

Cyber Media and Conflicts: How Journalists are Preventing Violence

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ABSTRACT

Cyber media is one of benchmarks in the current digital era as a result of the advance of information and communication technology. The media flood the public with diverse information fast and easy. However, the nature of the media creates challenges that could harm the public. The competition among the cyber media in providing news information often cause journalists to forget ethics of journalism. While publishing news on conflicts in public, at the same time, cyber media, could prolong the conflicts. The research seek to know how media and journalists could avoid further conflicts but still publishing them. The research use a mix method of content analysis of news produced by the cyber media and interviews the journalists. The result of the research shows that journalists could play role in preventing further conflicts that could become violence in public if the the cyber media and their journalist implement the journalistic ethics when producing news.

Keywords: *cyber media, conflict, journalist, verification*

1. INTRODUCTION

Cyber media have often made mistakes which were caused by, one of them, the absence of verification, one of the basic principles of journalism. Based on a research's result on cyber media and diversity issues in 2017, media cyber or online media has weaknesses in their verification process. Verification was often neglected because the media focused on producing news as fast as the can due to high competition among them (Loisa, Susanto, and Junaidi, 2019).

Not only on the diversity issues, such as news on religions, races and ethnicity and societal groups which are known with the acronym of SARA, in news related with political and legal nuances, the verification is ignored as the media might try to compete with the other media. Dozens of cyber media made mistakes on reporting the recent news on the verdict of the Jakarta Administrative High Court which decided President Jokowi and Minister of Information and Communication Johnny G. Plate guilty on stopping the internet access in Papua. Press Council decided as many as 33 cyber media outlets have made mistakes on the news because they did not conduct verification process (cnnindonesia.com, June 15, 2020).

The high number of cyber media companies in Indonesia might contributed to the stiff competition among them and, as a result, decreasing the efforts to make

verification on the news. According to the Indonesia Cyber Media Association (AMSI), there were about 47,000 online media and 2,700 of them, have been verified by the Press Council (www.amsi.or.id, April 6, 2019). The data showed that the public acceptance on the presence of the media. However, it could also potentially trigger conflicts or even making the conflicts worse due to lack of verification. If the cyber media produce the news by considering ethics of journalism, they might contribute to the peace process of the conflicts.

This paper based on our research in 2019-2020 on cyber media in four provinces in Indonesia, namely in West Java, East Java, West Kalimantan, and South Sulawesi, which were considered as conflict-prone areas due to issues of religions, ethnicity, race and inter-societal groups. We analyzed news produced by news media in cities in the provinces and interviewed journalists from the areas. How the cyber media and their journalists write and publish their news which carried themes of SARA-related conflicts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Media played important roles in many conflicts in the world. The roles could be inflaming the conflicts or, instead, helped resolving the conflicts. In the genocide of thousands of people in Rwanda in 1994, a radio station was used as a media to campaign for the mass murder. After the tragedy, media are also use the reduce prejudice and conflicts in the African country. (Paluck, 2019). In a sectarian conflict in Maluku in 1999, two newspapers produced imbalance and unverified news, taking side to Christian and Muslims as warring groups. As an effort to reduce the conflicts, journalists also contributed an important role by setting up Ambon Media Center and campaigning for peace journalism. The center helped media and their journalists, Christians and Muslims, to meet to discuss and helped calmed down the conflict which killed thousands of people (Nuswantoro, 2013).

Nowadays, media have been developing and changing in line with the advance of information and telecommunication technology. The development in mass media has changed the functions of the media (McQuail, The changes are not only the platforms, from conventional media of print and broadcasting to internet-based media, but also the natures: easy, fast and interactive (Chan, 2014). The chang2010). The functions of mass media that traditionally is perceived mostly as information messengers as well as educators become wider to entertainer. The changes in media platforms impacted also on practices on journalism. The news selection is determined by news factors and social significance (Araujo, 2018). Journalists select news events, cover and publish the news based on news values. For the shake of speed and competition, journalists often neglected principles of journalism, especially, the process of verification. In consequence, mistakes often happened as journalist the basic principle of

journalism and victims from vulnerable groups often suffered due to the neglect of the principle (Loisa, 2015).

