

P-ISSN: 2541-6960 | E-ISSN: 2549-8754

Yupa: Historical Studies Journal

Vol. 10, No. 1, 2026, pp. 1–12

<https://doi.org/10.30872/yupa.v10i1.5464>

A Discourse Analysis of Plantation Commodity Processing Advertisements in East Sumatran Newspapers (1870-1930)

Syahri Ramadhan^{1*}, Melly Tria Utari²

1 Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia Aceh, Jantho, Indonesia

2 Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia Aceh, Jantho, Indonesia

* Corresponding author: syahri@isbiaceh.ac.id

Abstract

This research aims to analyze the background behind the emergence of advertisements related to the processing of plantation commodities in newspapers, using Van Dijk's theoretical approach. The data sources for this study are the newspapers *Pewartu Deli*, *Suara Dairi*, and *Surya Sibolga*. The method used in this research is the historical method, which is examined through four stages, heuristics (source collection), data verification (validating sources), interpretation (analysis); and historiography. Data analysis is conducted using Van Dijk's theory. The results of this research indicate that there is a connection between the advertisements for processed plantation commodities in the newspapers *Pewartu Deli*, *Suara Dairi*, and *Surya Sibolga*, and the implementation of the 1870 Agrarian Law by the Dutch East Indies government. These newspapers served as a platform to market or sell the abundant outputs of the plantation industry, which significantly increased due to the application of the 1870 Agrarian Law.

Keywords

Advertisement; plantation commodities; newspaper

Article History

Received	Revised	Accepted	Published
24 July 2025	22 November 2025	28 November 2025	30 April 2026

How to Cite

Ramadhan, S., & Utari, M. T. (2026). A discourse analysis of plantation commodity processing advertisements in East Sumatran newspapers (1870-1930). *Yupa: Historical Studies Journal*, 10(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.30872/yupa.v10i1.5464>



Introduction

The advertisements for processed plantation commodities in the newspapers *Pewarta Deli* (1917), *Suara Dairi* (1930), and *Surya Sibolga* (1932) are noteworthy. From the early 20th century until the end of the Dutch East Indies colonial government, the development of such advertisements in newspapers grew rapidly. This growth was closely linked to the role of the Dutch East Indies government in implementing the 1870 Agrarian Law, which led to the emergence and expansion of plantation commodity processing industries.

A significant milestone in the development of industry and plantations in Indonesia occurred in 1870. The policy changes implemented in that year successfully stimulated the influx of foreign private capital into the Dutch East Indies, particularly through increased foreign investment in the plantation sector following the enactment of the Agrarian Law of 1870. Initially, on one hand, the Agrarian Law aimed to protect Indonesian farmers from losing ownership rights to their land to foreigners. On the other hand, it opened opportunities for foreigners to lease Indonesian people's land for plantation enterprises.

The emergence of the Agrarian Law of 1870 led to a rush among foreign private entities to establish large scale plantations in Indonesia and to develop plantation based industries as a means of processing agricultural products. This became evident after the implementation of the Agrarian Law of 1870 by the Dutch East Indies government, as numerous plantation industries were established in Indonesia, including those involved in the processing of sugar, coffee, and tobacco (Breman, 1997).

Given this situation, in the marketing process of plantation industries, the Dutch East Indies government and foreign private entities placed advertisements for plantation products in newspapers, such as *Pewarta Deli* (1917), *Suara Dairi* (1930), and *Surya Sibolga* (1932). The widespread publication of advertisements related to the processing of plantation commodities in the early 20th century attracted the author's interest to examine this phenomenon. Meanwhile, studies analyzing newspapers in East Sumatra remain very limited (Masyrullahushomad, 2019).

Based on this background, the author is particularly interested in examining advertisements related to the processing of plantation commodities in the newspapers *Pewarta Deli* (1917), *Suara Dairi* (1930), and *Surya Sibolga* (1932). These newspapers serve as data sources for the author to explore the connection between the plantation commodity processing industry and the implementation of the Agrarian Law of 1870. The newspaper analysis employs Van Dijk's theoretical approach. Utilizing Van Dijk's framework in analyzing advertisements on plantation commodity processing greatly assists the author in conducting an in depth analysis of the data sources, with the aim of generating valid hypotheses.

