Covid-19 and journalism conundrums: a study on dilemmas in content selection

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Abstract The study examined journalism practices covering Coronavirus disease (Covid-19), particularly online journalism in Solo, one of the metropolitan cities in Central Java Province of Indonesia. Solo is the first city in Indonesia to declare an extraordinary event due to the Covid-19 pandemic after coronavirus-linked deaths were reported. The notion of a dilemmatic situation, mainly in content selection, is the central perspective in this research. This research referred to news value theory and agenda-setting that used a qualitative approach method. The data were obtained through interviews with 20 journalists of online media in Solo. We also included non-participatory observation in the Solopos.com newsroom. The study suggests that, to some extent, journalists face a dilemma in choosing content to present news that concerns the public interest during the Covid-19 pandemic. The dilemma included determining interesting issues, attracting the public interest, and becoming meaningful to the readers, but not to endanger the personal safety and maintain professional sustainability because there is no news worthy of a life.

Keywords: online journalism; Covid-19; content selection; disaster journalism; news value

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic caused by a *coronavirus* (SARS-CoV-2) reveals that news is very valuable in such a crisis (AJI, 2020). The need for any information has increased drastically, and of course, requires journalists to work consistently and professionally in conveying information to the public. Therefore, the mass media must always present accurate, quality, and fast information amid the Covid-19 pandemic, which creates a dilemmatic situation (Muqsith, 2020).

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On the one hand, the mass media is required to be the spearhead that is accurate, verified, intelligent, and (at the same time) stimulates optimism. On the other hand, like these conditions, mass media companies must also ensure the safety of journalists during their reporting in the field (AJI, 2020; Muqsith, 2020). In these conditions, the mass media, including online news portals, play an essential role as a medium of information between the government, health workers, and the community by reporting the latest news and other important information related to handling and prevention that can be carried out at the individual level initially. Another essential role of the mass media is as a factor driving public health-oriented policies and behaviour through health information and several campaigns (Herlinda, 2020). This dilemma suggests that the mass media can influence a large group of people directly and uniformly by 'injecting' them with appropriate messages designed to be described in the syringe theory (Umeogu & Ifeoma, 2012), mainly during the Covid-19 crisis.

A Reuters Institute study showed that 60% of respondents from six countries admitted that journalism-based mass media helped them understand the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic (Pollack et al., 2020). During the pandemic, online mass media are competing to show their identity and credibility in serving the public (Herlambang, 2020; Yasyi, 2020). Indeed, when a disaster occurs, journalists are an essential element in conveying information to the public for the sake of solidarity among others, primarily to protect the community and reduce losses (Houston et al., 2019b). Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (2001) describe that journalism exists to build citizenship, fulfil citizens' rights, and democracy (American Press Institute, 2021). During social crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the news media, particularly at the local level, provide information and data that can contribute directly to the potential for self-protection and safety of citizens, as previously demonstrated in other disasters.

Journalism is not only a business but also an essential part of the infrastructure of democracy which is currently a victim of the coronavirus (Olsen et al., 2020). Although the image of journalism has changed due to technological advances, the goal of journalism remains the same, namely to provide the information people need to live and organise. However, in the emergency of the Covid-19 pandemic, the task of journalists becomes even more difficult because they have to protect themselves from contracting the coronavirus. Moreover, in covering the pandemic, journalists struggle with limited space for press freedom and access to information as they also grapple with threats to their physical and mental health. In this situation, journalists are not just mere observers or reporters, and they also face the same risk of being exposed to the Covid-19 virus (Bernadas & Ilagan, 2020).

Like other countries, Indonesia's public health system is not yet ready to accommodate Covid-19 patients (Asmara, 2020). The first

two cases were announced on 2 March 2020 by President Joko Widodo in a televised statement (Candra, 2020). According to the Minister of Health at the time, Terawan Agus Putranto, the patient contracted the virus from a Japanese citizen in Depok, who later tested positive in Malaysia (Taher, 2020). The first death of an Indonesian Covid-19 patient occurred on 11 March 2020. The victim was a man from Solo, Central Java, who previously attended a talk show in Bogor City, West Java, on 25-28 February 2020 (Baskara, 2020). Regarding this incident, the Mayor of Solo declared the status of an extraordinary event due to Covid-19 on 13 March 2020. He took drastic steps, ranging from temporarily stopping teaching and learning activities for elementary to high school students, stopping activities that were potentially crowded (CNN Indonesia, 2020), and eradicating bats suspected of potentially carrying the coronavirus that causes Covid-19 (Isnanto, 2020).

The determination of the status of extraordinary events due to Covid-19 by the Solo City government has made it one of the focuses of news in local and national online mass media. However, in this situation, journalists face a dilemma because they have to cover the ups and downs experienced by citizens and protect themselves from the Covid-19 virus. Health protocols pose challenges for journalistic practice that usually require much fieldwork and encourage journalists to reorganise news production (Bernadas & Ilagan, 2020). Furthermore, we observe that access to information from the government, in general, is still limited, causing uncertainty and crisis in society. Some crises are inevitable, like death. As no organisation, country, nation, or person is immune from crisis, and all must do their best to prepare themselves. The difference now lies in the duration and magnitude of the crisis (Umeogu & Ifeoma, 2012).

The Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) in November 2020 stated that journalists and media workers are at risk of contracting the virus when reporting in the field and going to the office to deliver the news (Natalegawa & Jasper, 2020). In the crisis during the Covid-19 pandemic, the task of journalists is even more difficult because they face many challenges, such as confusion of patient data and receiving complaints from health workers about people who are still struggling to survive during a crisis by ignoring calls to physical distancing. Apart from the impact of the crisis faced by journalists, the lack of incentives is another obstacle. However, in any situation, journalists will still be there to build solidarity. Journalism is not the only viable source of information to overcome social crises, but it can be one of the most desirable (Heryanto, 2020).

According to the March 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer: Trust and the Coronavirus Special report, the mainstream media is the first source of information in times of crisis. However, journalists are the most unreliable sources. Three main principles of journalism guide the actions of journalists and mass media in crisis contexts: transparency,

trust, and inclusion (Foundation Hirondelle, 2020). Therefore, the newsroom of the mass media must carry out various strategies to produce exclusive news during a crisis, limiting the space for journalists to move. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the mass media, through the newsroom, need to help maintain public order so that the news delivered does not trigger panic and is confirmed to be true. The mass media should not spread sensational news that harms the public amid an increasingly massive information flow due to the advancement of internet technology.

The responsibility of journalists is to provide information to the public to make better decisions about their lives, especially in the context of a crisis. Because information can help protect populations affected by the crisis (Foundation Hirondelle, 2020). However, the Covid-19 situation presents challenges because journalists have to implement health protocols that sometimes restrict movement. They also cannot attend to see and observe an event and visit key informants in important events directly because of physical distancing (Muqsith, 2020). Even so, journalists must continue to provide a comprehensive report on an event even though there are limitations.

This study aimed to examine dilemmatic situations, such as the obstacles faced by online journalists with local perspectives from the city of Solo, Central Java Province, in choosing news content in the midst of the Covid-19 outbreak. We suspected that limited mobility makes them uncomfortable, so the news they present is incomplete or even creates misunderstandings. Journalism cannot be done quickly with a work from home policy. Journalists are often required to go to the field to get exclusive news or reports that readers will consume. Usually, journalists can visit news sources directly, but this practice is difficult to do during the Covid-19 pandemic.

On the one hand, journalists in the field must find news sources to report to the public, but on the other hand, the crisis has led to various impractical policies with all kinds of protocols, which become new challenges and dilemmas for journalists who carry out their duties. In fact, in times of crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic accompanied by an abundance of information, media workers are required to work as quickly as possible so that the public gets clear, accurate, and credible information (Yasyi, 2020). We also assessed the dilemma situation experienced by online mass media journalists who work in the newsroom. They are required to package the results of journalists' coverage in the field by attracting and inviting 'clicks' which adds to their workload. Thus, the transformation of journalists' work during the Covid-19 pandemic is not only a form of professional responsibility but also a form of saving the media business, which is also affected by the pandemic at the same time.

METHODOLOGY

This research was a descriptive study with a qualitative approach to obtain a systematic, factual, and accurate description of the facts and the relationship between the phenomena studied. A qualitative approach is used to understand the phenomenon under study through in-depth observations without emphasising population measurement (Kriyantono, 2006). Qualitative research is research that is done mainly by observation. This research involved a set of interpretive practices with naturalistic and interpretive approaches. This shows that researchers tried to study and interpret or represent phenomena that were seen and observed. We turned the observations into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, and recordings to collect data (White, 2011). Qualitative research with an interpretive approach tries to explain the meaning and specific behaviour of informants based on their subjective experiences (Palmer & Bolderston, 2006) or explores the meaning that individuals give to situations (Olson et al., 2016) a social phenomenon. This type of research takes a smaller sample and tends to choose a purposive sampling technique to describe the details of the phenomenon, build understanding, and help researchers draw conclusions. With this approach, the researcher explored the dilemma of content selection by journalists from various online mass media in Solo, Central Java, who were on duty during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The research location for Solo City was chosen because it was the first region in Indonesia to declare the Covid-19 status as an 'Extraordinary Event' on 13 March 2020 (two weeks after the first Covid-19 patient in Indonesia was announced). Therefore, Solo was then included in the 'red zone' or a high risk of Covid-19 transmission. The subject of this research was the dilemma of choosing content that was reported during the Covid-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, the research object was 20 local and national online mass media journalists in Solo City, Central Java Province, who work in the field (reporters) and in the newsroom. All journalists participating in this study were interviewed separately from late June to mid-July 2020. They were on average 27-45 years old with 2-20 years of experience working in online journalism.

The primary data of this study were collected through in-depth interviews and non-participatory observations (Table 1). Participants were selected through several author's contacts and the assistance of other participants who were willing to participate in this study. The interviews were conducted until the required information was met. Meanwhile, non-participatory observations were carried out for two weeks in the Solopos.com newsroom in July 2020. It was aimed to see the content selection process in reporting on Covid-19 cases firsthand and identify interactions between editorial assessments and journalists in the field. The Solopos.com newsroom was chosen because of its reputation as the most significant local online media in Solo.