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The research use a mix method of quantitative and qualitative approaches. We collected samples of news from cyber media published in West Java and East Java, and analyze the contents of the news. The news were published along 2018 which carried themes of diversities, such as religion, ethnicity, race and societal groups. We have also conducted focused group discussions in Bandung and Surabaya in 2019 involving journalists and editors from the two cities and conducting deep interviews on how they cover the issues and publish them in their respective media.

Conflict, Cyber Media and Prevention

Conflict is a dispute or confrontation between individuals or groups that have different values, beliefs and interests that could escalate into verbal and physical attacks (Healy, K, 1995). Some individuals or groups might think that they have better or superior values than others. The individuals or groups might enforce their values and beliefs to others who though their own values and beliefs are even better and reject their opposing values and beliefs. Conflicts happened also because some individuals have different interests –could be political and economic interests—to others and tried to enforce their interests.

In communication theories, conflicts are caused by poor communication between individuals or groups that have different values, beliefs and

interest (Jones Jr, 2013). The disputes are expressed personally between conflicting individuals or groups or conveyed through media which could escalate the conflicts. In the current digital era, expressions on conflicts and different values, beliefs and interests could be easily found in cyber media. Conflicting individuals and groups conveyed their disagreement through the media.

Journalists in cyber media preferred to publish news related with conflicts more than news with themes of harmony and peace (Susanto, Loisa and Riris, 2020). The journalists viewed news with related to conflicts are more preferable by the audiences. It could be shown in the table 1.

Diversity theme in cyber media.

No	Themes	Kompas		Tribun		Detik		Viva		Average
		Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	
1	Pluralism	15	30.0	28	56.0	39	78.0	29	58.0	55.5%
2	Harmony	14	28.0	32	64.0	44	88.0	28	56.0	59.0%
3	Discrimination	0	0.0	7	14.0	4	8.0	3	6.0	7.0%
4	Prejudice	4	8.0	7	14.0	7	14.0	6	12.0	12.0%
5	Hatred	3	6.0	5	10.0	6	12.0	1	2.0	7.5%
6	Minority Group	8	16.0	4	8.0	12	24.0	7	14.0	15.5%
7	Conflict	24	48.0	25	50.0	21	42.0	11	22.0	40.5%
8	Regionalism	1	2.0	1	2.0	4	8.0	5	10.0	5.5%

Source: Results of Data Processing

In focused group discussions (FGD) in Jakarta, Bandung, West Java, Surabaya, East Java, Pontianak, West Kalimantan, almost all journalists admitted that news which carried themes of conflicts were preferred by their audiences. “We cannot avoid publishing news related to conflicts as they have huge readers,” one of the journalists said.

Conflict is one of considerations on how news perceived as “valuable” news or new values, while the other values are news related with prominent people, novelty and proximity (Araujo, 2018). As a consequence, news which

carry themes of peace and harmony are considered to have less values than conflict-themed news. However, in the research on news in cyber media in West Java and East Java, the conflict-related themes were still dominant but the tone is less sensational as the media and journalists tried to avoid the prolonged conflict. News with themes of harmony and pluralism were often published after the conflicts as efforts by the journalists in the two provinces to calm down the conflicts.

The conflict-related news spread rapidly in the current digital era, thanks to the social media, twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Cyber media also use their social media accounts, Facebook,

twitter and Instagram, to spread their news to reach wider audiences. “After our reporters got they news, we edited the news and published in our website. Our social media officer than upload our news into our social media accounts,” an editor said in FGD in Surabaya in 2019.

Related with the conflict-themes news, journalists preferred to use resources from state officers, law enforcers or public figures. So often people from minority groups are rarely interviewed and given spaces in the media as it shows in the table 2.

Position of newssources in society in news coverage.

