



Media Representations of Urban Poverty in Jakarta and Manila: A Comparative Sociological Study

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Abstract

Urban poverty remains one of the most persistent social challenges in Southeast Asia, yet its portrayal in mainstream media often shapes public understanding and policy responses in unequal ways. While current scholarship acknowledges the media's role in marginalization, there is a distinct lack of comparative research that details how divergent macro-level political economies produce specific, localized journalistic practices concerning the urban poor. This study addresses this gap by examining news and digital media in Jakarta and Manila, two megacities that embody contrasting trajectories of postcolonial urban development. Drawing on comparative sociological and critical discourse analyses, the research investigates narratives, visual framing, and thematic emphases across leading platforms between 2020 and 2025. Using mixed methods—including content analysis, interviews, and audience studies—the paper uncovers how journalistic practices produce different frames, ranging from moralized depictions of the poor as "responsible citizens" to structural critiques of inequality. Findings reveal that Jakarta's media normalizes poverty through developmentalist frames, whereas Manila's media emphasizes resilience. Ultimately, this paper moves beyond descriptive comparison to advance a theoretical framework for the 'mediatization of urban marginality.' The study contributes to the political economy of communication by theorizing how journalistic routines and local governance structures co-produce neoliberal subjectivities, transforming structural urban inequality into individual moral narratives.

Keywords: media representation, urban poverty, comparative sociology

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INTRODUCTION

Urban poverty, as both a social condition and a media construct, has increasingly become central to public debate across the Global South (Mittal et al. 2023; Miyamoto 2020; Sanglay and Abanto 2024). Cities such as Jakarta and Manila, emblematic megacities of Southeast Asia, embody rapid modernization where economic growth coexists with deep structural inequalities (Janssen et al. 2022; Susilo et al. 2023; Utami et al. 2023). Within these spaces of uneven development, media narratives play a pivotal role in shaping collective imaginaries about “the poor,” influencing how citizens, policymakers, and international observers understand the urban margins (Handayani et al. 2023; Kusaka and Marie Karaos 2017; McChesney 2016). Poverty, in this sense, is not only an economic or spatial reality but also a matter of representation — constructed through language, imagery, and journalistic framing that either humanizes or marginalizes the urban poor (Sampurna et al. 2024).

In the broader scholarship on media and social inequality, representation operates as a site where power is negotiated. Stuart Hall argues that representation is the production of meaning through language and signification, locating media as an ideological apparatus that continually constructs “the social” (Hall 1981). In urban contexts, where the visibility of poverty intersects with consumerist modernity, the media mediate how citizens perceive who belongs to the city and who is left behind (Triary Hardy and Susilo 2022). Consequently, the “representation of poverty” becomes a powerful discursive practice through which modernity and marginality are simultaneously defined (Bustos et al. 2023; Guilleminot 2023; Kevin E. Cahill 2017).

Jakarta and Manila provide compelling comparative cases for this inquiry. Both cities share similar colonial histories, neoliberal development trajectories, and democratic transitions, yet they differ in media systems, governance cultures, and urban imaginaries. These differences produce varied modes of representing poverty — from technocratic reporting aligned with government modernization agendas to emotive storytelling that frames poverty through resilience and moral virtue (Kataoka and Darangina 2023; Ronaghi and Scorsone 2024; Xu and Li 2023). By comparing these patterns, this study interrogates how national and local media systems contribute to the social construction of poverty in two of Southeast Asia’s most influential urban centers.

The politics of visibility is a key concern in contemporary sociological and media studies. Scholars such as Silverstone (2013) emphasize that mediated visibility determines whose lives are deemed worthy of empathy, policy attention, or moral concern. In contexts where urban

poverty remains entrenched yet normalized, the challenge lies not merely in making poverty visible but in determining how it becomes visible (Silverstone 2013).