Table 1. Informant List

Name	Media	Experience	Position
Nicolous Irawan	Solopos.com	8 years	Photojournalist
Binti Sholikhah	Republika.co.id	7 years	Reporter
Candra Mantovani	Solopos.com	2 years	Reporter
Ichsan Kholif Rahman	Solopos.com	3 years	Reporter
Farida Trisnaningtyas	Solopos.com	9 years	Reporter
Mariyana Ricky	Solopos.com	8 years	Reporter
Labib Zamani	Kompas.com	11 years	Reporter
Agus Iswandi	Tribunjateng.com	2 years	Reporter
Ichsan Noor Rasyid	Timlo.net	7 years	Reporter
Bayu Ardi Isnanto	Detik.com	5 years	Reporter
Larasati Reyma	Idntimes.com	4 years	Reporter
Achmad Husein	Suaramerdeka.com	21 years	Reporter
Triawati Prihatsari	Joglosemarnews.com	12 years	Reporter
Mahardini Nur Afifah	Kompas.com	7 years	Editor
Cahyadi Kurniawan	Solopos.com	4 years	Editor
Ginanjar Saputra	Solopos.com	4 years	Editor
Rohmana Kurniandari	Tribunnews.com	3 years	Editor
Anugerah Tessa Aulia	Tribunnews.com	2 years	Editor
Danang Nur Ichsan	Solopos.com	12 years	Editor
Daryono	Tribunnews.com	8 years	Editor

Source: Data Process by Author (2020)

These observations were done to provide a comprehensive picture of the collaboration of editors and journalists to frame stories obtained from their investigations in the field, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, it was considered sufficient to provide an overview of the situation in the newsroom, especially since the researchers have been working in the newsroom for almost four years, thus facilitating observation and understanding of the work culture of journalists. The data collected was analysed by qualitative analysis to describe the work of online mass media journalists in Solo in terms of selecting relevant and interesting content during the Covid-19 pandemic. The steps are (1) identifying the research topic; (2) conducting a literature review; (3) selecting participants or research objects; (4) collecting data through observation and interviews; (5) analysing and interpreting the data; and (6) reporting and evaluating the research results in narrative form (Creswell, 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Content Selection and Reporting Dilemmas

The biggest dilemma for journalists conducting field investigations during the Covid-19 pandemic is the reporting process. The dilemma is the fear of contracting the coronavirus for which a cure has not been found. Therefore, journalists must protect themselves in carrying out their reporting duties professionally and comprehensively. In this case, the participants of this study explained that a piece of

relevant news contains aspects of actuality and involves the public interest, including the current conditions during the pandemic, public access, transportation, health services, tips on maintaining health and virus prevention, and the impact of the pandemic. Based on observations, each participant experienced various forms of dilemmas in choosing news content and reporting during the outbreak. The dilemma includes the decision to choose 'what to report and not report,' 'tell the story,' 'deliver the terms and labels of Covid-19 patients,' 'deal with confusing data,' 'victim's family,' and 'maintain personal safety.' Whereas the sacred duty to convey the truth and connect public opinion is part of the primary motivation of journalists in carrying out their duties in times of crisis (covid-19 pandemic).

The many confusing issues that have spread and sparked panic have become a dilemma for journalists in choosing news content. Normalising rumours in a piece of accurate news is one of the tasks of journalists. However, they often have difficulty finding and connecting with critical informants due to limited communication. Moreover, journalists must maintain a conducive environment for news that is being broadcast to the public. Therefore, journalists are required to find a perspective that can avoid situations that frighten readers and enlighten readers when reading news, especially about the developments of the Covid-19 pandemic. Y15 explained the following, "I always try to find perspectives that do not make people scared when reading the news of the Covid-19. The public's views on Covid-19 are sometimes more frightening than the disease" (Y15, interview, 2020).

The Indonesian National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) has declared Covid-19 a non-natural disaster. The Covid-19 pandemic is caused by a series of non-natural events in the form of technological and modernisation failures, epidemics, and diseases. Thus, covering the Covid-19 pandemic can be said to be equivalent to covering natural disasters or battles on the battlefield. In this case, several events could occur, such as the public may forget, the government is not present, and the media ignores the possibility of the Covid-19 outbreak in Indonesia. As a result, the pre-disaster mechanism did not work properly and caused panic for all parties. The impact of Covid-19 as a non-natural disaster is different from natural disasters, such as flash floods, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and tsunamis. The virus initially spread in China and continued around the world. News about the coronavirus in China has been claimed and broadcast by almost all media in the world. However, the media crew did not know about the possibility of an epidemic that attacked their country, including Indonesia.

Likewise, the government initially took the outbreak (Covid-19) lightly and eventually caused panic when Covid-19 spread in Indonesia. This is where the importance of disaster journalism, in this case, the process of collecting and presenting news related to disasters that are predicted to occur in the future. The main task of disaster

journalism is to provide warnings and reports about current events (Houston et al., 2012). Understanding disasters through mass media coverage must be given to the public to prepare themselves and reduce the impact of a disaster. The way the mass media helps reduce the impact of disasters is through the delivery of disaster risk reduction through news coverage that discusses a systematic approach to identifying, assessing, and reducing disaster risk (Arif, 2010). The approach aims to reduce the socio-economic impact of disasters and prevent hazards that threaten the environment. In times of disaster, journalists compete to be the fastest and most accurate in providing the latest information. However, with the recent development of online journalism, the published news is often unclear because it still requires further confirmation. Even so, reporting on ordinary natural disasters and reporting on the Covid-19 pandemic is clearly very different. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been felt by everyone, including the journalists themselves, who are vulnerable to viral contact due to the demands of work which often do not allow working from home. However, the model of disaster journalism in Indonesia, which was full of polluted practices, is currently starting to develop in a better direction.

