

## Indonesian online news and digital culture: a media ecology perspective

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**Abstract** The number of Internet users in Indonesia continues to increase, with more and more people using electronic gadgets connected to the Internet. It is also quite clear to see the phenomenon related to the emergence of online news in the digital realm. The researchers review and characterise Indonesian online news from the media ecology perspective. By doing library research, a literature review will be composed and used to describe online news and digital culture in Indonesia in media ecology. The result shows that the increasing use of the Internet has resulted in the rise of online news media, which seem to have replaced traditional media. In the context of Indonesia's digital culture, multimedia features in online news have the potential to attract readers' interest. At the same time, social media provides space for independent online news and community participation in the digital world to shape social, political, and cultural values.

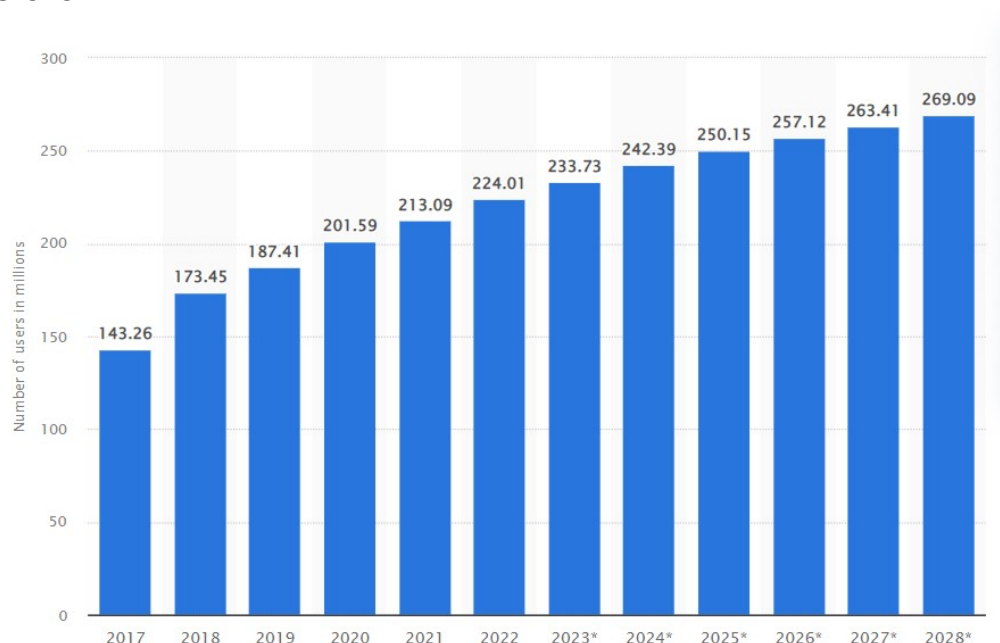
**Keywords:** digital culture; digital sphere; Indonesia; media ecology; online news

### INTRODUCTION

The advent of online media has profoundly impacted the daily lives of individuals by providing them with swift and current news updates. With its ease of access, online media is gradually displacing conventional media, as people increasingly prefer obtaining news simply by searching or browsing specific keywords on the Internet. In our contemporary society, there is a growing demand for flexibility in accessing information from portable devices, be it in text, audio, or video. Consequently, online news has revolutionised how news and information are obtained, introducing remarkable convenience and adaptability.

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A notable advantage of online news lies in its global accessibility, catering to audiences worldwide. Moreover, many online news platforms are freely available to users, allowing them to access news without incurring any cost (Radev et al., 2005). While certain major news agencies may offer subscription-based models, there remains a plethora of opportunities to obtain news content free of charge from the vast expanse of the Internet. Additionally, individuals have the autonomy to choose the news they wish to read and view, as numerous options abound, spanning both local and international news, accessible with just a simple click.



**Figure 1.** Number of Internet users in Indonesia from 2017 to 2022  
Source: Statista.com (2022)

According to Statista (2022), the number of internet users in Indonesia reached approximately 224 million in 2022 and is projected to grow to around 270 million by 2028. This steady increase can be attributed to Indonesia's large population and the widespread availability of internet-connected electronic devices. As a result, the rise of Internet news portals and citizen journalism has become apparent.

News digitalisation has been inevitable in the era of internet networking. News and information can now be easily accessed through search engines and archived on websites and social media platforms, thus becoming integral components of the digital media ecology.