Method

The method used in this research (Sjamsuddin, 2012) is the historical method, which is examined through four stages: First, the heuristic stage (source collection). The primary data sources in this study are the newspapers *Pewarta Deli* published in 1917, *Suara Dairi* published in 1930, and *Surya Sibolga* published in 1932, obtained through observations at the Center for Historical Studies and Social Sciences of Universitas Negeri Medan (PUSSIS-UNIMED). The newspapers selected as samples for this research were chosen based on their publication years 1917, 1930, and 1932 which are the main focus of this study.

Second, the data verification stage involves testing the validity of the collected sources through two steps: examining the authenticity of the sources (external criticism) and evaluating the accuracy or credibility of the content (internal criticism). After verification, the data are then categorized according to the research topics being investigated. This verification process is validated by comparing the data with findings from previous studies and reinforced by interview data related to newspapers, obtained from several informants such as historians or cultural experts in the city of Medan.

Third, the data interpretation stage is the process of assembling historical facts from sources into a coherent understanding. Ultimately, these meaningful historical facts are written integrally in a narrative based on the collected data. Fourth, the historiography stage (historical

writing) is the process of presenting (reconstructing) historical facts. This historical writing is not merely descriptive but explanatory aimed at providing a deeper analysis so that the research can be thoroughly understood and previously unanswered questions can be addressed effectively. Meanwhile, the data analysis technique used by the author in examining the newspapers *Pewartar Deli* (1917), *Suara Dairi* (1930), and *Surya Sibolga* (1932) applies Van Dijk's theoretical approach. In his theory, Van Dijk states that there are three key factors to consider when conducting text analysis within a discourse: text, social cognition, and social analysis (Sulasman, 2014).

Results and Discussion

The author will briefly explain Van Dijk's theoretical approach in this paragraph. Van Dijk states that there are three key factors to consider when analyzing texts within a discourse (Eriyanto, 2001). The first is Text. Which Van Dijk divides into several levels: (1) Macrostructure, this refers to the global or general meaning of a text, which can be observed by identifying the main topic or theme highlighted in the news; (2) Superstructure, this relates to the discourse structure or the overall framework of the text, showing how the different parts of the text are organized to form a coherent news report; and (3) Microstructure, this involves the detailed meaning of the discourse, which can be observed from smaller elements of the text such as words, sentences, propositions, sub clauses, paraphrases, and images.

Second, Social Cognition. Discourse analysis does not limit its focus to the structure of the text alone, but also considers how a text is produced. Van Dijk introduces a concept known as social cognition. Within the framework of Van Dijk's discourse analysis, it is essential to examine social cognition, which refers to the mental awareness or mindset of the journalist that shapes the text. Third, Social Analysis. The third dimension of Van Dijk's analysis is social analysis. Journalists are part of the discourse that develops within society, so in order to analyze a text, it is necessary to conduct an intertextual analysis by examining how discourse on a particular issue is produced and constructed within the social context. The newspaper analysis using Van Dijk's theory will be further explained in the following paragraph.

Pewartar Deli Newspaper (1917)

The *Pewartar Deli* newspaper (1917), there was an advertisement related to the sale of plantation commodities, one of which was tobacco. The sale of plantation commodities at that time was closely linked to the implementation of several Dutch colonial political policies aimed at exploiting all available natural resources in Indonesia. The process of agrarian sector control during the Dutch colonial period had already begun with the establishment of the VOC (*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*). This can be evidenced by the trade monopolies imposed by the VOC to dominate key agricultural commodity sectors, such as nutmeg and cloves in the Maluku Islands. In addition, they controlled pepper from Banten and Aceh, rice from Mataram, and coffee from the Priangan region (Sudirman, 2012).