Journalists seem to have realised that the mitigation of the Covid-19 outbreak at the pre-disaster stage did not work. However, when a disaster occurs, they swiftly report everything related to Covid-19, such as the number of victims, hospital readiness, the condition of medical personnel, government actions in dealing with the outbreak, and any information related to how to protect themselves from Covid-19. 19. Scientists, especially health experts, are starting to get a share as key informants in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, an important point in disaster journalism is reporting from a mitigation perspective and not exploiting suffering during disasters. In addition, it is also important to highlight how the mass media can educate the public to be ready to face disaster journalism (Arif, 2010). On the other hand, the perspective of disaster journalism in Indonesia seems to still experience problems which roots are lack of knowledge and the absence of clear standard operating procedures. So far, however, most major disaster reports have focused on the timing of the disaster.

Indeed, disasters have high news value, namely under the issue of conflict. The difference is, conflict can be predicted, while disaster cannot be predicted. Therefore, journalists are often not prepared to cover disasters because they still do not have sufficient knowledge about the area being investigated. Therefore, reporting ethics must be maintained, and journalists must be prepared to cover disasters with good ethics. So, there must be guidelines or special protection standards for journalists covering the Covid-19 pandemic. In this regard, the Indonesian Press Council (Dewan Pers) has issued Press Council Regulation Number 5/Peraturan-DP-IV/2008 concerning Standards for the Protection of the Professional Journalist. The first

point states that the protection provided for this standard is legal protection for journalists who comply with the journalistic code of ethics in carrying out their duties to fulfil the public's right to information. Furthermore, the fifth point states that journalists who work in hazardous or conflict areas must be given a letter of assignment, safety equipment that meets the requirements, insurance, knowledge, and skills from the Press Company related to the interests of the assignment (Press Council Regulation, 2008).

News is a report that contains actual information about interesting, clear facts and involves the interests of many people (Kusumaningrat & Kusumaningrat, 2012). News is delivered in print, broadcast, and online because it has become the primary need for everyone. However, not all information is worthy of a report in the mass media. Particular values become parameters for newsworthy information, which is the forerunner to the theory of news value in journalism. The discourse about the value of news or criteria in selecting news that began in the period of communication expert in the 1960s has a long tradition. As the starting point, the aspects of 'true' and 'false' should be considered in choosing news, but the mass media editors have their own parameters in assessing information worth reporting to the public, which is called news values (Siregar, 2012a). Newsworthiness also can be interpreted as a mental construction, thought, or judgment of reporters about a fact or event (Shoemaker, 2006). The theory of news value (also called the concept of news factors) describes the rationale of a topic that is newsworthy and can be published by the media (Abubakar, 2020). The valuable news from an event usually fulfils one of the various factors that can determine how important and interesting is the event to be reported, and this is what the journalists experience in the field.

The newsworthiness becomes a reference for the journalists and editors to decide issues that are newsworthy. These criteria serve as a guide for journalists to detect which events need to be reported and not. An understanding of the value of news is highly important for journalists amid the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. For journalists, this criterion is fundamental as guidelines for reporting. However, for editors, the criteria of news values are a guide to consider and decide which news is most important to broadcast to the broader community. The essence of news is a report about what a group of people have already seen, heard and experienced. Siregar argues that two things make the news important, namely the needs of readers and editorial politics (Siregar, 1998). Practically, every journalist chooses news based on the reader's interests, but the editors are free to follow their conscience. The differences in the characteristics and politics of editorials signify that not all information can be reported. There are special criteria that become the eligibility requirements for news, namely (Siregar, 2012a):

Significance

News must contain something that concerns the interests of many people. The measure is how important an event for the public and whether the event is important for the public or not, such as disease outbreaks and rising food prices.

Magnitude

The extent of the influence of news on the community determines the news's value. It means that the event within the community's life determines whether the news is valuable or not—for example, the increase of fuel prices and the distribution of the Covid-19 case.

Timeliness

In reality, the news (particularly online mass media) is highly important. The news will be more interesting when the public is attracted to consume (enjoy) it. Again, the speed of the news distribution and spread to the community is the critical point for the success of online mass media.

Proximity

Proximity is an important factor that significantly influences the value of newsworthiness (Trilling & Tolochko, 2017). The events that have closeness with the reader will attract more attention when it is reported. The closeness is geographically, environmentally, psychologically, signifying the emotional aspect of the readers.

Prominence

The news that contains a reporting of public figures, such as artists (Trilling & Tolochko, 2017), officials, scientists, and heroes, are greatly valuable because it will become an attraction for many people (readers). For example, the event involving famous figures (e.g. death) will attract many readers.

Human Interest

Like the above criteria, the news that presents humanity always gets a spot of reporting because it attracts the readers (Trilling & Tolochko, 2017). The aspect of humanity value within the news is able to touch and attract readers' feelings. Directly speaking, the events that involve emotional effects and sympathy will get a special portion in the mass media because it has a great appeal for readers.