The concept of media ecology was first introduced by McLuhan in 1964, with the primary focus of exploring how humans adapt to new media technologies throughout history. Scholars like Postman (2000) elaborated on the term, emphasising the interaction between people and media and how this interaction shapes culture and creates different 'environments' for individuals to inhabit. Media ecology helps us understand the development and adaptation of media and sheds light on the interconnection between various media functions.

Considering the framework of media ecology, it becomes pertinent to question how Indonesian online news functions to attract and influence its audience through news production and content. Furthermore, we seek to understand the role of online news and social media in shaping digital culture in Indonesia.

Media ecology has been widely used to analyse various aspects of popular culture, television programs, news media, and social media in different contexts. This paper aims to provide new insights through a literature review or summary description of Indonesian online news from the media ecology perspective. Additionally, we will explore alternative new media sources and independent online news outlets that cover daily news through newsletters, websites, and social media accounts. We argue that in the digital era, social media platforms create digital spaces and opportunities for people to engage in the creation and sharing of news. Understanding these conditions is essential for situating Indonesian media within the broader context of media ecology.

The primary objective of this paper is to provide a contextualised and comprehensive overview of the existing literature on Indonesian online news, examining it through the lens of media ecology. The researchers aim to employ media ecology as a theoretical framework to unravel the multifaceted discourse surrounding the relationship between digital media and its impact on society. Although previous research in humanities and social communication science has extensively studied online news, the current trend indicates a heightened interest in exploring the intersection of online news with social media platforms such as Youtube, Instagram, and Twitter (Hong, 2012; Poell, 2014).

Considering that social media platforms and websites may adopt diverse models for presenting online news, this paper intends to shed light on the influence of online news on the audience and digital culture within the specific context of Indonesia. By delving into this investigation, the researchers seek to discern the implications and significance of online news consumption on social media and how it shapes the broader digital landscape in Indonesia. This comprehensive analysis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between digital media, online news, and the evolving cultural dynamics in the country.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research is a qualitative descriptive study. Library research is done to create a concrete literature review to map and understand Indonesian online news from a media ecology perspective. Researchers use a literature review to describe a framework for discussing Indonesian online news from media ecology. It should be noted that this article is not mapping the results of previous studies on media ecology in Indonesia but instead describes media ecology in Indonesia. Literature reviews can serve as background for empirical studies or stand-alone pieces, and their purpose can categorise the latter: describe, test,

extend, and critique. Review methodology differentiates the literature review types from others (Xiao & Watson, 2019). It is essential to strike a balance between old established papers and current ones and to read the entire article to assess the evidence and summarise the findings (Winchester & Salji, 2016). Literature reviews are a research project that uses secondary data analysis of published and unpublished documents, adopting qualitative thematic analytical procedures to synthesise research evidence and identify key themes and debates. These reviews are valuable in bringing together evidence from different sources and informing professional theory and practice (Steward, 2004).

Furthermore, this paper describes several online news in Indonesia and social media which are used as news references. The digital era has made media consumers switch to using technology through their gadgets to access news. The research uses a literature review to identify the research topic and questions, gather relevant literature sources, review and analyse the literature, synthesise the findings, evaluate the quality and validity of the sources, and write a comprehensive report. It is a systematic and rigorous approach that helps identify gaps in existing knowledge and provides an overview of the current state of research (Xiao & Watson, 2019), which may help us understand more about the media ecology of online news in Indonesia.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Online News in Media Ecology**

Media ecology is acknowledged in how the media evolved throughout history and affected the people who use them and their relationships (Scolari, 2012; Scolari, 2013). As Scolari also stated (2012, p.8), "media ecologies can be simplified to a basic statement: technologies [...], from writing to digital media—create environments that affect the people that use them". The environment means, as Ruotsalainen and Heinonen (2015) stated, "[...] metaphor focuses attention on how media influence particular situations and interactions" (p.3). In addition, when discussing media ecology development, it can also be perceived to study and observe the relationship between people, online networks, and technologies.

Furthermore, media is like a living thing that impacts the environment since there is a linkage between media and 'the audience's participation and awareness in processing the information' (McLuhan and Fiore, 2005, cited in Nurhaqiqi, 2022, p.7). As McLuhan stated that media is like a form of 'species'. Media is seen as constantly changing and evolving to transform its format and style (Scolari, 2012; Scolari, 2013). Online news appeared after the emergence of the Internet, putting itself among printed media, radio, and television broadcasts. The popularity of online news increased along with the growth of internet users. It is essential in influencing social, political, and cultural values by giving information, narratives, and societal events. Beforehand, it was around the 60s to 70s when Birmingham schools responded to social

conflicts and movements, investigating the impacts of newspapers, radios, televisions, and other cultural productions on audiences (Kellner & Durham, 2006).

