem "Signs" and the specific experiences it recounts, emphasizing the emotional and spiritual impact of these events. By focusing on the first-time experience of prayer being answered, Chin frames this moment as a pivotal and transformative event in his life. The detailed account reinforces Chin's message about the effectiveness and significance of prayer, which aligns with his perspective as a communicator.

And I was like, 11 years old. I used to like breaking rules. (A9)

These details, such as taking turns to lead prayers, being fed, and being 11 years old, create a vivid picture of the setting and the Chin's role within it. The inclusion of these details emphasizes Chin's personal connection to the memory and his playful, rebellious nature as a child. The details highlight Chin's personality and his relationship to the rules of his religious environment. By mentioning that he "used to like breaking rules" and describing how he replaced a traditional prayer with a little rap or rhyme, Chin conveys a sense of individuality and humour. This selective detailing paints Chin as someone who, even at a young age, challenged norms in a light-hearted way. Chin portrays himself in a favourable light by focusing on his creativity and

playfulness. Instead of framing his actions as disrespectful or inappropriate, the details emphasize his innocence and childlike silliness.

And when he was telling us that, I'll never forget this part where he said that "Angels are writing down everything you do. (A10)

The details evoke a sense of moral and spiritual responsibility. By specifying that angels record actions in both public and private, the speaker amplifies the idea that no deed goes unnoticed. This creates a sense of urgency and introspection, encouraging the audience to reflect on his behavior and its consequences. The rhetorical question, "What's your day of judgment gonna be like when you're called to account for that which you've done?" further reinforces this purpose. Chin presents the idea of divine accountability in a way that aligns with his values and beliefs. By focusing on the concept of judgment recording of actions, Chin's position as someone who is deeply concerned with morality and the consequences of one's actions. This framing makes the message appear authoritative and morally compelling.

And he goes, "Do not die, unless you die in a state of submission. And don't die unless you die as a Muslim. This is Surah Imran." (A12)

The incorporation of a verse from Surah Ali Imran underscores the profound impact of this narrative, effectively conveying a message of inspiration. Through this comprehensive and detailed exposition, Chin seeks to articulate a compelling claim about the existence of God and the inevitability of death, while underscoring the eventual return of all human beings to God's fold.

That studio we was at? Our manager got killed. And she's not even involved in crime. I think death was so close to home I remember having a dream that I got shot. (A13)

The statement about the manager's death highlights that the manager was not involved in a crime, which serves to underscore the unpredictability and closeness of danger. However, there are no further details about the circumstances of the manager's death, shifting the focus instead to Chin's personal reaction. The dream sequence is described in detail, with sensory elements like sweating, panic, and the paramedics' dialogue that make the experience feel intensely real. However, the most detailed part is the Chin's realization of wanting to take the Shahada before dying, which is framed as the ultimate concern above all else. By emphasizing this aspect in great detail while leaving other elements vaguer, the discourse is shaped to highlight the importance of religious transformation in the face of mortality. The omission of specific background details, such as what led to the manager's death or prior thoughts on religion, directs the focus toward the inevitability of conversion, portraying it as a deeply personal and almost predestined moment rather than a gradual process.

4.1.1.1.3. Meaning

According to Eriyanto (2001), the meaning element is to present profitable information, which is described explicitly, firmly, and clearly, and to directly show facts.

If I was created by Allah, how I worship Allah is by following these instructions. It's better for myself. (A14)

The phrase "how I worship Allah is by following these instructions" explicitly conveys that worship is a structured practice with specific guidelines. Chin reinforces the personal benefits of this obedience by stating, "It's better for myself," making the advantages of religious adherence

clear. Furthermore, the claim that following these instructions leads to “the best of this life and the best in the next life” directly states a fact from Chin’s perspective, reinforcing the idea that religious commitment yields both worldly and spiritual rewards. The final sentence, “And every rule, I see the benefit in,” further strengthens the message by emphasizing that all religious rules have observable advantages. This statement is firm and leaves little room for doubt, reinforcing the positive framing of religious practice. The paragraph consistently presents profitable information clearly, directly, and from Chin’s perspective, ensuring the message is conveyed with certainty and conviction.

So now I'm starting, it actually was everywhere. It was all around me, this religion. (A15)

The statement “it actually was everywhere” explicitly reinforces the idea that the religion's presence was undeniable, making the realization seem natural and unavoidable. The mention of researching “more and more” highlights an active pursuit of knowledge, reinforcing the notion that the decision was informed rather than impulsive. The phrase “I didn't need much convincing” firmly establishes that acceptance came easily, suggesting that the information was self-evident and beneficial. The final sentences provide a structured reasoning process: first, acknowledging the existence of a creator, and second, logically concluding that the creator must know what is best. This progression of thought is presented firmly and explicitly, reinforcing the idea that the belief is not only valid but also practical and beneficial. Chin ensures that the information is clear and actionable by clearly stating the advantages of its realization, leaving little room for ambiguity or alternative interpretations.