The danger of transmission of the coronavirus and the growing stigma in society is a dilemma for journalists in carrying out their duties during the pandemic. Their daily tasks are increasing: conveying the latest information to the public and educating the public about the transmission of the virus, and keeping themselves safe from the possibility of contracting it. At the start of the pandemic, there were no clear instructions on protecting oneself from possible virus transmission. Unexpectedly, in its development, Covid-19 cases in Indonesia increased rapidly, with the number of patients increasing every day. Moreover, now many people have contracted the virus, even though they do not show any symptoms of the disease. Thus, the

virus's potential is more significant if the infected person is not easily detected.

In addition, during this time of the pandemic, journalists have to rack their brains in sorting out issues for readers because they have to think about their own safety. Moreover, the work of journalists cannot be done entirely at home as recommended by the government. The practice of 'Working from Home (WFH)' does not allow journalists to develop issues of interest to readers. Journalists cannot work optimally just by quoting statements from several sources without direct participation and natural investigations in the field. Plus, readers certainly need clear information, educate, and build optimism during a pandemic. Meanwhile, the interview process, especially those conducted by telephone, cannot describe and guarantee the details of an event.

Basically the job of journalists is to process facts into information. This work is usually carried out in two stages, namely finding facts and writing in text form. In principle, facts in journalism are aspects of reality that meet newsworthiness. The work process of journalists is closely related to obtaining facts that require sources. Informants are an essential factor because when journalists cannot observe the facts directly, the resulting news can be in the form of accusations that must be avoided. During a pandemic, interviewing is not an easy thing. Interviews are not just 'questions' and 'answers' using a structured and planned questionnaire (Siregar, 2012b). However, the interview is a dialogue that requires interaction between the informant and the journalist. In interviews, journalists must prepare a list of questions to guide each part of the interview and reconstruct a fact or discourse. When the facts and evidence obtained from field investigations have generally passed, journalists need to reconstruct them through information from selected informants. In essence, the work of a journalist in an attempt to reconstruct the empirical experience or opinion of the source in the description of factual discourse. On the other hand, writing news obtained from selected informants is sometimes not fully able to build a complete story, so a journalist still has to make observations to investigate facts on the ground. On the other hand, during a pandemic, conducting field observations or investigations carries a high risk, creating a dilemma for journalists.

> "I cannot fully develop and elaborate on interesting issues because I only quote the speaker's speech without direct contact to the field, especially during the work from the home period. It is essential that readers need clear information. However, conducting interviews only by telephone cannot provide a detailed picture. In the end, I was forced to take to the field despite the risks. This may be a difficult decision because no news is worth a life" (Y13, interview, 2020).

In a crisis situation, all information about Covid-19 in all aspects is always interesting to report because it is valuable news due to its actuality, proximity, influence, and impact on human life. On the other hand, the coronavirus also creates a dilemmatic situation because not all news can be written only by citing experts or official speeches. In this situation, journalists must also observe what is happening in the field in order to be able to write accurate and balanced news. Journalists overcome this dilemmatic situation by increasing prevention efforts through the use of masks and gloves when carrying out their reporting duties and maintaining a safe distance when meeting other people. To maintain its performance in presenting news that is actual, enlightening, and fostering reader optimism, the editor in the newsroom must also carefully sort out interesting issues based on the reporter's presentation. In addition, they also have to mix up other news as a companion to the literature on the internet. Based on observations, the way of working in the newsroom is different during the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the young editors at Solo Post even complemented the limited submissions of reporters with other information that can be obtained from the internet, "actually, an opportunity is important during a pandemic. So, I often complement journalists' stories with other stories; arrange them based on search results on the internet. The themes range from the number of Covid-19 cases to the impact of the crisis in the world, such as salary cuts to layoffs" (Y20, interview, 2020).

Agenda Setting Dilemma

In disaster journalism, all mass media (especially online media) effectively deliver news accurately and quickly. The mass media also informs the needs of victims and ensures whether they get the proper rights or not. In this case, the mass media must play an active role in attracting public sympathy to raise humanitarian funds to guard public awareness in order to avoid disasters. However, it is still challenging to appear due to various problems. The role of mass media in disseminating information and its readiness to present disasters has become a deeply embedded thought, especially in television and online media. Unfortunately, disaster news broadcasts in Indonesia are still in a hurry. Indonesia has repeatedly experienced world-scale disasters with worrisome conditions because the country's economy and infrastructure are still far behind other countries, especially in dealing with disasters. Covid-19 is a new epidemic for which everyone has yet to find a cure. The World Health Organization has declared Covid-19 as a pandemic, and Indonesia is one of the countries that has felt its impact. In Indonesia, the number of Covid-19 patients continues to increase every day. In the midst of a crisis situation, the mass media is urgently needed to oversee crisis management properly.

Responding to previous evidence, the Indonesian Press Council encourages journalists to continue to carry out their sacred duties in

the midst of the pandemic. Since the situation was completely limited (from the beginning of the pandemic until now), journalists have continued to seek information from the public. The chairman of the Indonesian Press Council, Muhammad Nuh, believes that the Covid-19 outbreak is a test that the Indonesian nation must pass. For this reason, he asked journalists to continue to present accurate news to the public, especially regarding the development of Covid-19 in Indonesia. The Press Council also issued an appeal regarding the reporting of Covid-19 cases that the mass media should enforce in Indonesia (Press Council, 2020). First, reporting cases of the spread of Covid-19 must uphold the journalistic code of ethics principles, starting from reporting that is accurate, balanced, in good faith, and carried out proportionally. The mass media must also pay attention to aspects of the broader public interest before broadcasting Covid-19 news. Second, the newsroom should not make the public panic because of the news being broadcast.