In Jakarta, the media's portrayal of poverty is heavily influenced by developmentalist narratives that emphasize economic growth and national progress (Savirani and Aspinall 2017; Wilson 2019). The poor often appear as subjects of state intervention or as passive beneficiaries of welfare programs (Putri et al. 2025). In contrast, Manila's media environment — historically pluralistic and shaped by strong civil society movements — tends to frame poverty through human-interest stories and community-based struggles (Garrido 2019; Hernandez et al. 2022; Hjorth and Arnold 2011; Ogena 2012). While such representations may foster empathy, they can also depoliticize poverty by individualizing structural inequalities.

This tension between empathy and structure, or visibility and accountability, forms the theoretical hinge of this study. Drawing from critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2003) and cultural sociology, the research explores how journalistic routines, newsroom ideologies, and political economies of media production shape the process through which the poor become “media subjects.” The dichotomy between representation as visibility and representation as distortion is central to understanding media's dual role as both a platform for inclusion and an instrument of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1998).

Southeast Asia's urbanization has been both a developmental triumph and a sociological dilemma (Dobbs and Loh 2023; Freire and Stren 2001; Kusaka and Marie Karaos 2017; Thompson 2007; Triary Hardy and Susilo 2022; Wilson 2019). Cities like Jakarta and Manila have undergone relentless expansion, fueled by industrialization, migration, and informal economies (Hafiudzan et al. 2024; Jelinek 1992; Ong et al. 2023; Sepe 2019; Susilo and Primatama 2018). Yet despite rising GDP figures, urban poverty persists in complex forms — manifesting through precarious labor, informal housing, and environmental degradation. The World Bank (2024) estimates that over 20% of urban populations in Indonesia and the Philippines live below the poverty line, many within highly dense settlements vulnerable to displacement.

Urban poverty in this region cannot be understood solely through quantitative economics but must be contextualized within historical, political, and cultural frameworks. Postcolonial theorists (e.g., Escobar 2011) remind us that the “modern city” in Asia is not a neutral developmental outcome but a contested space where global capital, state power, and everyday

survival intersect (Escobar 2011). Jakarta's kampung settlements and Manila's barangays exemplify how informal communities sustain urban economies while simultaneously being stigmatized as “backward” or “problematic” (Janssen et al. 2022; Kataoka and Darangina 2023; Lewis and Scott 1998; Wilson 2019). Media representations play a decisive role in reinforcing or resisting these stigmas.

News stories often depict slum dwellers as passive victims of structural decay or as enterprising subjects embodying “Asian resilience.” Yet what remains largely absent are depictions of structural inequality — the systemic causes of poverty such as land precarity, labor exploitation, or policy failures. This absence reflects media's accommodation of elite and commercial interests, where urban development is celebrated while displacement and marginalization are obscured (Savirani and Aspinall 2017).

A comparative sociological lens enables the study to move beyond cultural essentialism or media determinism (de la Cruz Paragas and Lin 2016). Instead of treating Jakarta and Manila as isolated cases, this approach examines how historical legacies, media structures, and sociopolitical dynamics interact to shape distinct representational patterns. Indonesia's media system, despite democratization, remains heavily influenced by conglomerate ownership and state narratives that emphasize order and development (Susilo 2017). Meanwhile, the Philippines has one of the freest yet most commercialized media landscapes in Asia, producing a paradoxical mixture of investigative journalism and sensationalist populism (Ong 2015; Pacoma 2019; Siriyuvasak 2005).

These systemic differences influence how poverty is covered. In Jakarta, the developmentalist ethos inherited from the New Order regime has evolved into a “progressive modernization” discourse that treats poverty as a technical problem solvable through governance and infrastructure (Gazali 2003). In Manila, the media's populist orientation foregrounds emotional storytelling and moral appeals, often situating poverty within personal narratives of sacrifice and perseverance (Pacoma 2019). Both discourses, however, risk depoliticizing poverty by framing it as either a problem of governance capacity or individual moral strength rather than structural inequity. By examining these differences, this study shows that the media does more than just reflect society—it actively creates social divisions and moral rules. Comparing these contexts helps us spot broad regional trends without losing sight of unique national details. This balanced approach is essential for building theories that truly apply to the Global South.