And every rule, I see the benefit in. Wherever it's to sleep on your right side you see the benefit. Whether it's to eat with your right hand, you understand. Pray five times a day, fast in the month of Ramadan. They're not a burden. They're actually things that are better for you. (A16)

The statement “And every rule, I see the benefit in” directly conveys that all religious guidelines have clear advantages, reinforcing the idea that they serve a purpose beyond mere obligation. Chin then provides concrete examples, such as “sleep on your right side,” “eat with your right hand,” “pray five times a day,” and “fast in the month of Ramadan,” which are stated as factual and practical instructions. By listing these practices without questioning their validity, the speaker presents them as universally beneficial. The phrase “They're not a burden” directly counters any notion that these rules may be difficult or restrictive, while the conclusion, “They're actually things that are better for you,” explicitly affirms their positive impact. This direct and confident presentation ensures that the profitable information, highlighting the personal and practical benefits of religious adherence, is clearly communicated and reinforced.

No one is perfect. But one thing I say is, you see, the prayer, that's gonna save us. That's the one where we're asking Allah to guide us to the right path. Don't see that as an option. (A17)

The statement “No one is perfect” acknowledges human imperfection but immediately shifts focus to a solution, emphasizing the role of prayer. The phrase “the prayer, that's gonna save us” is direct and absolute, leaving no room for doubt about its importance. By stating that prayer is the means through which people ask Allah for guidance, the speaker highlights its necessity in finding the right path. The closing statement, “Don't see that as an option,” reinforces this idea with a commanding tone, making it clear that prayer is not merely a choice but a requirement.

This firm and unambiguous presentation ensures that the profitable information, the vital role of prayer in achieving spiritual success, is conveyed clearly and convincingly.

I say that I turned all my mess into my message. (A18)

The statement “I say that I turned all my mess into my message” explicitly shows Chin's personal experience, where Chin's “mess” is turned into a valuable “message”. There is a strong sense of transformation from something negative into something positive and inspiring.

And that means if I was born in Israel, I would have been a Jew. So it's not about what's the truth, it's just about what I inherit. (A19)

The statement “if I was born in Israel, I would have been a Jew” is presented as a factual observation, reinforcing the argument that religious identity is largely determined by birth rather than objective truth. The phrase “it's not about what's the truth, it's just about what I inherit” firmly asserts that religious affiliation is often passed down rather than critically examined. By stating, “I don't think religion should be an inheritance,” Chin directly challenges this idea and presents an alternative perspective.

4.1.1.1.4. Presupposition

Presupposition is an attempt to support an opinion or argument by including premises that are believed to be true, both logically and factually (Eriyanto, 2001).

How does that make sense? (A20)

Upon reflection, Chin feels that his argument or thought has validity. This assumes that a rethinking process is underway. Chin questions the logic behind a particular action. This assumes that Chin does not fully accept the explanation or reason given.

Now the worst I see in life is we're breaking down. We're all breaking as humans. But we're complaining. Why am I going through this, why am I going through that? But we're not following the instructions of the person who created us. (A21)

Chin's theory suggests that humanity is experiencing a universal “breaking down” due to suffering, decline, or moral decay. This assumes that the audience agrees with this idea. Complaining is seen as a common, unproductive response to life's challenges, and the audience recognizes it as a negative behaviour. Chin also suggests the existence of a divine creator who has provided “instructions” for humanity to follow, assuming the audience accepts the concept of divinely ordained guidelines for human behaviour.

4.1.1.1.5. Nominalization

Nominalization is the process of changing verbs into nouns. Nominalization can eliminate the subject in a discourse. Through this strategy, the discourse maker can eliminate the subject by using nominalization of the information.

So, I had a tight relationship with God from then on. (A22)

This is that guy that used to drive a convertible with a big chain and the gold teeth. (A23)

“Do not die, unless you die in a state of submission. And don't die unless you die as a Muslim. This is Surah Imran.” (A24)

And I can get you a teacher there, you'll have no distractions. (A25)

And what that was is to give upliftment, to say, look, don't ever feel, just because you're, like, 'Oh, they prefer that.' (A26)

From the data above, several words are formed through the nominalization process, which changes a verb into a noun. The word *relationship* comes from the verb relate, which undergoes nominalization to form a relationship. Something similar happens to the word convert, which, after being nominalized, becomes *convertible*. In addition, the words submit becomes submission, distract becomes distractions, and uplift becomes *upliftment*. This process shows how English words can be shaped to change their function and meaning depending on context.