Furthermore, the mass media may not include the patient's identity, photo, and address, because the patient is a victim who must be respected. Finally, the mass media and health authorities must convey information that provides certainty in the community and avoid sensational news that can disturb the public. On the other hand, the pandemic situation has become a tantalising moment for online mass media with their 'click' tactics. People need the latest information in the midst of a pandemic crisis.

The press agency has acted professionally in carrying out its role to convey accurate information to the public. The press also plays a role in bridging the communication process and the flow of information so that the public can avoid confusing news related to the Covid-19 pandemic. On the other hand, the press is shaded by industry-based companies that have business interests. Therefore, through the newsroom, mass media companies must control and select the issues they want to convey to the public (Nasionalita, 2015). Online mass media can determine the importance of an issue by organising news based on topics or commonly referred to as 'tags' that are easily accessible in a short time. News that contains essential issues in online mass media will continue to increase, even though the page view of the news is high. The higher the page views or the readability of a story, the issue will continue to grow and get a more significant portion. This phenomenon is one of the determinants of news loading in online mass media today, in addition to the pre-determined media agenda. McCombs & Shaw argue that mass media has the ability to transfer thoughts through the news to the public agenda (Griffin et al., 2018). They also add that mass media has the ability to make people judge something important according to what they are talking about (Nuruddin, 2007). This perspective shows the power of mass media to influence and shape the mindset of people who are affected by exposure to information. In other words, everyone can judge

something as significant when the media states that it is important. The two scientists emphasised that the mass media deliberately influence the audience through news that is delivered with a specific purpose. Furthermore, the main idea of agenda setting theory is that the media present different attention to each issue or event. Everything that is considered and considered necessary by the media will also be important in the public's eyes if it continues to be reported. This condition can occur because the mass media has the power to determine the portion of attention on an issue or event that is finally presented to the public (Rakhmat, 1988). This shows that the power of the mass media has the ability to direct an issue or event to be well received by the public as an important record.

Weaver et al. explain that agenda-setting theory begins and is based on two main assumptions (McCombs et al., 2014). First, the media do not reflect reality as a whole but choose and shape it according to their wishes. Second, the accentuation of issues by the mass media in a certain period of time will affect the public because the public perceives it as an essential topic. Agenda setting theory faces the challenges of the advancement of the internet. The number of online mass media audiences is increasing. This condition is a challenge for the media crew (Ninkovic-Slavnic, 2016). However, agenda-setting theory is still relevant to be used in the study of mass communication, which focuses explicitly on online media. Online mass media can still influence audiences on the internet through news broadcasting. In this context, Althaus and Tewksbury explained that the agenda-setting function still works in online media differently and more dynamically. Highlighting issues that begin with the selection process plays an essential role in shaping the reality of online media audiences through the frequency of news coverage, headlines embedded in the microsite, and upload time (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002). The online mass media determine the importance of the issue by organising news stories by topic (commonly called 'tags'), and these tags are easily accessible in a short time. In addition, news containing important issues in online mass media will continue to increase, especially when news page views are high. The higher the page views or the amount of readability of a story, the issue will continue to grow and get a large portion. Currently, this situation is one of the determinants of the loading and publishing of news in online mass media other than the pre-determined media agenda.

In practice, journalists usually discuss with their editors in the newsroom to select the current issue before covering the news. Journalists who have a good understanding of field conditions will propose several themes for follow-up. However, they can also develop specific issues based on instructions in the newsroom. The news work is carried out according to the agenda that the mass media company has set because all mass media certainly have an agenda that they want to highlight to the public. The percentage of assignments and

ideas for each journalist's personal coverage may vary according to the policies of the mass media company. As respondents in this study, journalists explained that they always propose ideas for daily news to the editor in the newsroom. The managing editor of Solopos.com explained that Covid-19 was a big theme that was the focus of the company at the beginning of the pandemic (around March to April). At that time, everyone was very focused and following the development of the Covid-19 case. The media agenda, which initially only focused on Covid-19 cases, began to shift from May to the present because public attention to Covid-19 cases also decreased. Instead, lately, the mass media have started discussing the 'New Normal,' the implementation of health protocols, economic, social, cultural and tourism impacts.

> "During the pandemic, the media setting agenda, which lasted for approximately four months, was constantly changing. Covid-19 is indeed the main theme. Even in March-April, Covid-19 became a major issue. However, from May to July, the media agenda shifted to the issue of New Normal and other matters outside of Covid-19. If you pay attention, the market is not too enthusiastic about this issue anymore. Even so, the Covid-19 theme was not immediately abandoned. Still being discussed, but the portion is not the same as the previous one in terms of quantity" (Y19, interview, 2020).

In agenda setting theory, McCombs & Shaw argues that the mass media have the ability to transfer their thoughts through the news to be appreciated as a public agenda. Mass media can make people judge something important based on its news. Practically, online mass media determine the importance of issues by organising news based on categories that are easily accessible in a short time. In this study, the same respondent explained that the agenda-setting theory assumes that the managed online mass media are characterised by existing issues that are of interest to readers. This phenomenon is influenced by the results of Google Analytics calculations which show that the media agenda and the public agenda go hand in hand. Based on observations on Solopos.com, the process of determining the agenda setting is carried out by continuously monitoring issues that are developing and of interest to the audience, primarily through Google Analytics. Issues that get more attention will continue to be worked on to get as many page views as possible. Therefore, it can be concluded that the media agenda and the public agenda certainly go hand in hand.