This research is grounded in three overlapping theoretical frameworks: representation, hegemony, and framing theory. Representation theory, inspired by cultural studies and poststructuralist thought, posits that media do not merely depict reality but construct meaning through systems of signs and discourse (Hall 1981; Sienkiewicz and L. Wayne 2023). In the case of poverty, this process shapes social attitudes — whether the poor are viewed as deserving, deviant, or resilient.

Framing theory (Entman 1993) operationalizes these ideas in media research by specifying how certain aspects of reality are highlighted while others are omitted. Frames of poverty — such as moral, structural, or developmental — guide public reasoning about causes and solutions (Entman 1993).

These frameworks help us analyze how the media reflects broader power dynamics. They allow us to see how language, images, and narratives actively shape public understanding of urban poverty. While much research exists on media and inequality, we still lack a strong understanding of how Southeast Asian media portrays the urban poor. Specifically, there has been no systematic comparison of Jakarta and Manila—two cities with similar growth patterns but different political and cultural environments. Therefore, this study asks: How did mainstream and digital media in Jakarta and Manila portray urban poverty between 2020 and 2025, and what social, cultural, and political factors explain these portrayals? By answering these questions, this research goes beyond analyzing media content to show how journalism actively shapes social inequality and moral values in both cities.

METHODS

This study employs a comparative, mixed-methods design to examine how mainstream and digital news media in Jakarta and Manila represented urban poverty between 2020 and 2025. The research integrates quantitative content analysis, critical discourse analysis (CDA), and semi-structured interviews to identify dominant frames, narrative structures, and ideological patterns within selected media texts (N Fairclough 2001; Norman Fairclough 2001). Grounded in an interpretivist paradigm that views representation as a socially constructed process, this integrated approach facilitates a dual focus: identifying recurring frames used in reporting and elucidating the ideological meanings embedded within those frames (Ong 2010).

Media Selection and Comparative Validity The study analyzes coverage from ten leading news outlets — five from each country. The selection of exactly ten outlets is purposive,

designed to ensure comparative validity and representativeness without compromising analytical depth. Outlets were selected based on high readership/circulation, agenda-setting influence, and the need to reflect a symmetrical media ecosystem across both megacities. For both Jakarta and Manila, the sample includes a matched balance of legacy print-turned-digital powerhouses (Kompas; Philippine Daily Inquirer), broadcast networks' digital arms (CNN Indonesia; ABS-CBN News, GMA News Online), and independent digital-native platforms (Tempo.co, Detik.com, Republika; Rappler, Philstar Global). This structural symmetry ensures that differences in reporting reflect distinct socio-political contexts rather than skewed institutional comparisons.

Data Sampling and Corpus Construction Articles were initially gathered using a set of key search terms such as “urban poverty,” “slum,” “informal settlements,” “*kemiskinan kota*,” and “*permukiman kumuh*,” covering the period from January 2020 to December 2025. From an initial corpus of approximately 2,500 items, a representative subset of 500 articles (250 per city) was extracted using stratified random sampling. Strata were defined by publication outlet and publication year to ensure proportional representation across the five-year timeframe and to prevent the overrepresentation of single, highly publicized events (e.g., a specific disaster). Selected articles included hard news, feature stories, and opinion columns focusing directly on issues of poverty, inequality, or urban living conditions.

Phase 1: Quantitative Content Analysis and Coding . The first phase involved quantitative content analysis to map macro-level trends. The coding process utilized a deductive-inductive approach. An initial codebook was developed based on established framing models (Dougherty 2005; Krippendorff 2018; Lombard et al. 2002), which was then iteratively refined during a pilot test. Coders evaluated each article for dominant frame presence — structural, moral, human-interest, and development — as well as for key visual and lexical indicators. Intercoder reliability was tested using a subset of 50 articles, yielding a Cohen’s Kappa coefficient above 0.80, confirming statistical reliability.