4.1.2. Superstructure

In the superstructure, there are 3 parts from the YouTube video entitled "*I don't care if I die! I have to become Muslim!*" - *British Rapper inspiring convert Story!* such as the introduction, content, and closure.

At the beginning of the video, there is an introduction scheme. Before entering the content, namely the process by which the informant became interested in becoming a Muslim, the informant introduced himself and shared a brief story about his status as a convert.

The content section consists of 7 sections, namely life before Islam, Christianity, journey to Islam, becoming a Muslim, family reaction, choosing the rap, and favorite lines of rap. All of these sections were determined from the questions during Chin's interview. Each question and answer is determined by the main idea, which is then summarized into a core topic to determine the theme for each section of the content.

In the closing section, Chin offers a conclusion from his story. The message for non-Muslims is to search for religion or truth, as Chin experienced in his story, where he studied the teachings of Islam until he became interested in becoming a Muslim.

4.1.3. Macrostructure

Macrostructure element used in the YouTube video entitled "*I don't care if I die! I have to become Muslim!*" - *British Rapper inspiring convert Story!* is in the form of themes or topics discussed in the video. The main theme or topic is the spirit of becoming a Muslim. This theme describes the story's entire content: Ashley Belal Chin's lifelong struggle to understand Islam.

4.2. Social Cognition

4.2.1 Schemas

4.2.1.1. Person Schemas

Person schemas relate to how a person perceives other individuals. The following is an analysis of the person schemas into 3 parts: before becoming a Muslim, just before becoming a Muslim, and after becoming a Muslim.

Chin revealed his thoughts while in church. A woman in the church reminded Chin to give thanks by mentioning the name of Jesus. This contradicted Chin's belief in one God. Finding the woman's words unreasonable, Chin eventually left the church.

After leaving Christianity for many years, Chin then met a young man who became his idol. Chin, who was still young at the time, saw this young man as cool because of the clothes he wore

and the vehicles he drove. After getting to know the young man, Chin learned that he was a Muslim. Chin then learned the religion from this idolized person.

When Chin said the shahada, He realized that his Muslim brothers who witnessed him saying it were very happy, giving him a cheerful look. People greeted Chin happily because they had become Muslim brothers.

4.2.1.2. Self-Schemas

Chin is a rapper who inspires people with his story. Chin does not feel he is teaching people; he just shares what he has experienced. Chin, who has a foundation in writing poetry, makes rap a path of proselytizing that spreads goodness to many people.

4.2.1.3. Role Schemas

In the role schemas, Chin, a musician and actor, has numerous works and achievements. Chin inspires people who relate to his life journey. Chin strives to spread the teachings of Islam to many people. Chin started teaching his mother and sister because they are family. With several attempts to convince his mother and sister finally embraced Islam thanks to Chin's efforts.

4.2.1.4. Event Schemas

In the event schemas, Chin's story begins with his sad childhood. Despite this, Chin believed in the existence of God. Initially, Chin never missed church services, but one day he realized that something was not in accordance with the principles he believed in, namely, worshiping only God. Chin left the church. After a long journey, Chin was known to live among people associated with Islam. As he studied Islam more deeply, Chin realized that its teachings had been in accordance with his principles all along. Finally, he decided to become a Muslim. After becoming a Muslim, Chin's family certainly had a reaction to what happened to him. Initially, his mother and sister were not interested. However, due to Chin's efforts, eventually his mother and sister also converted to Islam. Chin became a rapper to share his life story, aiming to spread da'wah and inspire many people.

4.2.2. Long-term Memory

4.2.2.1. Episodic Memory

Chin was born into a financially struggling family, studied Christianity, and frequently attended church to pray to God. He began believing in God after a miraculous event where his prayers were answered. However, he found discrepancies between his own beliefs and the Christian teaching on praying in the name of Jesus, leading him to leave the church at 13. He only believed in one God. He met a Muslim role model and learned about Islam through their relationship. The social environment supported his decision to embrace Islam, as it played a significant role in his life. Chin's family initially showed disinterest in his conversion to Islam, but with Chin's efforts, they eventually converted to Islam. Chin became a rapper to share his life story, aiming to spread da'wah and inspire many people.

4.2.2.2. Semantic Memory

Chin's semantic memory of his knowledge of Islam was found. Chin has knowledge of God, who must know what is best for him. Every Islamic teaching has a purpose and goal for Muslims. Every rule is not a prohibition but an instruction for a better life.