Furthermore, the mass media is not the only party that has the ability to influence the public agenda. Sometimes, the media agenda even follows the public agenda, which is marked by coverage of the events being discussed by the public. However, the percentage of the public agenda that influences the media agenda is not so substantial.

An example of the influence of media coverage on public assessments occurred when Dr Moewardi Solo Hospital was reported not to treat positive Covid-19 patients at the end of March 2020. This phenomenon made people return to their normal activities. In addition, the issue of the City of Solo, which was labelled 'Black Zone' in early July 2020, had caused a stir in the community. This attracted the attention of many parties, causing pros and cons among district and provincial officials. The news also made people in Solo and its surroundings panic and frenzy so that the situation seemed calm after three days of reporting. This evidence proves that the mass media still has a strong influence on the public's assessment of the development of information.

The Covid-19 pandemic in the city of Solo is always in the spotlight and gets its own share in the newsroom of several online mass media, especially at Solopos.com. The increase in patients and the development of cases are news that must be pursued because they are needed by readers and searched for on several online mass media sites. Practically, the editorial room of Solopos.com will publish news from various perspectives (PoV) with a 'click-bait' pattern to attract readers' attention. This method is carried out according to the media setting agenda that is in accordance with the business for profit to continue business continuity during the pandemic. It is undeniable that almost all online mass media add 'click-bait', which significantly affects the profit for the company. A full report sent by a reporter can be turned into at least three stories if it has the potential to get a 'click.' This practice is very common among online mass media editors, both locally and nationally. These editors have a target page view that reaches millions every month. Therefore, they are required to be observant and creative in working on different content. News that is potentially important and has the potential to generate 'clicks' will be placed in the headline, while news that is interesting and must be informed to the public (according to the editorial room) will be placed in the editorial selection. News has higher readability because it is highlighted to examine the agenda of setting online mass media. They are also required to be observant and creative in working on various content.

Sourcing and Sustainability Dilemmas

The dilemma experienced by journalists in carrying out their duties during the Covid-19 pandemic is also included in the resource and sustainability aspects. Correlation of sources and maintenance of personal security is another issue that creates a dilemmatic situation in reporting during the pandemic. The mass media have an important role in every level of disaster. Journalists can be engaged before, during, and after a disaster to support mitigation, preparedness, facilitate long-term recovery, and foster public resilience (Houston et al., 2019a). In pre-disaster times, the mass media can remind citizens

of threats to encourage disaster preparedness (Rattien, 1990). When a disaster occurs, the mass media must apply the principles of empathic disaster journalism that focuses on survivors, vulnerable groups and raises public optimism. After the disaster passed, the mass media played an important role in overseeing the reconstruction and rehabilitation process to prevent new disasters from occurring. However, the majority of mainstream mass media in Indonesia (local and national) tend to report disasters as mere events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. The way the mass media helps reduce the impact of disasters is through the delivery of disaster risk reduction through news coverage that discusses a systematic approach to identifying, assessing, and reducing disaster risk (Arif, 2010). This approach aims to reduce the socio-economic impact of disasters and prevent hazards that threaten the environment. In times of disaster, journalists compete to be the fastest and most accurate in providing the latest information, but with the recent development of online journalism, the published news is often unclear, because it still requires further confirmation.

The main dilemma is finding a primary source that can provide clear information to explain the accurate picture of the pandemic and how huge the impact is. For journalists, finding several sources of stories that can explain and represent the impact of the pandemic is not easy because of the risk of transmitting the virus, and it may have a more devastating effect if the health protocols, such as maintaining distance, are ignored. In the midst of a limited and uncertain situation, mass media companies also make Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) to regulate their duties while maintaining the safety of their reporters in the field. For example, the journalists were provided with masks, hand sanitisers, and vitamins to maintain physical fitness. In addition, mass media companies also strictly regulate 'what is allowed' and 'what is prohibited and avoided' by journalists in reporting on the field. For example, one company allows reporters to do Work from Home (WFH) by presenting news sources by telephone or attending existing webinars. They also assigned their editor in the newsroom to monitor the condition of journalists in the field so that unwanted things did not happen.

In Solo, the 'Extraordinary Event' status was announced by The Mayor, FX Hadi Rudyatmo, on 13 March 2020 after a positive patient died from a seminar in Bogor's newly recorded cluster. At that time, information about the victims who lived in Semanggi Village continued to be reported every day and caused panic in the community. The identity and condition of the first patient (victim) family became a piece of the trending news in several online mass media. Again, the minimum knowledge on Covid-19 raised a stigma against these patients in the community. Both the public and reporters were scared. Several journalists were even panicked. They did not dare to leave the house and even considered their colleagues who conducted the

reporting in Semanggi Village as carriers of the virus. An experience as a carrier (stigmatised) of the deadly virus was even experienced by one of the online reporters in Solo's most prominent local mass media. The stigma had made him even more stressed and caused him physical and psychological sufferings when he followed the Mayor of Solo to visit the residence of deceased patients to assist the families and local society who are quarantined:

> "Some time ago, there was one journalist who reported in Semanggi as a carrier of the virus. At that time, Semanggi Village was considered as a 'red zone,' and knowledge about Covid-19 was still very minimal. There is no recommendation to wear a mask because there is no need to wear a mask first. I did not go into the patient's house, and I just stood on the front porch. However, many of my friends were worried about me and some other journalists and reported us as carriers of the coronavirus. Eventually, the stigma made me stressed, and I fell ill. I have to stay at home for two days to cool off" (Y9, interview, 2020).