Phase 2: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) The second phase utilized critical discourse analysis (CDA) to explore the deeper ideological structures underlying textual data. Following Fairclough’s (2010) three-dimensional model, analysis proceeded across three levels: textual (examining word choice, metaphors, and imagery), discursive practice (considering how stories are produced and circulated), and social practice (interpreting the socio-political context).

Particular attention was paid to how discourses of development, morality, and citizenship are mobilized when narrating urban poverty.

Phase 3: Semi-Structured Interviews To address the 'discursive practice' element of Fairclough's model, the study incorporated semi-structured interviews with media practitioners (N=12; 6 in Jakarta, 6 in Manila). Using purposive sampling, the researchers recruited journalists, editors, and producers who actively covered urban issues within the ten selected outlets. Interviews lasted 45–60 minutes and explored editorial routines, political-economic pressures, and journalistic perceptions of the urban poor. Interviews were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis, with ethical clearance and informed consent obtained for all participants.

Integration of Methods The integration of these mixed methods follows an explanatory sequential design. First, the quantitative content analysis mapped the frequency of specific frames. These statistical patterns were then used to purposively select focal texts for the qualitative CDA, allowing for a deep dive into the most prevalent ideological constructs. Finally, the interview data were triangulated with the textual findings to explain *why* specific frames dominated, linking the journalistic text directly to the political economy of the newsroom. By juxtaposing Jakarta and Manila through this integrated approach, the analysis contributes to a nuanced understanding of how Southeast Asian media systems mediate the visibility, meaning, and moral politics of urban poverty.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Dominant Frames and Narratives of Poverty

Across both cities, the developmental frame emerged as the most dominant, appearing in approximately 42% of all analyzed articles. This frame constructs poverty as a policy or infrastructure problem requiring coordinated state intervention. In Jakarta, the developmental logic was particularly pronounced, aligned with the language of modernization and city branding. Articles frequently reported on *penataan kota* (urban restructuring) and *kampung* renewal projects, emphasizing government programs aimed at housing relocation and infrastructure improvement. Poverty here was largely depicted as an impediment to national

progress—a challenge that could be solved through technocratic planning rather than social reform. (Sutanto et al. 2017)

Headlines commonly invoked terms such as *revitalisasi*, *pembangunan berkelanjutan*, or “urban order,” situating poverty within a modernization narrative. The framing implicitly validated state interventions such as eviction drives or slum clearance as necessary for achieving developmental goals. Such coverage exemplifies what Ong (2010) describes as the “disciplinary rationality” of neoliberal urban governance, where media naturalize growth-oriented policies even when they marginalize informal communities.

In contrast, Manila’s developmental framing was less bureaucratic but similarly reformist. Media reports highlighted government initiatives on social housing and livelihood programs under the lens of service delivery. While these stories praised administrative efforts, they occasionally adopted a critical tone regarding corruption, inefficiency, or lack of public consultation. Nonetheless, the underlying narrative remained the same: poverty as a technical issue to be managed rather than a structural consequence of neoliberal development (See Picture 1).

Picture 1



Analysis of the Developmental Frame in Media Coverage

The human-interest frame, the second most frequent (around 30% of total coverage), portrayed the poor through deeply personal, emotional narratives. This frame was more prevalent in Manila’s media than Jakarta’s, reflecting the Philippines’ long-standing journalistic tradition of affective storytelling and moralized empathy. Features and television reports often chronicled

individual life stories—single mothers working multiple jobs, children overcoming adversity, or informal settlers facing demolition—with emotive visual and linguistic devices (Armando 2014; Kanchana Chokriensukchai 2017; Kitley 2000). This representation humanized poverty but simultaneously individualized it, transforming structural deprivation into stories of personal virtue and sacrifice. Such narratives align with the notion of “the aesthetic of pity,” which invites empathy without necessarily mobilizing political critique (Pacoma 2019).

