From safety to source domination and diversity content: Media challenges in the pandemic era

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Abstract

All sectors of human life have been affected by the Covid-19 virus, including the media industry. There have been many changes in the media organization. The patterns that have become standard have completely changed due to the pandemic. The media face many challenges because of that. Those are the risk to the safety of workers, the loss of several types of jobs, the dominance of information sources, and threats to the diversity of information that the public can receive. Those were the results of this study. That results were obtained by a research process carried out from May to mid-December 2021. The method was carried out by interviewing and observing journalists who worked in the Surakarta area, Indonesia. Apart from that, it also observed the media work process (newsroom). Technology, the safety of life, dominance of news sources, and diversity of content were challenges for media actors in ethical demands and the fulfillment of basic principles of journalism that have not changed at all.

Keywords: *change, covid-19, challenge, journalist, media.*

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus has brought extraordinary changes in human life. All sectors, including the mass media, are affected as an industry and a social organization. The pandemic has changed all routines from lowest to highest levels. In the news media, for example, at the lowest level, namely journalists, there is a change in the pattern of covering and reporting events to the public. At the editorial level, there are also changes in managing information ranging from reports given by journalists to editors or producers to how it can be processed into news, ready publish to the public through television, radio, newspapers, and the internet. The pandemic brought significant changes in media life. That is due to the limitations of media actors in their activities to keep safety from virus attacks. Activity restrictions imposed by the government on all sectors have changed work patterns and human activities previously on the spot to be done from home. We are then familiar with working from home, studying from home, shopping from home, and even vacation from home (staycation).

The media has a pretty tough challenge regarding the pandemic. Even after the enactment of the current new normal era, the condition of the press has not recovered. After starting to rise due to being beaten by the pandemic for more than two years, the condition of the media is not yet safe because the Covid virus is still threatening. There has been another increase in the number of cases, and it has even become media headlines because it is feared that the high number of patients will make Indonesia enter the fourth wave of Covid-19 (CNBCIndonesia, 2022; CNNIndonesia, 2022). The increase in cases is strongly suspected due to the inclusion of the Omicron BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants (Saputra, 2022). Some policy easing previously implemented and even revoked are now being discussed to be re-implemented. Among other things, the obligation to pocket the negative results of the Covid-19 Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test as a travel requirement (Okezone. com, 2022). The media routine, which had gradually returned to normal, although there were still differences compared to the situation before Covid, took place in a limited manner and with strict supervision and rules in

anticipation of the re-explosion of cases due to the virus attack.

This article discusses the challenges faced by the media in connection to the pandemic, starting from the problem of reducing employees, the safety of life, and the dominance of sources and diversity of content. Those three problems first are matters that the media inevitably face concerning the pandemic. The research did by interviewing and observations to workers and media organizations in the Surakarta area, Indonesia. Studies that discuss the correlation between media and the pandemic, and of course, have been done by some researchers. Among others, by Shafa Salsabila Gusna et al (2021), Joana Sooknanan and Nicholas Mays (2021), Janni Leung et al (2021), and Benni Setiawan (Setiawan, 2022). Shafa's study examined the challenges faced by the mass media, especially Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) Yogyakarta Station, in the pandemic era. However, that research focuses more on the efforts made by RRI in the current digital era, especially regarding media convergence. As a result, RRI has reached the full convergence stage in developing its products by adapting to technological developments and striving to promote innovation and creativity. Meanwhile, a study by Joanna Sooknan and Nicholas Mays highlighted efforts to maximize technical sophistication in the media sector, especially in the presence of social media in mapping disease patterns caused by the Covid-19 virus. Information on social media forms a design that can be mathematically observed to see societal developments. Next is the research of Janni Leung and her colleagues, which discusses the impact of social media's power in disseminating information that creates psychosocial challenges and breaks a relationship in communities. Then Benni Setiawan's writing focuses more on the state of the mass media, especially print media in the current digital era. The condition of the print media is experiencing difficult times due to the brunt of the internet. The pandemic made the condition of the print media even more complicated, so they had to take several rescue steps. The four research results above show differences from the study results that the author adopted. The first three studies do not discuss or examine the challenges faced by the mass media, especially about the impact caused by the pandemic. Benni's examination is closer to the results of this study because it explores the effects of the pandemic on the mass media. It's just that Benni focuses on print media which is increasingly being displaced by technological developments. Thus, the difference in the contents from similar articles mentioned above is this study's state of the art.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media transformation