In another source, the VOC (*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*) also sought to dominate the agrarian sector, particularly in clove cultivation in the Maluku Islands, especially in Ambon. However, no narrative was free from conflict and competition over control of the Maluku Islands, as at that time the region was surrounded by the interests of various European powers such as Spain, Portugal, England, and the Netherlands through its VOC (Hoeverell, 2014). During the administration of Herman Willem Daendels (1808-1811), exploitation in the agrarian sector was also carried out, such as the implementation of the *Prianger Stelsel* a system that required the people of Priangan and its surrounding areas to cultivate export crops like coffee. Additionally, he enforced a monopoly on rice trade. Under Daendels' rule, land owned by the local people was sold to Dutch and Chinese private individuals (*particulieren*), which further increased the suffering of the common people due to the arbitrary actions of these landowners (Octavia, 2020).



Figure 1. Pewarta Deli Newspaper (1917)

In addition to the period under Herman Willem Daendels, during the administration of Thomas Stamford Raffles (1811-1816), similar efforts were made to exploit the agrarian sector. Raffles introduced the Land Rent System, which stated that all land belonged to the government, and farmers, as cultivators, were required to pay land rent. Moreover, Raffles abolished the forced delivery of crops by the people and replaced it with the freedom to cultivate and sell profitable commodities. Apart from the two administrative systems previously described, another system was later introduced by Van den Bosch, known as the Cultivation System (Cultuurstelsel) or forced cultivation system (Itawan, 2023). This system was extremely burdensome for the Indonesian people, as it required them to allocate part of their farmland to grow mandatory crops typically export quality commodities. The harvest from these crops had to be handed over to the government, and indigenous farmers were forced to work their land under the supervision of Dutch officials. This situation caused immense suffering among the native population, as it led to widespread poverty and hardship.

From the explanation above, it can be understood that the advertisements for the buying and selling of plantation commodities such as tobacco in the Pewarta Deli newspaper (1917) were influenced by the political policies of the Dutch East Indies colonial government. These political policies were implemented by the colonial administration to control Indonesia as a colony. As previously described, most of the policies carried out by the Dutch East Indies government were intended to turn the colony into a region exploited for the benefit of the mother country the Netherlands. Indonesia's socio economic conditions at the time, as a predominantly agrarian or pre-industrial society, gave rise to colonial policies such as the Cultuurstelsel (forced cultivation) and trade monopolies over exportable agricultural products. These commodities were then marketed and sold in European markets (Kartodirdjo, 1991).

The perspective of Van Dijk's theory, the plantation commodity advertisements found in the Pewarta Deli newspaper (1917) reflect a social cognition that positions the ruling authority the colonial government as the central subject being represented. The colonial administration played a dominant role in influencing the content and framing of advertisements in newspapers. This influence brought several advantages to the colonial government. One of the key benefits was its control over all advertisements related to the sale of plantation commodities, allowing the government to freely promote and market these goods produced through exploitation in Indonesian territories to both domestic and international audiences. This, in turn, generated significant revenue for the Netherlands as the mother country of the Dutch East Indies colonial administration.

Suara Dairi Newspaper (1930)

As a result of World War I, exports from the Dutch East Indies declined significantly. During the war, which lasted from 1914 -1918, almost no plantation products could be exported to Europe, causing the economy to suffer greatly. Likewise, the import of goods from abroad

previously supplied by Europe came to a halt. To prevent such a crisis from happening again in the future, efforts were made to ensure that the Dutch East Indies could become self-sufficient and no longer reliant on foreign imports. Consequently, in the early 20th century, Governor General Idenburg established a committee for the development of industries focused on processing plantation commodities (Zubir, 2015).



Figure 2. Suara Dairi Newspaper (1930)

One of the processing industries established by the Dutch East Indies government was the industry for coffee and rubber processing. This development was closely tied to the successful cultivation of rubber in the Deli region and on the island of Java, which quickly attracted the attention of European entrepreneurs. Nearly every week, new rubber plantations were established in the Deli area (Sumarno, 2016). Due to the abundance of vast unoccupied lands and the region’s climate highly suitable for rubber trees East Sumatra came to be known as the Garden of the East. This success encouraged the Dutch East Indies government to establish rubber processing industries. This can be seen in the growth of rubber plantation processing industries in Sumatra.