Jakarta’s coverage tended to employ the human-interest frame more cautiously. When present, it often appeared in lifestyle or special-report sections, focusing on inspirational microentrepreneurs or community resilience under economic hardship. While these stories foster public sympathy, they still underpin a neoliberal moral economy that equates survival and adaptability with civic virtue. The media thus valorize the capacity to “adjust” rather than question systemic inequality.

Moral Frame and Structural Frame: Poverty as Responsibility and Virtue

The moral frame accounted for about 15% of articles and intersected significantly with religious discourse, particularly in Jakarta-based coverage. Islamic values of commercialized and politically entangled media systems favor the moral framing of poverty, positioning the well-off as moral agents obligated to assist the poor. Such reporting underscores compassion but also reinforces a hierarchical moral order between benefactors and beneficiaries.

In Manila, moral framing was often intertwined with Christian ethics, particularly during humanitarian crises such as typhoons or fire incidents in slum areas. The poor were portrayed as pious, resilient, and morally upright despite hardship. While these stories evoke emotional solidarity, they tend to moralize poverty as a test of faith rather than a product of inequality. Consequently, the moral framing in both contexts contributes to the symbolic domestication of poverty—transforming it into a moral condition rather than a social problem demanding structural change.

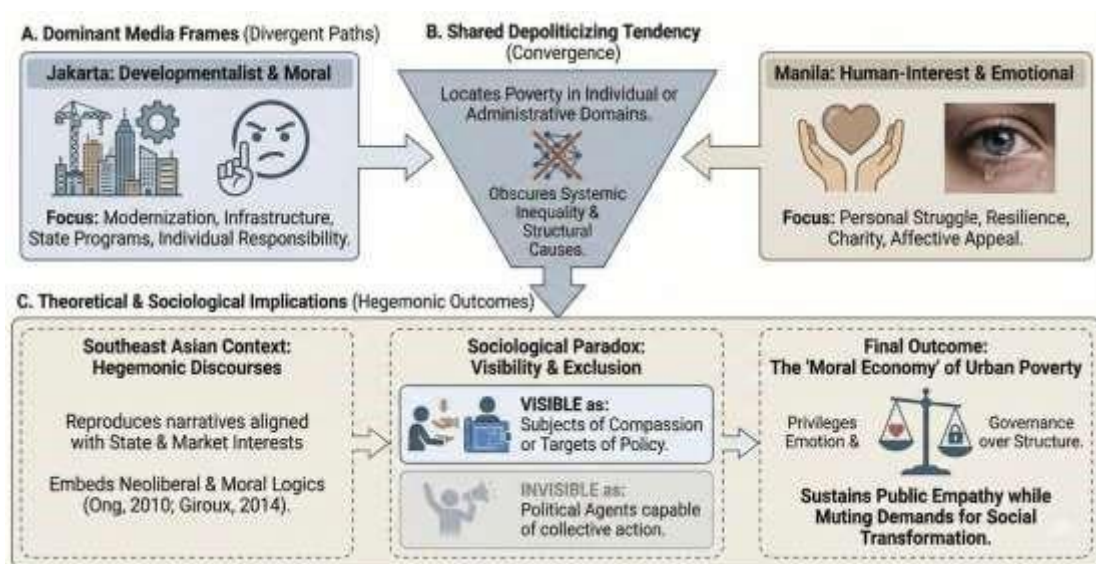
The structural frame comprised only around 13% of the articles, and its relative scarcity indicates how rarely poverty is analyzed as a systemic issue. In both cities, such framing usually appeared in opinion columns or investigative features rather than in mainstream news articles.

In Jakarta, critical pieces by outlets like Tempo.co occasionally linked urban poverty with labor precarity, land dispossession, and state-corporate alliances in urban redevelopment.

However, these perspectives were episodic and largely confined to elite opinion sections. Similarly, in Manila, investigative pieces by Rappler and the Philippine Daily Inquirer traced poverty to political patronage, land inequality, and weak labor protections. Yet these interventions rarely gained traction in broader media discourse, overshadowed by more dominant sentimental or developmental narratives.