Mass media has developed along with the times. Long before getting to know television, newspapers, radio, and the internet today, people have used the media to communicate to other people. They spoke indirectly by using writing on the surface of stones, walls, logs, etc. The indirect communication model has changed since the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century (Mcquail, 2011). Since that invention, the delivery of messages can be done much faster and reach a wider audience. Acta Diurna became the forerunner of the newspaper. Acta Diurna was a medium used to disseminate information about the reign of Julius Caesar V, who ruled in Rome in the 5th century (Nurhayati, 2020).

Mass media develops. From what was initially only readable, the public can enjoy information through audio-based technology, which delivers to the history of radio. Next, television comes with the advantage of being able to present information, which is not only audio but also visual (Paxson, 2018). Television is a mass media included in the electronic media group. Television comes after print media and radio. Television is the outcome of technological developments that seek to combine elements of print and radio media. The founder of television technology is called Paul Nipkow from Germany (Burton, 2008). In 1884, he invented a device called the Jantra Nipkow or Nipkow Scheibe. It discovery affords electric television. At first, many people did not think that television would be tremendous commercial potential. For television news, BBC carried out for the first time in August 1936. The process of transmitting the image took four hours from the situation at the Alexandra Palace in North London. That evolution was followed by Germany one month later, in September 1936, by broadcasting the race-Nuremberg Rally by the Reich Rundfunkgesellschaft Television station (Yorke, 2000).

The development of mass media does not stop there. The internet presence can accommodate all existing

media platforms, which can be read, heard, and seen. The invention of the internet is in the 1960s but only started to boom in the late 1990s or early 2000s (Naughton, 2015; S.Kh, 2019). The internet findings turned out to have a significant influence on the life of people, including the media industry. Mass media, also called the Press, is a social institution and a tool for mass communication that carries out journalistic activities. Its activities including seeking, obtaining, possessing, storing, processing, and conveying information in the form of writing, sound, images, sounds, and images, as well as data and graphics, as well as in other forms using print media, electronic media, and all types of available channels (Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 40 of 1999 concerning the Press). By using mass media, messages or information can be disseminated to broad audiences. Those involved in delivering media content are reporters, writers, editors, announcers (broadcasters), commentators, press associations, photographers, media arts and creatives, business management officers, advertising, public relations to research, and marketing departments. (Emery et al., 1998).

In the current pandemic, the influence of technology in the media life cycle is felt. Media life becomes more dependent on the internet when direct communication is not possible. The presence of the internet adds to the new types of mass media. Previously only referred to in printed form such as newspapers, tabloids, magazines, then electronic media because they use electricity as the basis, namely television and radio, increasing with new media types, namely internet-based, to be called new media. While the previous two types of media, namely print media and electronic media, are called old media (Baran & Davis, 2010). The presence of the internet adds to the type of media and brings consequences on work patterns and media behavior in presenting information to the public. The management of mass media no longer stands alone but converges with each other through the use of technology, especially the internet (S.Kh, 2019).

Media routine

Mass media, apart from being a social organization, is also a business organization. It means that the press must do something to make a profit. What to do to make a profit, of course, the media must have a product. Media products are generally categorized into two things. They are namely artistic products and journalistic products. Artistic products are products resulting from creativity. For examples are advertisements, films, soap operas, music shows, comedy, and so on. Meanwhile, journalistic products are mass media products that are produced from facts. Reports about these facts are called news. However, not all facts can be used as news. That is why many facts happen in society but are not broadcast or written by the media. To be reported as news, the facts in question must have specific values (news value). These values are used as the basis for whether the facts are appropriate to be conveyed to the public. A fact can be raised as news if it contains value. The values are essential to the public, extraordinary, novelty, valuable, proximity, information, conflict, and human interest. The other values are surprising and sexual (Brooks, Brian S; Kennedy, George; Moen, Daryl R.; Ranly, 2010). The elements of feasibility in the news are generally mixed based on what they like or attract the attention of readers or audiences and can meet their needs for information (Bednarek, 2016). Along with the times, especially technology, the value of news also changes. A fact also can be the news if people like and seek it because of the audio-visual display, shareability (inviting many likes, shares, and comments on social media). The next is the agenda-setting of the media itself (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017).