The point of media itself is always connected with the innovation and implication of technologies, particularly online media (news). Thus, it is important to understand online news in media ecology, as it will explain the position and circumstances of online media networks. Moreover, innovation, independence, and the process of exploration are fostered in an open system; thus, media ecology is a network of concepts, individuals, and publications that links to each other in various ways (Strate, 2004). It can also mean "different media might facilitate interactions and social structures in general" (Meyrowitz, 1999, cited in Ruotsalainen & Heinonen, 2015, p.3).

People relied on traditional newspapers, radio, and television for updated news in the past, but they often had to wait for the morning edition or scheduled broadcasts. However, this paradigm has shifted drastically with the emergence of online news media. Online news offers the advantage of real-time updates, allowing information to be delivered within 24 hours (Andriano, 2021). The history of news dissemination can be viewed from two perspectives: the material side, represented by printed culture, and the virtual side, facilitated by wireless networks, and these two aspects complement each other (Facchinetti, 2021). While some tabloids and magazines still exist in printed form, the trend is moving towards online news platforms. The advancements in technology enable online media to deliver news in various formats, including text, images, audio, and video, contributing significantly to modern society (Adhiarso et al., 2017; Pristianita et al., 2020). Consequently, online news has become the primary source of information for many individuals, easily accessible through online news portals and social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook.

Information and communication technology (ICT) has eliminated temporal and spatial barriers in communication, shaping today's information society and knowledge industries (Khan et al., 2012). As a result, online news outlets compete to be the fastest and most up-to-date to attract audiences. These news sources adopt various formats and technological features tailored to their target audiences. Although large news agencies still dominate the online news landscape, independent online news sources are emerging to challenge mainstream corporate news agencies. Consequently, news can be obtained through search engines, web applications, and social media platforms, allowing the audience to choose the type of news they want to consume.

However, network algorithms can create the illusion of choice in news selection for the audience. As discussed in Dwyer and Hutchinson's article (2019), algorithmic recommender systems used by online news media can influence how South Korean contemporary society accesses news, reflecting the media ecologies at play. Despite algorithms, elite

news corporations may still hold more influence and trust of the audience due to their established credibility from the era of printed media. The economic aspect of the media sector, driven by advertising revenue, encourages media outlets to present information from various perspectives (Fitriyani, 2022, p. 155). However, Bennett (2016) suggests a powerful symbiotic relationship between media and politics, potentially affecting the narrative flow and hidden agendas within news reporting. In online news, this dynamic within media ecology makes absolute neutrality nearly impossible when media outlets decide to take sides.

The study conducted by Nygren et al. (2018) reveals the emergence of a hybrid media system in Swedish local newspapers, which represents a transitional balance between the old and new media systems. The Internet and digital broadcasting, as the "new media" technologies, exhibit characteristics of networkability and evolving interactions with the audience (Agboola, 2014). As a result, large audiences are increasingly shifting from newspapers and television news to online news sources due to their convenience and the abundance of information compared to traditional print and broadcast media (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000). Conventional news services transitioning to online platforms often provide additional news and features, along with the capability to explore topics and events in much greater depth than what is possible with traditional media (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000).

However, there are notable differences between online and printed newspapers. Online news is non-linear, making it necessary to click through pages or links to access the entire news content (De Waal et al., 2005). Some online news platforms may restrict access to full articles unless the audience subscribes or pays for the content. This creates challenges in obtaining comprehensive news without barriers. Moreover, 'clickbait' content may attract readers to unreliable news articles with hyperbolic headlines and irrelevant content (Kaushal and Vemuri, 2021).

Dimmick and Li (2004) also observed a displacement effect within traditional news sources, as the consumption of television and newspaper declined with the rise of internet usage and online news. Globalisation is closely linked to media development technologies and the role of international media elites, as it facilitates the exchange of materials, information, and technology (Olausson, 2009).