The scarcity of structural framing reflects what Bourdieu (1998) calls the “symbolic censorship” within journalistic fields—an internalized limitation on discussing power relations that threaten social consensus. Both countries’ commercialized and politically entangled media systems favor narratives that sustain social stability over those provoking systemic critique.

Picture 2.



Comparative Narrative and Sociopolitical Consequences of Poverty

Overall, the findings demonstrate that while Jakarta’s media lean toward developmentalist and moral framings, Manila’s favor human-interest and emotional ones. Both styles, however, share a common depoliticizing tendency: they locate poverty in individual or administrative domains rather than systemic inequality (See Picture 2). These patterns affirm the hypothesis that Southeast Asian media often reproduce hegemonic discourses aligned with state and market interests, embedding neoliberal and moral logics into their portrayals of the poor.

In comparative sociology terms, these framing tendencies underscore the ideological interdependence of visibility and exclusion. The poor are made visible as subjects of compassion or targets of policy but remain invisible as political agents. By privileging emotion and

governance over structure, media narratives in both Jakarta and Manila shape a moral economy of urban poverty that sustains public empathy while muting demands for social transformation.

Media Ownership, Journalistic Norms, and Developmental Discourses

Media ownership significantly influences framing priorities and narrative boundaries. In Indonesia, the conglomerate-dominated media, under oligopolistic control by politically connected business groups, correlates with the prevalence of developmental framing. Major outlets like Kompas and Detik.com are owned by conglomerates with deep ties to state infrastructure projects and urban development initiatives (Ananda et al. 2019; Zulfiningrum 2014). Sociologically, this ownership structure does more than dictate editorial lines; it creates a structural symbiosis where media capital and state capital depend on the same narratives of progress and modernization.

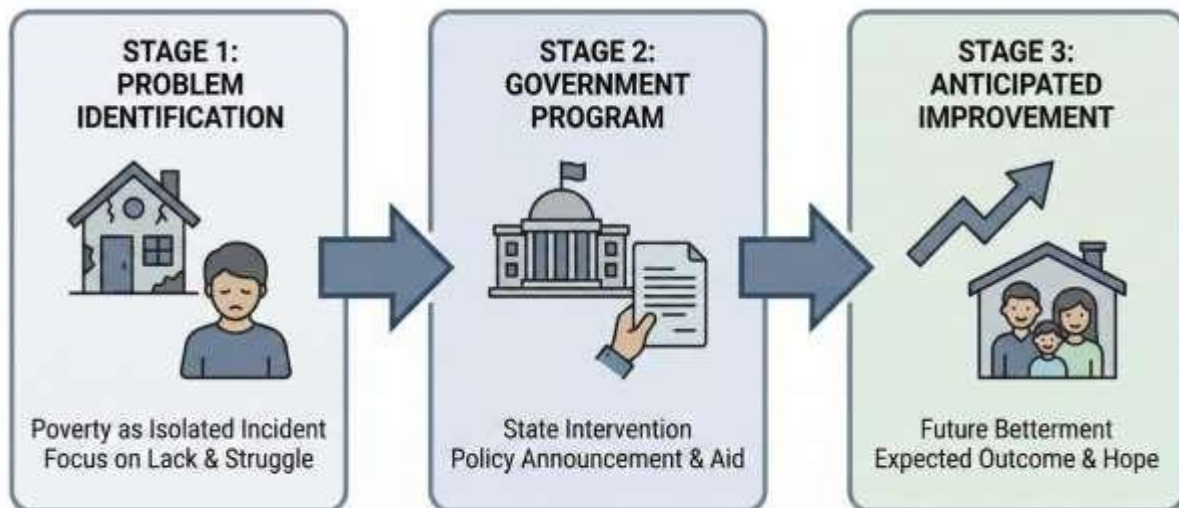
For instance, articles frequently echoed the language of Jakarta's Special Region status and its ambitious city branding under Governor Anies Baswedan and subsequent administrations. Critical reporting on slum evictions or displacement was rare, appearing primarily in independent outlets like Tempo.co that maintain relative autonomy. The political economy of Indonesian media thus embeds a hegemonic developmentalism, where poverty is reframed as an opportunity for state-led upliftment rather than a consequence of uneven development.