Media workers tasked with finding facts and turning them into the news are called journalists or reporters. Journalists are only one part of a system called an editorial or newsroom. In it, various other professions contribute to determining a fact into the hands of the public. What happens in the newsroom is a pattern known as media routine. In addition to deciding what news is good and bad, facts are worthy or not worth reporting, how to get and package facts, who is in charge/responsible, is a news mechanism formed. This media routine is one of the important factors because it can influence the decisions of a media organization (Shoemaker, 2006). In addition to media routines, Shoemaker and Reese also mention other factors, namely individual factors, media organization, extra media, and ideology.

The individual level is in the media workers. It deals with journalist professionalism which is influenced by background, experience, attitude, religion or belief, ethics, and values. Those characteristics do not directly

affect the media content, but in writing a fact, perception journalist about something influenced his background. The organizational level relates to the decision-making process concerning the organizational structure of the media concerned how a media policy is formed. Extra media in the form of factors outside the media itself such as sources of information (interest groups, public relations, other news organizations, sources of income (advertisers, viewers), other institutions (business, government, religion, etc.), the economic environment, and technology. Those factors outside the media will have an impact on the running of the media organization. The last is the level of ideology. It deals with the ruling party in the society and how that power affects the agenda media. All of these factors will contribute to media routines (Soemaker & Reese, 1996)

METHODS

The research used a descriptive qualitative approach. Descriptive research aims to make a systematic, factual, and accurate description of a particular population or object (Kriyantono, 2010; Slamet, 2006; Sutopo, 2002). Qualitative research puts forward the content of the discussion and not the amount of data. Qualitative research can explain a phenomenon in depth through in-depth data collection results (Denzin, Norman K; Lincoln & S, 2009; Kriyantono, 2010; Sarosa, 2012; Slamet, 2006). Meanwhile, the method used to obtain data is interview and observation techniques. Interviews and observations were carried out on journalists assigned to cover events in the Surakarta City area, Indonesia. As for the journalists we interviewed, Septiantoro Kusuma Aji, a quality controller for regional reporting at MNC Media. MNC Media is one of the media-network companies that accommodate four private television stations in Indonesia, namely RCTI, Global TV, MNC TV, and i-News TV. MNC Media also still oversees dozens of television channels on pay channels, newspapers, and many other online news portals. Other informants were Reporter of Joglosemarnews.com, Triawati Purwanto, Solopos Photographer, Sunaryo Haryo Bayu (just retired, now assigned at news bureau, Joss. Id and Diffable TV), Tribunnews Reporter, Khairul Rahmawan, and Editor of the News Daily Solopos, Mufid Aryono. The researcher also collected data from three other media workers who worked in the Surakarta area but asked not to reveal their identities. The research was done from May to the middle of December 2021.

Data analysis used inductive analysis of filling system techniques. Inductive analysis is a way of thinking. It is commonly used in qualitative research where researchers depart from things that are specific to general (conceptual) things. The filling system analysis technique is a step taken by researchers after data collection. Observational data will be analyzed by making specific categories or domains (Kriyantono, 2010; Sarosa, 2012). Data collection in the study was carried out in the period May to the midle of December 2021.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The challenges that faced by the media regarding to the pandemi are :

Technology and employee reduction

In addition to making changes, the Covid-19 pandemic is also a challenge for journalists or media workers. The first relates to technology. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced media workers to be familiar with the technology. It is not a question of how media workers can operate the tools and keep up with the latest developments, including the consequences. Pandemic is not impossible to get rid of humans regarding technology. The media will streamline the number of workers regarding technology and the current state of the media, which is also quite heavy due to the pandemic. The media income has fallen drastically due to the lack of revenue from advertising or sponsorship. One of the secretaries of a media company in Surakarta City even mentioned that she had cut the salaries of their media workers for a whole year. The employees are only given a basic salary to stay. MNC Group journalist, Septiantoro, even said that he and his friends had experienced delays in receiving salaries. This condition does not only last a month or two but is quite long. The editor even said to apologize to his employees because of this condition. The editors even invite their employees to resign if they cannot accept the situation. Pandemic gives ahuge impact to economical media so they must try all of efforts to strunggle. The pandemic has had a heavy impact on the finances of media organizations. Not only in Surakarta or Indonesia, it also seems to