The advent of online sources and internet websites has transformed how journalists obtain and present news (Garrison, 2000). Online media's hypertext feature distinguishes it from printed media and television programs, enabling interconnectedness through hyperlinks (Beyers, 2005; Steensen, 2011). Some news may be reproduced and distributed multiple times, creating a transformative but repetitive distribution model unique to online news within the media ecology (Turner, 2007). Consequently, it is possible to encounter identical news content due to the reproduction of information from other sources.

## **Indonesian Online News: Between Multimedia, Storytelling, and Slideshow News**

A brief history of Indonesian online news is essential to understand the transition from old media to new media in Indonesia. Detik.com, established in 1998, is considered the pioneer of online news in the country (Margianto & Syaefullah, 2012). The immediate sociopolitical developments in 1998 prompted Budiono, one of Detik.com's founders, to create this online news platform to convey information quickly and without easy censorship, overcoming the limitations of traditional printed media (Anggoro, 2012).

Kompas, one of the most popular Indonesian newspapers, has also transformed from a traditional print medium to a multimedia information source, embracing digital platforms such as the Internet, mobile devices, and digital gadgets (Kusuma, 2016). This shift is partly due to the digitalisation model that relies more on advertising income, raising questions about the future of printed media.

Social media's rise as a new platform has brought about significant social transformation, impacting existing cultural and ethical values (Pabbajah et al., 2020). It has altered the way readers access and consume news content. Modern online news platforms employ various features to attract and engage their audience. They use multimedia skills, such as sharing news on multiple social media platforms, adopting new storytelling styles, and utilising slideshows to cater to specific online platforms. The evolution of online news has led to modernisation and creation of more creative content, appealing to a diverse audience (De Waal & Schoenbach, 2010). The adaptation of storytelling styles by Indonesian online news is intended to interest and captivate their target audience, similar to how television programs rely on talk shows, features, and straightforward news to attract viewers (Atika, 2020).

Given the diverse interests of the online news audience, news industries adopt various approaches to provide more attractive content, especially in multimedia formats (Crosbie, 2004). Using audio and visual formats can enhance the appeal of news content. The media ecology perspective emphasises the need for online news platforms to adapt and modify their presentation styles to meet their audience's demands, who constantly seek freshness and innovation.

In the context of media ecology, Indonesian online news fulfils the societal need by transforming the traditional printed newspaper into a dynamic and accessible online news portal. The transition from old media to new media reflects the evolving media landscape and the audience's changing preferences.

Deuze (2003, 2004) highlights the significance of multimedia in online media, referring to the integration of images, animation graphics, audio, and videos in news coverage across various media. This allows for different storytelling formats in online news, emphasising the high functionality of multimedia applications. Visual storytelling has become increasingly common in online news due to increased internet

consumption and social media users (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2016; Seyser & Zeiller, 2018). As a result, several Indonesian online news platforms have embraced visualisation and presented news in shorter formats like infographics and slideshows.

For instance, Tirta.id creatively presents news in infographics, enabling the audience to quickly grasp the content with concise and compact explanations provided in a single picture. This storytelling approach primarily targets young audiences and readers from the intellectually middle class (Nur, 2018). Other Indonesian online news outlets such as Tempo, Kompas, Mojok, and Detik.com have also utilised infographics to attract a younger audience on digital platforms (Sukardani & Setianingrum, 2019).

Another example is Catchmeup.id, an independent online news platform that employs informal language and expressions to deliver news. They use taglines like "hey guys!" to greet their audience, creating a different nuance and vibe that resembles casual conversations among friends. The content delivery is designed to be akin to daily life storytelling, enhancing the connection with the audience.

On the other hand, Slideshows news is commonly found on online news websites and social media platforms like Instagram. The popularity of Instagram for sharing pictures "at the moment" enables a linear timeline and spatial experience for users (Leaver et al., 2020). Instagram's repeatability functions allow online news outlets to create aesthetic slideshows and co-create news with other researchers. Many Indonesian online news platforms utilise Instagram's slideshow feature to present comprehensive, compact, and easily readable news, often supplemented with additional information in the caption section if needed.

### **Online News and Social Media On Digital Culture in Indonesia**

In the digital era, news dissemination has been greatly facilitated by social media and the Internet, leading to a transformation in the media landscape compared to the broadcast news period in the past (Chadwick & Vaccari, 2019). This digitalisation is intertwined with digital technologies such as the Internet, computers, and mobile phones, affecting every aspect of life, including media consumption. However, the shift towards digitalisation has also posed commercial challenges for news media, as audiences are less inclined to pay for news when they can find it freely available online (Hjavarad & Kammer, 2015).