Table 1. Rubber Plantation Processing Industries

No	Name of Plantation Industry	Location
1	Verenigde Langkat Ondernemingen Mij	Sumatera
2	Anglo Sumatra Rubber Company Ltd	Sumatera
3	Sumatra Deli Rubber Ondernemingen Mij	Sumatera
4	British Sumatra Rubber Estates	Sumatera
5	Glen Bervie Rubber Company	Sumatera
6	Serdang Central Ondernemingen Mij	Sumatera
7	Havea Rubber Onderneming Mij	Sumatera
8	Sungai Kari Rubber Mij	Sumatera
9	Sabang Onderneming Mij	Sumatera
10	Bandar Sumatera Rubber Mij	Sumatera

Source: (Siahaan, 2000)

In such a situation, the Dutch East Indies government also played a significant role in influencing the discourse of texts within each advertisement for plantation commodities. If the discourse within these advertisements is analyzed using Van Dijk’s approach, it reveals how social cognition and the mental attitude of the journalists who produced the discourse were

primarily directed toward emphasizing the role of the colonial government. This was closely tied to the influence and authority of the colonial administration, which consistently exercised control over various activities in the colony to serve the interests of the colonial government (Siregar, 2024).



Figure 3. Suara Dairi Newspaper (1930)

In addition to being analyzed through social cognition, the textual content of advertisements for processed plantation commodities can also be examined through social analysis, which is influenced by two key factors: power and access. These two factors play a significant role in determining the outcome and purpose behind the creation of a text within a discourse. Naturally, both were shaped by the Dutch East Indies government, which at the time held absolute authority over its colonial territories. This control enabled the colonial government to dominate the narrative, regulate access to media platforms, and direct the discourse to serve its economic and political objectives.

Surya Sibolga Newspaper (1932)

The Surya Sibolga newspaper (1932) shares similarities with *Pewartu Deli* (1917) in its presentation of advertisements for processed plantation commodities. In the advertisement images from Surya Sibolga (1932), it is evident that a wide variety of plantation products were being traded both by the colonial government and by Chinese merchants. This reflects the influence of the Agrarian Law of 1870, which served as a key mechanism used by the colonial government to exploit the agrarian sector in its colonies. The law not only opened the door for foreign private capital to invest in plantations but also allowed colonial and non indigenous traders to dominate the trade and distribution of plantation commodities across the archipelago.

The year 1870 marked a crucial turning point in the development of industry and plantations in Indonesia. Beginning that year, several policy changes were implemented by the Dutch East Indies government, including: (1) Opening wide opportunities for private enterprises to invest capital in various sectors, including processing industries; (2) The Agrarian Law, which allowed foreign companies to acquire land to be used for plantations; and (3) The enactment of a Sugar Industry Law, which stipulated that the government would no longer be involved in the sugar industry. From that point onward, such enterprises were to be entirely handed over to the private sector (Sinaga, 2016).

The policy changes implemented in 1870 successfully stimulated the influx of foreign private capital into the Dutch East Indies. One significant outcome was the increasing number of foreign investors in the plantation sector following the enactment of the Agrarian Law of 1870. Initially, on one hand, this law aimed to protect Indonesian farmers from losing ownership of their land to foreigners. On the other hand, it also opened opportunities for

foreigners to lease land from the local population for the purpose of establishing and expanding plantation enterprises.

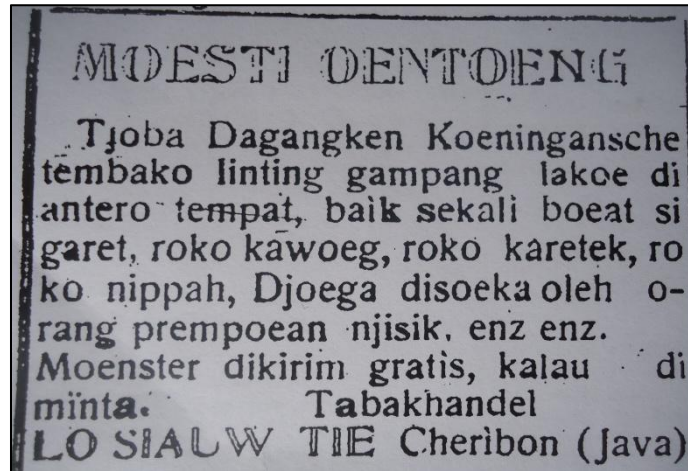


Figure 4. Pewarta Deli Newspaper (1917)