have happened to almost all media. Public consumption of media during the pandemic has indeed risen sharply. Staying at home makes people spend more of their time-consuming media to relieve boredom, keep up with the latest developments, or look for other sources of information needed (Blasco, Mireia Montaña; Castellà, Candela Ollé; & Raso, 2020). However, this does not contribute to media finances because the media has lost many sources of income, mainly from advertising. Many services or product organizations have terminated or canceled their advertising contracts due to the pandemic. The pandemic caused the company's revenue to drop drastically so that it had to take various ways to save money to survive in these times (Firmansyah et al., 2022; Gelgel, 2020; Odriozola Chéné, Javier; Díaz-Noci, Javier; Serrano-Tellería, Ana; Pérez-Arozamena, Rosa; Pérez-Altable, Laura; Linares-Lanzman, Juan ;Calvo-Rubio, Luis-Mauricio; Torres-Mendoza, Antón-Bravo, Adolfo Manuel García; Carretero, 2020).

During a pandemic, journalists are also required to do several things at once or multitask. Before the pandemic, journalists' jobs were as specialized as their profession. Previously, a photographer only specialized in doing photojournalistic works. A reporter or journalist only did the job of interviewing and writing news. A television journalist was only in charge of recording events and making the news in audio-visual form. The presence of the internet makes media management today become converged. Although the basis is print media, now media managers are expanding their business by creating online versions (dotcom) or making audio-visual shows such as television and social media to disseminate such as Youtube and Instagram. Post-pandemic, journalists are required to multitask in using tools that previously were specialties from other fields and make news in other formats according to the type of media managed by the company where the employee works. Solopos newspaper photographer, Sunaryo Haryo Bayu, said that previously he only specialized in producing journalistic photos. However, because media management has developed into an online and television model (Solopos.com and SoloposTV), he is also required to make news in audio-visual form and online media versions, especially if he gets information with good news value. Likewise, Septiantoro, a TV journalist from the current editor directs all journalists to make news in two versions of the same report. So, in addition to making TV news, he also makes news scripts for the online version or dotcom along with photos produced from video screenshots from the news that is made. During live reports, he no longer needs camerapersons but can do it himself by using a tripod and preview check. From the statements of the media workers, we can see that some professions in the media will be no longer needed because they can be carried out or duplicated by other media workers. That means the pandemic is increasingly threatening the existence of media workers. They can lose their jobs at any time due to the demands of the situation. However, from a media manager's perspective, it can be profitable. It can save costs even though it has to provide technology to support media work routines such as subscribing to communication services and providing an internal network to facilitate the flow of information processing before it reaches the public. In terms of media workers, it can be interpreted that they must continue to upgrade themselves with various skills that can support their performance to continue to be gradual in the midst of intense job competition.

Work Safety

Going directly to the field to obtain and produce information every day is not an easy matter for media workers. Reporters are the most at risk because they are at the forefront of media organizations. They must go to the location to obtain and ensure the information presented to the public can be justified. During this pandemic, Covid-19 has become the most widely covered issue by the media, even though the journalists who write are not on duty at the health desk. Everything that happens in society is linked to Covid-19 because it significantly impacts all people.

Covering news about Covid-19 does not mean reporters are not filled with anxiety and fear. They are also stressed. Any time they can be infected and tested positive for Covid-19. Journalists also feel pressured because they are accused of being the most involved in spreading and instilling anxiety in the community (Kartinawati & Gama, 2021). The media is even considered as destroying people's mental health (Wake, 2021). Adaptation to reporting conditions that are much different from previous conditions also triggers stress on media workers (Hoak, 2021). In the early days of the pandemic, it was not easy for journalists in Surakarta to carry out their

duties.