4.3. Social Context

The story of how Ashley Belal Chin became a Muslim is included in the YouTube video to inspire viewers. Ashley Belal Chin's decision to be one of the program's interviewees is inseparable from his background. Ashley Belal Chin is a rapper and actor who is quite famous for his conversion to Islam, which could certainly influence more people. An influencer has a greater impact because their appeal draws more attention from the general public to their story.

The process of converting to Islam is characterized by a long spiritual quest, personal struggles, and significant life changes. These stories exemplify the personal strength, self-discovery, and sacrifice involved in embracing a new faith, which can serve as a source of inspiration for others seeking to evaluate and deepen their own beliefs. The influence of social influencers, particularly among the younger generation, is considerable, especially given their extensive use of social media. Their stories are widely shared by their fans, increasing visibility of the conversion process.

In the context of the challenges faced by Muslims worldwide, including negative news and stereotypes, conversion stories have the potential to showcase the positive and peaceful aspects of Islam. Conversion stories can also function as a medium to present or reinforce Muslim identity in the context of discussions concerning religion, race, and politics. Muslim converts, particularly those from unusual backgrounds, can serve as symbols of change and inclusivity. Moreover, the story of a convert can function as a response to negative stereotypes about Muslims. Many Muslim converts previously had a negative view of Islam, but later changed after learning more about the religion. Ashley Belal Chin's story shows that Islam is a religion of compassion, tolerance, and peace.

4.3.1. Power

Growing up, I was always into music, and then I ended up building a career out that. (F1)

I made money, I've done films, I've done this. (F2)

Chin is a rapper and actor who has many fans. Since he has many fans, Chin can influence and impact many people. For his fame and achievements, Chin uses rap as a path of da'wah.

4.3.2. Access

And the Imam there, he said "You went to Egypt, how was it like? You should share your story in the Mosque." (F3)

So, I was actually in Malaysia, performing. And I'd been there a few times to perform. (F4)

I would say, as a people, we need to learn how to think. (F5)

As a famous figure who inspires many people, Chin decided to share his thoughts on beliefs that were not in line with Christianity and how he realized that Islam's rules aligned with his life principles. By sharing his story on YouTube, Chin can certainly change some people's negative views about Islam.

5. DISCUSSION

This study, applying Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, demonstrates how textual structures, social cognition, and social context interact in shaping a

Muslim conversion narrative in digital media. The findings reveal that the narrative is not merely a personal account but a strategically constructed discourse that reflects ideological positioning, identity negotiation, and audience engagement.

From a textual perspective, the analysis shows that the narrative is systematically organized across microstructure, superstructure, and macrostructure levels. At the microstructural level, the use of background details, presuppositions, and nominalization functions naturalizes the conversion experience and presents it as inevitable and authentic. This finding is consistent with prior CDA studies that emphasize how linguistic features shape meaning and ideological representation (Islamiyah & Hermaliza, 2024; Mustikawati, 2021; Anam & Ghozali, 2022). Similarly, research on media discourse by Ghauri et al. (2021) and Yousuf et al. (2024) demonstrates how lexical choices and thematic structures construct particular representations of Islam. However, while these studies focus on institutional or journalistic texts, the present study extends this perspective by showing that individual narratives also employ sophisticated discursive strategies comparable to those found in formal media discourse.

At the superstructural level, the narrative follows a coherent and emotionally engaging sequence—beginning with personal struggle, moving through a turning point, and culminating in spiritual resolution. This structure aligns with narrative theory, particularly the notion of transformation narratives in religious studies, where storytelling is used to construct meaning and moral legitimacy. Comparable patterns can be observed in studies on Islamic media narratives (Ulfaafifa et al., 2025; Utami & Harianto, 2021), yet those works primarily focus on institutional or scripted content. In contrast, this study highlights how unscripted, personal testimonies in digital media can exhibit equally structured and persuasive narrative forms.

At the macrostructural level, the dominant theme of spiritual transformation reinforces the broader discourse of Islam as a source of guidance, purpose, and inner peace. This finding resonates with sociological studies on conversion, such as those by van Nieuwkerk (2023) and Midden (2023), which emphasize identity reconstruction and meaning-making in conversion processes. However, unlike these studies, which focus on lived experiences and practices, the present research reveals how such transformations are discursively framed and rhetorically intensified through narrative construction.