Since then, the journalist has never reported in the 'red zone' because of the frightening high risk. Not only the risk of contracting but also the stigma that is given is considered more dangerous than the disease itself. Fortunately, some of those reporters have been moved to new news coverage, i.e. any issue other than Covid-19. Other journalists also felt the same dilemma as respondents in this study, especially after the Deputy Mayor of Solo, Achmad Purnomo, was declared positive for Covid-19 on 23 July 2020, even though he was included in the category of asymptomatic sufferers. Their worries are getting worse because Achmad Purnomo is an official and public figure often visited by the media crew to report. Journalists working in national and local mass media companies have clearly been in contact with Ahmad Purnomo. As a result, they cannot avoid the Covid-19 issue, which is still a significant and important topic, especially for those who do not have a team. They have to oversee various events in Solo and write down every news report to become accurate news for readers amidst the fear of contracting Covid-19. A dilemmatic situation is also felt by a reporter who works in the photo department (photographer). A photographer in any mass media (including online mass media) obviously cannot work from home (WFH). He still has to investigate and conduct field investigations to get the best image to describe people's impressions and feelings during the pandemic. Before the government announced the New Normal, some journalists had an obligation to conduct field investigations every day. They realise that reporting during a pandemic is a high risk for personal safety. Even so, they considered it a natural thing because no news was more valuable than life. In the Covid-19 reporting guidelines compiled by the Press Council, the safety of journalists is the main point/thing that must be

maintained. This means that journalists' work during a pandemic is writing accurate news and educating readers, and keeping themselves safe from the risk of contracting a disease. Of course, this provision has an impact on their reporting procedures, which then become more complicated because they have to start a new habit by implementing health protocols. Before covering, journalists and photographers always coordinate with the editor in the newsroom. Journalists are given suggestions to cover, while the editor directs them to do relevant and safe reporting. If a reporter's proposal is a safety hazard, the editor reserves the right to reject it.

> "Journalists must prioritise their own safety above the interests of reporting because there is no news that is more valuable than life. During reporting, journalists must apply strict health protocols to protect themselves. As an editor, I must ensure that journalists are in a safe condition and do not approach dangerous areas, except for urgent needs, and there is no other choice" (Y11, interview, 2020).

Moreover, news has become a necessity for almost everyone during the Covid-19 pandemic. The story that started from this pandemic factually contains news value in the form of actuality, impact, influence, and humanity that can change the reader's emotions. For this reason, journalists must continue to report the latest news and look for other interesting news, primarily to educate readers who are at risk of contracting the corona virus. They struggle with the problem of choosing between professional obligations and social responsibility for their families and communities. Reporting the news in traditional ways—such as going out into the field—affects their personal safety and continued professional contact with speakers. The constant struggle to overcome this dilemma has forced journalists to seek safe guidance through their professional code of ethics. In this study, respondents also emphasised that serving during the Covid-19 pandemic is a new challenge. Their workflow becomes more complex because they have to carry a lot of equipment to protect themselves from the risk of transmitting the coronavirus. In addition, journalists must also implement strict health protocols and change old habits. Finally, they must consider their own safety because no news is worth a life. This is done by sorting out which issues are newsworthy with the concept of news value theory.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that journalists at a certain level have experienced a dilemma in choosing content and carrying out their reporting during the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the dilemmas in question is to determine the issues that will interest readers but do not endanger the safety of journalists during field investigations. On the other hand, journalists must think creatively to produce the best news

stories during mobility restrictions. Apart from this dilemma, journalists also face dilemmas in selecting and contacting informants for interviews because interviews are a matter of 'asking' and 'answering' and of interaction and dialogue between journalists and interviewees in reconstructing the facts investigated. Meanwhile, telephone-based interviews could not provide details of events. Indeed, journalists also find it challenging to build relationships with informants as a condition for the continuation of their work. Therefore, the practice of working from home (WFH) cannot be thoroughly carried out by journalists and actually becomes an obstacle to their work, especially in selecting and developing issues that should be the attention of readers.

Furthermore, the danger of transmitting the virus also requires journalists to change the way they report by maximising limitations to continue to convey accurate information to readers. This condition factually adds to their workload, so they have to adapt to new habits to protect themselves from the possibility of contracting the plague.

Journalists must break the stigma of Covid-19 that is growing in society. They must build narratives that do not cause confusion, keep the public aware of the existence of Covid-19, but still make people optimistic and alert to the Covid-19 outbreak, according to the agenda setting that has been set by the media where they work. News presented and delivered must at least meet one of the eligibility criteria, namely significance, magnitude, timeliness, proximity, excellence, and human importance. Actually, they have adapted to the new normal since the outbreak began. Limiting mobility creates a very dilemmatic situation but does not necessarily discourage journalists from conveying accurate information to their readers because they realise that they have a primary duty to convey the truth to the public.

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