For greater clarity, this paragraph explains the land use regulations established under the Agrarian Law of 1870: (1) Land owned by indigenous people could not be sold to non-indigenous individuals; (2) Government-owned land of up to 10 bau (approximately 7 hectares) could be purchased by non-indigenous individuals for company construction purposes; (3) For larger areas of government land, non-indigenous individuals were granted usage rights, such as the right to use land, the right to build, lease rights, and the right to inheritance, for a period of up to 75 years.

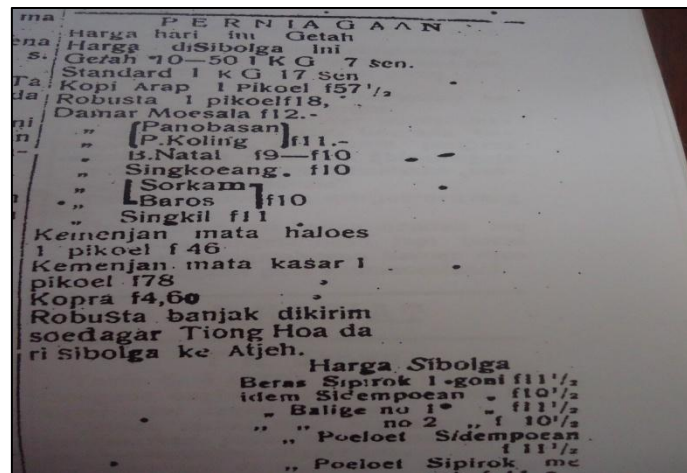


Figure 5. Surya Sibolga Newspaper (1932)

The implementation of the Agrarian Law of 1870 led to a surge of competition among foreign private investors to establish large scale plantations across Indonesia and to develop plantation based industries as a means of processing agricultural products. This became evident following the enforcement of the law by the Dutch East Indies government, as numerous plantation industries began to emerge throughout the archipelago. Among the most prominent were industries focused on the processing of sugar and tobacco (Pelzer, 1985).

The enactment of the Agrarian Law of 1870 caused plantation companies to grow like mushrooms at the beginning of the rainy season. Over time, this led to increasing competition

between plantations managed by the Dutch East Indies government and those operated by foreign private entities. This concern materialized when, year after year, the private sector's export production growth began to rival and eventually surpass that of the colonial government. In fact, by 1871, just one year after the law was passed, the private sector had already outpaced government plantations in terms of export commodity production. This statement can be substantiated by observing and analyzing the table below:

Table 2. Government and Private Export Production from 1865-1884

Year	Government Export Production (% of total value)	Private Export Production	
		Private Plantation Companies	Indigenous Producers
1865	57	38	2
1866	56	38	3
1867	53	41	2
1868	49	45	3
1869	53	42	2
1870	52	43	2
1871	45	47	3
1872	23	70	2
1873	19	72	3
1874	23	70	3
1884	13	79	7

Source: (Kartodirdjo, 1991)

In addition to the table above, this paragraph will also examine a table that highlights the significant disparity in the comparative value of plantation export commodities such as coffee, sugar, tobacco, and tea between foreign plantation companies and those operated by the Dutch East Indies government (Dermawan, 2023). To understand this gap more clearly, let us take a closer look at the data presented in the following table:

Table 3. Export Commodities from Private and Government Plantations

Year	Private Export Production					
	Coffee		Tobacco		Tea	
	Private	Government	Private	Government	Private	Government
1860	4,6	25,1	1,4	0,02	0,0	0,56
1865	9,7	23,8	2,1	-	0,4	0,28
1870	31,2	12,9	3,6	-	1,7	-
1875	38,3	32,1	9,1	-	2,1	-
1880	31,9	27,9	15,7	-	1,7	-
1885	12,8	16,8	20,1	-	1,6	-

Source: (Kartodirdjo, 1991)

The explanation of Tables 1 and 2, it can be seen how significant the role of foreign private entities has been in the development of the plantation industry and the increase in export commodity production in Indonesia. However, the success of foreign private entities in managing the plantation industry and boosting export commodity production cannot be

separated from the support and financing provided by banks for investment in the form of capital in plantation industries.