In terms of social cognition, the findings indicate that the speaker's beliefs, experiences, and socio-cultural background significantly shape the discourse. This supports van Dijk's socio-cognitive model, which posits that discourse production is mediated by mental models and ideological frameworks. Similar patterns are identified in political and digital discourse studies, such as Aprilia & Ferdaus (2024) and Suryanatha et al. (2023), where discourse is strategically designed to influence audience perception. Additionally, studies on racialization and Islamophobia (Sufi & Yasmin, 2022; Corral et al., 2023) show how cognition operates in constructing "us vs. them" narratives. In contrast, the present study demonstrates that conversion narratives reverse this dynamic by reconstructing Islam through a positive, experiential lens, thereby reshaping audience cognition.

From a social context perspective, the findings highlight how the conversion narrative functions as a form of counter-discourse against dominant negative representations of Islam. This aligns with studies on media framing and representation (Hasanah, 2021; Ghauri et al., 2021), which show how discourse can reinforce or challenge stereotypes. Moreover, research on political rhetoric (Popal, 2023) and gender discourse (van Oost et al., 2023) illustrates how Islam is often

positioned within contested ideological spaces. The present study contributes to this body of work by showing that personal narratives in digital media can actively intervene in these discursive struggles, offering alternative representations grounded in lived experience.

Furthermore, the role of digital platforms such as YouTube is particularly significant. Previous studies on digital Islamic discourse (Fauzan & Nadia, 2024; Mukminin & Yafuz, 2024; Setiyanto, 2024) highlight how online media facilitate the dissemination of religious messages. Studies on conversion and adaptation (Abdullah et al., 2022) emphasize social integration, whereas more recent digital religion studies highlight the importance of online identity construction. However, these studies rarely examine the discursive mechanisms that construct and circulate narratives. This study fills that gap by demonstrating that YouTube is not merely a medium of transmission but a discursive space where meaning, ideology, and identity are actively produced and negotiated. Taken together, these findings affirm the analytical strength of van Dijk's CDA framework in uncovering the interplay between textual structures, social cognition, and social context. At the same time, they extend CDA scholarship by applying it to a relatively underexplored domain—personal religious narratives in digital media.

The novelty of this study lies in several key contributions. First, it extends the application of Teun A. van Dijk's CDA beyond traditional domains such as news media, political discourse, and institutional communication to personal conversion narratives in digital environments. Second, it demonstrates that individual storytelling on platforms like YouTube is not merely expressive but discursively structured, ideologically loaded, and socially consequential. Third, the study integrates insights from discourse analysis and conversion studies by showing how religious transformation is not only experienced but also narratively constructed and publicly communicated. Finally, it highlights the role of digital media as a site of counter-discourse, identity negotiation, and ideological contestation, thereby offering a new perspective on how Islam is represented and understood in the contemporary digital age.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates how textual structures, social cognition, and social context collectively shape the narrative in the YouTube video *"I don't care if I die! I have to become Muslim!"* featuring British rapper Ashley Belal Chin. The textual analysis identifies key semantic elements—such as background, detail, meaning, presupposition, and nominalization—supported by a coherent superstructure and a macrostructure that emphasizes the overarching theme of spiritual transformation.

The analysis of social cognition highlights how Chin's encounter with a Muslim role model and his supportive environment contributed to his decision to embrace Islam. Meanwhile, the social context dimension reveals the significance of sharing his conversion story through YouTube, which not only inspires others but also challenges prevailing stereotypes about Muslims and Islam. Taken together, the findings show how digital narratives can function as powerful tools for identity formation, counter-discourse, and religious inspiration.

Theoretically, this research enriches the body of literature on critical discourse analysis by applying van Dijk's model to digital religious narratives. It demonstrates the versatility of CDA in analyzing not only political or journalistic texts, but also conversion stories disseminated through online platforms. The study also contributes to scholarship on media and religion by showing how digital storytelling can operate as a form of counter-discourse that reshapes public

perceptions. Practically, the findings have implications for digital da'wah and media literacy. Religious organizations and practitioners of da'wah may draw on the power of personal storytelling to counteract stereotypes and engage broader audiences. At the same time, media consumers are reminded of the need for critical awareness in interpreting online content, recognizing how discourse is strategically constructed to influence perception and belief.

This research contributes to the application of van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis beyond traditional media, demonstrating its relevance for studying digital platforms and religious narratives. At the same time, the study acknowledges its limitations, as the microstructural analysis was restricted to semantic elements. Future research may extend the analysis to other microstructural aspects, such as stylistic, syntactic, and rhetorical features, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of discourse construction. Furthermore, van Dijk's model can be fruitfully applied to a wide range of media objects—including films, books, and digital content—offering opportunities to explore how discourse operates across diverse cultural and ideological contexts.

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