The transformation of media institutions is evident in various regions, influenced by factors such as politics and public opinion (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). For instance, in Asian countries, authorities still impose restrictions and oversight on media organisations, as seen in Indonesia's Information and Technology Law (UU ITE), which responds to the digital transformation affecting the country's social culture (Riaz, 2010). The advent of digital change calls for applying polite and ethical culture in social media and online media platforms (Sinthiya & Ipnuwati,



2022). However, it also raises concerns about the UU ITE law, which can be a double-edged knife, potentially oppressing individuals with defamation charges.

The transferability of media content, such as newspapers to television programs, can sometimes lead to challenges in understanding the author's intentions and how audiences interpret the information (Hine, 2000). Social media platforms offer the advantage of immediate interaction between news agencies and the audience, allowing for clarifications and responses to audience queries. The multimedia approach adopted by online newspapers can influence the psychological perception of the audience (Sundar, 2000). Online news agencies and participatory citizen journalism have thrived due to the Internet's emergence, leading to debates about the definition and role of journalists within the digital technology era (Roberts, 2019).

Large media agencies owned by elite oligarchs may consolidate media control in the digital arena, while citizens and activists can challenge them, leading to a potential digital revolution (Tapsell, 2015). However, the digital sphere can also be a space of oppression and violence against marginalised communities and minorities, with misinformation and false news posing significant risks, particularly during critical events like the Covid-19 pandemic (Jurriëns & Tapsell, 2017; Muzykant et al., 2021). Consequently, there have been various movements in Indonesia aimed at combating hoaxes and false news initiated by social actors, communities, and media to address the dangerous implications of misinformation (Tawaqal et al., 2018; Maqruf, 2021).

Indeed, the digital sphere offers opportunities for marginalised communities and minorities to have a voice through various online platforms, including social media, news blogs, and independent online news agencies. These independent online news outlets provide diverse perspectives on social, political, and cultural issues in Indonesia, countering the hegemony of mainstream media. For instance, portals like Magdalene.co focus on gender and feminism issues, shedding light on incidents and regulations that victimise women. Such alternative media aim to communicate, influence, and advocate for equality and justice, empowering women amid challenges like the Covid-19 pandemic (Fenti & Eddyono, 2021).

The rise of the Internet and social media has fostered collective action behaviours in the media environment, with social media users actively engaging with information by liking, commenting, and sharing (Veronika & Raharjo, 2021). Online news and social media have shaped a dynamic and ever-changing digital culture. Webinars and online forum discussions are examples of collective actions encouraged by online news agencies, leading to a reciprocal communication process where journalism becomes more conversational and interactive (Veronika & Raharjo, 2021). Mobile devices and social media platforms have played a crucial role in transforming journalism from a one-way communication

process to one that involves active audience engagement and interactivity. This shift has changed how journalists report news and interact with their audiences, making it essential for news outlets to embrace these platforms to reach their readers.

Furthermore, social media's interactive nature creates a digital space and opportunities for people to participate in creating and sharing news. Online news agencies can source and reproduce news based on the footage and information the audience and social media users provide, fostering civic participatory engagement in the digital sphere. The audience's involvement in providing resources and information for news stories exemplifies the collaborative nature of news production in the digital age.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the increase in internet usage has led to significant growth in the number of online news outlets in Indonesia. Traditional media like newspapers, radio, and television are gradually being replaced by the convenience and accessibility of online news, resulting in a rise in internet users accessing news online. The media ecology perspective highlights the strong connection between media and technology and how the information is presented online, influencing the audience.

The use of multimedia features in online news, especially in the context of Indonesian digital culture, can potentially engage and captivate the audience. Visual storytelling and slideshow news are some of the ways online news agencies are adapting to the digital landscape to attract readers.

Additionally, social media has provided a new platform for disseminating information and has allowed independent online news agencies to thrive in Indonesia. These platforms offer opportunities for diverse perspectives and social activism to be voiced, challenging the dominance of mainstream media. The engagement of citizens in contributing to news content through videos and comments further demonstrates the civic participatory nature of digital culture.

Overall, digital technologies and the Internet have revolutionised how Indonesian news operates, impacting the social culture of society. Understanding online news from a media ecology perspective, incorporating multimedia elements and interactive nature, sheds light on how it shapes social, political, and cultural values, especially in the context of independent online news and citizen journalism that actively contribute to social activism in Indonesia.

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