This can be seen from the large number of new banks that were established and operated in the field of capital financing for plantation businesses and trade in Indonesia an embodiment of European financial capitalism. Since 1870-1900, banks such as Rotterdamsche Bank, N.I. Handelsbank, Credieten Handelsvereniging, and several others were founded, focusing on providing capital for business ventures, particularly in the plantation industry (Tanjung, 2014).

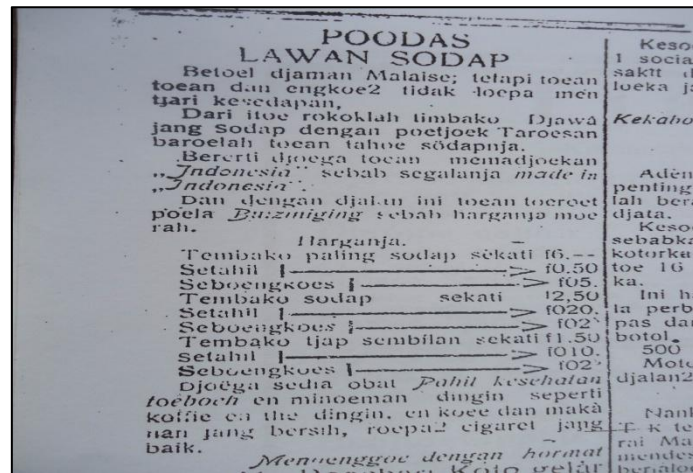


Figure 6. Surya Sibolga Newspaper (1932)

If several advertisements found in the Surya Sibolga newspaper (1932) are analyzed using Van Dijk's theory, it can be seen that, from a social analysis perspective, the creation of these advertisements was influenced by two main factors: (1) Power, the colonial government at the time held full control over the publication of advertisements and news related to the sale of plantation commodities. This allowed the colonial administration to freely use textual aspects to influence the wider society. However, the role of the Dutch East Indies colonial government in the publication of advertisements in the newspaper did not run smoothly, as Chinese merchants from private companies attempted to influence the flow of the text within the newspaper, which could affect the direction and purpose of plantation commodity sales transactions; (2) Access, in the Surya Sibolga newspaper advertisements of 1932, both the Dutch colonial government and private (Chinese) parties had equal access in influencing the discourse within the newspaper's advertisements. Both parties shared a common goal: to promote plantation commodity products to the broader public.

Conclusion

The author's analysis reveals a connection between the plantation commodity processing advertisements in the newspapers *Pewarta Deli* (1917), *Suara Dairi* (1930), and *Surya Sibolga* (1932), and the implementation of the 1870 Agrarian Law by the Dutch East Indies government. This is evident as the year 1870 marked a significant turning point in the development of industry and plantations in Indonesia. From that year onward, several policy changes were enacted by the Dutch colonial government.

The policy changes enacted in 1870 successfully stimulated the influx of foreign private capital into the Dutch East Indies. This can be seen in the way foreign private entities competed to establish large scale plantations across Indonesia and set up plantation based industries as a means to process agricultural products. Following the implementation of the 1870 Agrarian Law by the Dutch colonial government, numerous plantation industries emerged in Indonesia, including those specializing in the processing of sugar and tobacco.

Given this situation, marketing efforts were necessary to promote and sell the products of the plantation industries. One of the marketing techniques employed by the Dutch East Indies government and foreign private entities was placing advertisements for processed plantation products in newspapers such as *Pewartar Deli* (1917), *Suara Dairi* (1930), and *Surya Sibolga* (1932). However, in the process of placing these advertisements, the ruling elite at the time namely the Dutch colonial government and foreign private parties played a crucial role in crafting newspaper advertisements that could influence the wider public. From a social analysis perspective based on Van Dijk's theory, both the Dutch colonial government and private entities held power and access in shaping the content of newspaper advertisements, giving them the ability to control and influence public discourse through the media.

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