No	Position in The Society	<i>Kompas</i>		<i>Tribun</i>		<i>Detik</i>		<i>Viva</i>		Average
		Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	
1	Religious leaders	13	26.0	18	36.0	17	34.0	8	16.0	28.0%
2	Activists	15	30.0	21	42.0	19	38.0	7	14.0	31.0
3	Society leaders	2	4.0	8	16.0	15	30.0	12	24.0	18.55
4	The Government officials	21	42.0	17	34.0	27	54.0	19	38.0	42.0%
5	Law Enforcement	4	8.0	9	18.0	15	30.0	9	18.0	18.5%

Source: Data Processing Results

“We often interview government and law enforcers since they are more accessible, quick to be contacted. We need to publish the news immediately,” a journalist said in FGD in Surabaya. Another reason why journalists are rarely interview minority groups are they claimed that they have no access to the groups. In many cases, the journalists produced one-source news without giving other to confirm whether the news right or wrong. The imbalance news and lack of verifications, such as an example in the introduction part in the paper, could deepen the conflicts.

However, conflicts could be resolved amicably or even prevented if the individuals and groups or others who want to contribute in resolving or preventing the conflicts could

understand the causes of the conflicts through various ways. Conflicts could be resolved through effective communication by respecting each other among conflicting individuals or groups; do not forcing opinions; developing personal knowledge to understand others; building empathy; being flexible and tolerant; and willing to maintain relationships with others (Hindman, 2008).

Besides the interviewing credible news sources, the journalists were aware on the use of peaceful vocabularies to avoid further conflicts. “We carefully use words and terms that would not prolong the conflicts,” a journalist in FGD in Bandung said. In the time of conflicts, many news sources, especially those involving to the conflicts, including provocateurs might want to be interviewed by journalists. But the

journalists could carefully select the resource persons and provide facts, instead of opinions that could prolong the conflicts.

Related with the conflict prevention, although Cyber media have their freedom to publish news according to their characteristics and orientations, they should uphold journalistic ethics and aware of existing regulations, including the Law No. 40/1999 on Press, the Law No. 11/2008 on Information and Internet Transaction Law and the Law No 14/2008 on Public Information Transparency. The media could publish news freely according to their interests, but it could receive diverse response from the audiences; authorities and public, if they perceive the media have produced news without verification and have caused damages to the audiences. In the situation, the media could create conflicts among individuals or groups or even prolonged the conflicts instead of preventing and resolving the conflicts.

Preventing further conflicts, media and journalists could still publish news on conflicts, but should be cautiously prepare it by considering ethics, basic principles of journalism, such as verification. Although, producing news, which have been verified, takes time and effort, it could avoid mistake and prevent further conflicts. "We have to wait for confirmation and varication. And we have to be very careful in writing it. We don't want conflict destroy our region," a journalist from Pontianak, West Kalimantan said, revealing a possible ethnic-based conflict in the province which was ravaged by bloody conflict.

Media and journalists could select news sources who are considered moderate and could avoid further conflict. Journalists avoid interviewing and quoting statements from news sources that could prolong the conflicts. "We tried to avoid using statements from people and leaders who are provocative. We use statements that could calm down the conflict," one of the journalists in FGD in Surabaya said.

Government officials and the law enforcers are the most accessible news sources for journalists as they need quick and fast response to publish the news as soon as possible as the nature of cyber media.

4. CONCLUSION

Media have roles in worsening and preventing or resolving conflicts through their news publications. Producing news without considering ethics and basic principle of journalism, such as regulation, and regulations could trigger and prolong the conflicts. The presence of cyber media in the current digital era provide diverse information. Public could easily and cheaply access the media. However, the nature of cyber media, such as speed, and competitiveness among them, could harm public as media often neglect verification process for the shake of speed and, consequently, producing imbalance and unverified news that could be mistake and damage the situation. Journalists in West Java and East Java have played role in preventing the conflicts by producing unsensational news through interviewing credible news sources, using peaceful vocabularies and focusing also on themes of harmony and pluralism. The media and journalists also spread the news through their social media accounts, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, to reach wider audience.

The cyber media and journalists should be more aware that if they continue to produce unverified news, they could not only worsen the conflicts, but it would harm them as the response from the audience could be obstacles of their journalistic works. The media and journalists could face legal consequences as they breach the regulations as far as anger from wider audiences

due to their unverified news. Cyber media and journalists could contribute and resolving and preventing conflicts by cautiously preparing the news through considering ethics and basic principles of journalism. They could carefully select credible news sources, not just from the government officials, but also from diverse groups, including victims and minority groups in order to create credible news that considering principles of journalistic ethics.

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