In the Philippines, the media system's commercial pluralism produces a more fragmented but equally constraining environment. While outlets like ABS-CBN and GMA face commercial pressures to maximize emotional engagement, investigative platforms like Rappler occasionally challenge power structures (GOYENA 2022). However, even critical journalism tends to remain within populist-humanitarian boundaries rather than pursuing systemic critique. The absence of overt state control paradoxically reinforces market-driven sensationalism, where poverty becomes commodified as emotional spectacle.

Crucially, however, the depoliticization of poverty in both cities is not an absolute hegemony; it is a contested arena. While dominant discourses favor state or market logics, the media also function as a site of episodic resistance. In Manila, investigative outlets and alternative digital networks occasionally weaponize the human-interest frame—not merely for spectacle, but to mobilize political outrage against forced evictions or extrajudicial killings in urban slums. Similarly, in Jakarta, independent platforms utilize digital storytelling to center

grassroots resistance against land grabs. These counterexamples demonstrate that while structural forces push toward depoliticization, journalists and urban poor advocates continuously negotiate and exploit fissures within these media systems to assert political agency.

Picture 3.



The Poverty Story in the Media Narratives

Professional norms and routines further mediate how poverty is covered. In Jakarta, the official source dependency characteristic of Indonesian journalism — a legacy of the New Order era — manifests in heavy reliance on government press releases and expert commentary from urban planners or development officials. Poverty stories typically follow a formula, as seen in Picture 3. This routine embeds a technocratic optimism that marginalizes resident voices and community perspectives.

Content analysis revealed that direct quotations from the urban poor appeared in only 18% of Jakarta articles, compared to 32% in Manila. When present, these voices were often framed as testimonials to state benevolence rather than as political critique. Such practices reflect the professional norm of “balanced reporting” that equates official perspectives with objectivity, effectively silencing grassroots narratives.

Philippine journalism, by contrast, exhibits a melodramatic norm where emotional storytelling dominates. The human-interest frame thrives on vivid personal accounts, tearful interviews, and dramatic visuals of hardship. While this approach generates public sympathy, it adheres to commercial imperatives that prioritize audience engagement over analytical depth.

The journalistic routine of “victim advocacy” paradoxically depoliticizes poverty by transforming it into a moral melodrama rather than a structural injustice.

Both countries’ media representations are anchored within national developmental discourses that shape the discursive boundaries of poverty coverage. In Indonesia, the *Pembangunan* discourse (development discourse) inherited from Suharto’s New Order has evolved into a neoliberal variant emphasizing public-private partnerships, smart cities, and inclusive growth. Media coverage of urban poverty rarely challenges this framework, instead positioning the poor as beneficiaries or obstacles within a predetermined developmental trajectory.

The discourse constructs a teleological narrative where poverty is a transitional phase toward middle-class modernity. Critical terms like “exploitation” or “dispossession” are largely absent, replaced by the sanitized language of “urban upgrading” and “community empowerment.” This discursive hegemony ensures that media representations remain compatible with the state’s vision of orderly modernization.

In the Philippines, developmental discourse is more fragmented but similarly constraining. The “inclusive growth” rhetoric under successive Duterte and Marcos administrations frames poverty alleviation through targeted social programs and infrastructure spending. Media coverage aligns with this logic by highlighting government initiatives while critiquing implementation failures. Yet even oppositional journalism rarely questions the underlying neoliberal assumptions of growth-led development.