The first relates to personal protective equipment or safety to prevent transmission. In the early days of the pandemic, personal protective equipment was tough to obtain, and even if there was, it was pretty expensive. The same goes for masks and hand sanitizers, which were scarce. Luckily, several outside journalists worked to provide support, such as the Indonesian Photo Journalist (PFI), which provided personal protective equipment (PPE) and rubber gloves. For photojournalists and television, the long-distance reporting pattern is a challenge because the essence of their news lies in the image or the visual aspect. Therefore, they are more vulnerable than ordinary reporters. The number of victims who have fallen due to Covid has increased journalists' awareness of their health and safety. They seem to have automatically understood what equipment to bring in addition to technical equipment related to reporting, such as spare masks, rubber gloves, hand sanitizers, and helping to avoid crowds. It is just that the latter is still difficult to avoid because in getting news, journalists usually do it together with journalists from other media. However, journalists have realized that they keep their distance immediately after the interviews and site observations have been completed.

Regarding institutional support for the health and safety of journalists, each media organization is different. Solopos, for example, provided their journalists with rubber gloves and vitamins. A health clinic and a doctor on duty are also prepared at the editorial office. For MNCs, the newsroom contacted their reporters through the coverage coordinator (Korlip) to control each reporter they supervised, from asking about health conditions to messages to always be careful on duty. From that communication process, the newsroom gets data about reporters who should be quarantined or not. A decision is made to place a replacement reporter or other policies not to zero the news.

Domination of news sources and diversity of content

The Covid 19 pandemic causes journalists to be unable to carry out reporting patterns like the period before the pandemic, where they are free to meet sources or go to locations. There is a change in sources from what has initially been based on the level of need and credibility and balance to news that is dominated by one party. In this case, it is an official, government, and the authorities. Journalists are supplied with information, pictures, and videos from officials, city government, police, and hospital public relations. That is understandable because journalists currently have limited access to locations usually used as places of coverage to reduce the potential for the spread of the virus. That can lead to an imbalance of sources, especially from the grassroots. As a result, many problems at the citizen level can go uncovered. Not because of journalists' reluctance to do coverage, but the mindset of maintaining safety is now more important than news exclusivity. Of course, it has other consequences on the content of the news, which becomes less varied. News content can focus on one or more things that it continues. People do not get a lot of variety of information (diversity of content). The public can send news either in written scripts, photos, or videos to journalists or editors/media offices. Currently, it is an opportunity for the public to participate in fulfilling the diversity of content, so specific sources do not dominate that information. However, the media have particular rules or principles that must be met. That is also a challenge for the Press to process data from the public to remain following existing normative standards. Information from the public, not all of them meet the requirements, so it is still a task for media workers to change or complete it so that it is following the basic principles of journalism that have not changed at all.

CONCLUSION

The pandemic has had a huge impact on media life. It does not only bring changes to routines but also problems to the media economy. The latter is what the media experience is much heavier because it encourages media managers to take strategic steps to survive. Some have already been mentioned in the content and discussion section above. Those are safety risks in the lives of media workers, demands to continue to upgrade and increase expertise, as well as regarding the dominance of sources and threats to the diversity of media content. The exclusivity of media content is, of course, the main thing because it is a distinguishing feature and the main attraction of the public in choosing a channel. It's just that, during a pandemic, it cannot be used as the main

target because, after all, nothing is more valuable than human life. Therefore, uniformity of information is one of the consequences accepted by the public due to the homogeneity of sources. Sources are mostly dominated by those related to power, such as government organizations, police, hospitals, etc. Not because reporters are reluctant to do coverage, but to keep safety.

Moreover, not all sources are willing to meet in person. Everyone takes care of themselves. The role of Public Relations in government is one example. During the pandemic, their role has increased because they are required to be able to provide information to the media. They are alike "replacements" for the hands and feet of the media due to limited access. Public relations practitioners usually provide links to share information via the internet. That is, of course, impacts the lack of diversity of information received by the public. In the period after it was announced the easing of the virus, the work pattern during the pandemic was still carried over by journalists. In other words, the work pattern of the media did not return completely as before. That is one of the gaps other researchers can fill to see the differences in the reporting patterns of journalists and information organizations in newsrooms after the "normal" situation is implemented.

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