The comparative analysis reveals how institutional contexts produce homologous representational logics despite surface differences. Jakarta’s conglomerate-driven developmentalism and Manila’s commercial populism both serve to contain poverty within manageable discursive boundaries. These patterns affirm Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) insight that media systems are embedded within national political cultures, producing parallel outcomes across different institutional arrangements.

More critically, the findings illustrate Gramsci’s (1971) concept of hegemony in action. Dominant groups — state, corporate, and political elites — secure consent for developmental policies through media discourses that appear commonsensical and benevolent. Poverty becomes not a challenge to the social order but a technical problem within it (Gramsci 1971).

Journalistic norms reinforce this hegemony by internalizing constraints as professional virtues: objectivity in Jakarta becomes source dependency, while advocacy in Manila becomes emotional spectacle. Both approaches ensure that structural alternatives remain outside the realm of legitimate debate.

These findings contribute to media sociology by demonstrating how institutional and discursive structures co-produce representational regimes. They challenge simplistic notions of media “bias” by revealing how poverty coverage emerges from systemic pressures rather than individual malice. Practically, the study suggests that media reform must address ownership concentration and professional routines alongside content. Strengthening independent journalism and amplifying marginalized voices could diversify representational practices, fostering more politically engaged discourses of urban inequality.

Ultimately, these findings advance Global South media sociology by moving beyond the constraints of traditional Western framing theories. Existing Western applications often assume a normative, liberal-democratic divide between a “watchdog” press and the state. However, this study demonstrates that in Southeast Asian megacities, such neat divisions do not exist. By conceptualizing how postcolonial state-building, oligarchic capitalism, and informal urban economies fuse to dictate journalistic boundaries, this paper clarifies how media in the Global South co-produce the moral economy of poverty. Practically, the study suggests that media reform in these contexts cannot rely solely on Western models of “objectivity.” It must address ownership concentration and amplify marginalized voices to transform the urban poor from passive subjects of development into recognized political agents.

CONCLUSION

This comparative study demonstrates how media in Jakarta and Manila construct urban poverty not as a structural injustice, but as a manageable issue of technocratic policy or personal resilience. While Jakarta’s coverage emphasizes state-aligned developmentalism and Manila’s leans toward commercialized emotional spectacle, both systems ultimately converge in depoliticizing the urban poor. Moving beyond descriptive comparison, this study synthesizes these findings to advance three distinct conclusions for media sociology in the Global South.

The primary theoretical contribution of this research is the provincialization of Western framing and media models. By adapting framing (Entman 1993) and cultural representation

(Hall 1997) to non-Western urban contexts, this study advances a framework for understanding *postcolonial urban media regimes*. It empirically demonstrates that in Southeast Asian megacities, media hegemony operates through distinct institutional mechanisms—conglomerate state-alignment in Indonesia and commercial pluralism in the Philippines. These systems co-produce a moral economy that naturalizes uneven development, proving that journalistic frames are historically contingent tools that manufacture elite consent and constrain the rights-bearing agency of the urban poor.

The primary limitation of this study is its methodological focus on elite, national news outlets. By analyzing institutional media, this research captures dominant hegemonic discourses but may inadvertently underrepresent hyper-local journalism or alternative digital networks where grassroots, counter-hegemonic voices and resident-led narratives potentially proliferate. To build upon these findings, the future research agenda must pivot toward participatory media and audience reception. Future studies should investigate digital-native platforms and algorithmic social media (e.g., TikTok), where visual representations of poverty and informal economies are rapidly evolving outside traditional editorial gatekeeping. Furthermore, expanding this comparative framework to other regional megacities—such as Bangkok or Ho Chi Minh City—will test the broader generalizability of these postcolonial representational logics.

Ultimately, this research reaffirms the media's role as a constitutive force in material power relations. By exposing how communication systems construct the moral architecture of the Asian megacity, this study calls for a critical media sociology committed to structural visibility, urging scholars and practitioners to reimagine the urban poor not as objects of compassion, but as active citizens co-shaping equitable futures.

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