

# **Politics Media: The Dynamic of Independency and Neutrality for Journalist in Strengthening Resilient Society**

Septyantoro Aji Nugroho<sup>1\*</sup> Prahastiwi Utari<sup>2</sup> Andre Noevi Rahmanto<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>*Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia*

*Corresponding author. Email: septyanuns@student.uns.ac.id*

## **ABSTRACT**

The role of mass media in society is fulfilling the society's needs for information. Society knows several issues from the mass media, especially in the digital era. As we know, there are two platforms in conventional media: printed and broadcasting. These platforms, especially newspapers and television, are still dominant to spread information and to influence society's behavior. In the challenge of media convergence to the digital and social media era, society confirms that printed media and television produce objective and critical news journalism. The author chose television as an object of study because it is a combination of audio and visual aspects that can give the audience or society complete information, including entertainment. Unfortunately, the political view of the media owner influences the society trust. The media owner's political view makes the information is no longer neutral. It tends not only to fulfill their interest in political matters. But it also affects journalism ethics and goal, which is serving and giving information for society. This condition put the neutrality for their journalists is hard to achieve. They must accommodate the media owner's policy while reporting the news. This research describe how politic interest from media owner's influence on the neutrality and independence of journalism. This "media crisis" situation would be harmful to the process of building society resilient. Society must be protected from the "misleading" information, which only gives an advantage to the media's owner. This research helps the society select verified information to face the challenge in globalization era.

**Keywords:** *Media, Politics, Neutrality, Journalist, Independence*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In modern society, mass media is providing information for people who are living individualistically (Anggoro, 2016). Mass media is divided into three sections: printed, electronic, and online. At the moment, television starts to be abandoned by society even though some people still take it as the favorite to get the news [1]. In Indonesia, there are some, broadcasting institution, Media Nusantara Citra (MNC) is one of them. This group has some stations, such as RCTI, MNCTV, Global TV, iNews (television), Sindonews, Okezone (online), Trijaya (radio), Sindo (newspaper). This paper discusses media and politics in

MNC Group. MNC Group belongs to Hary Tanoesoedibjo (HT) who is also the chief of Partai Perindo. HT's politic view and interest influence the process of journalism in MNC Group, especially for the journalist in the field when reporting the news. On the other hand, this paper is very important to reveal because the media has the power to influence behavior and opinion. The power of media should be controlled to meet the constitution's obligation for achieving the goal. Mass media is fragile in this situation about framing public opinion because of its power and characteristic. The involvement of the media owner in the politic party makes the media difficult to be objective. Press idealism becomes unreachable because it is just used for fulfilling the political interest of the owner.

The neutrality for their journalists is hard to achieve. They must accommodate the media owner's policy while reporting the news[2], [3]. Unfortunately, that principle is difficult to conduct because of the journalist just as a worker and not have the authority to publish the news. The editors who are in charge of editing and publishing the news tend to accommodate the owner's interests in politics.

In addition to MNC Group, there are Metro TV and Media Indonesia Group, belonging to Surya Paloh also known as politicians in Indonesia. He is the chief of Partai Nasdem. Then, there are TV ONE and ANTV belonging to Aburizal Bakrie, the ex-chief of the Golkar 2009-2016 period. This paper will discuss the influence of the media owner's political interest upon the independency of their journalist in making the news. This paper is elaborating on the process in MNC Group, especially in the journalist's routine as the primary source of news material before it is published. Media and politics are already discussed by Daniel Susilo [4]. He focused on media conglomeration and explaining how HT (CEO of MNC Media Group) always showed up in television (RCTI, MNCTV, and GlobalTV) every day in General Election 2014. Daniel focused on the media owner's domination in Indonesia, especially MNC, Metro TV and VivaNews, before the general election in 2014. It is very urgent to get public trust, especially for the new party, to get a vote to enter the parliamentary. Therefore, Metro TV and Viva is presumed as a tool to make "brand" for them.

Meanwhile, Viva and Golkar Party also competed to get the public sympathy among the crisis of leader situation at that time. This study is different from the previous one because it is focusing on editorial matters and fulfilling the gap of the previous study and revealing the media owner's politic interest that influences editorial's independency

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. *Media Agenda And Public Opinion*

Mass media has a certain agenda when it was published. That agenda should be framed to get public attention and, the opinion would come up [5]. Agenda setting theory shows that reality in society was produced by media construction by the news. Media constructs as well as directs the people's opinion and behavior. Therefore, the public is not responding to the reality or fact but responding to what they think. Mass media plays a role in forming the reality in society's opinion. Media can select the issues happening in society[6]. There are two ways: first, to determine the important thing or value and then select the aspects. The second way is to frame the issues to be public agenda with media. With the framing, the media setting would be able to conduct.

### 2.2. *Social responsibility of mass media*

Media is a window to enable people to study and know the event in society. Like a mirror, the media can reflect the

facts in society. But, the content of media cannot be able to deliver what the fact tells. This becomes the gatekeeper's role in an editorial.

As the public facility to get information, media must provide accurate, balanced, and objective information. That principle can be fulfilled if the media is not influenced by certain people or situations[3].

The information can be said objective if it is accurate, complete, and trustable also reliable. Information should be neutral and fair, in the meaning of reporting the alternative perspectives without the intention of sensational and bias[7]. Objectivity could be able to reach if the media is independent. Its independence is related to fairness, neutrality, factual, and non-partisan. As a business institution, media is difficult not to be influenced by the economy and politics, to get profit and survive. But, as a social institution, mass media has a responsibility toward society.

### 2.3. *News elements*

The news product is influenced by the internal and external from its media. The factors that can influence the news content are personal background in managing the information; and routine factors related the mechanism of selecting news. The other factor is an organizational issue. This factor is also related to news reporting. There are extra media factors, such as news, financial source, government, media partner, and ideology. These are confirmed by the Shoemaker-Reese [8]. UU Press 1999 confirmed that conducting the journalism job must be based on the ethics code.

### 2.4. *The Role of Mass Media*

McQuail explains in his book *Mass Communication Theories*. There are six perspectives to reveal the role of mass media[9] :

- a. Mass media as a window on event and experience
- b. Mass media as a mirror of the event in society and the world, implying a faithful reflection
- c. Mass media as a filter or gatekeeper to select which event or information that is appropriate to believe or not
- d. Mass media as a guide
- e. Mass media as a form to give some information and ideas for society to give them a reason to make responses to certain issues;
- f. Mass media as interlocutor.

Mulyana sees that mass media surely influence the act and way of thinking of people upon knowledge, perception, and social behavior[1].

Politic definition, the term politic is firstly used by Kean Bodin in Europe 1575. Then followed by Fitzhherbert and Jeremy Bentham in 1606[10]. But, the meaning of this term is stated theoretical as it was written

by some bachelors in continental Europe. The characteristic is juridical institutional. On the other hand, In America, state theory is not stuck into static institution. It sees the country more progressively as the political department. Therefore, the politic definition that is appropriate in recent time is Kaspar Bluntssihli's definition, "politics is the science which is concerned with the state, which endeavors to understand and to comprehend the state in its conditions, in its essential nature, its various forms of manifestation, and its development."

The common difference of it because each scientist sees this based on one's angle or factor. The factor is treated as the main subject used to analyze other factors. From that analysis, it is clear the main subject of politics is the state or power to make decisions, policy or distribution, and allocation.

### *2.5. Objectivity and Neutrality of Media*

People need comprehensive and independent information and have distance from certain influence. Kovach and Rosenstiel in *Sembilan Elemen Jurnalisme* said that the main obligation in journalism is bringing the truth, balance, and content verification [3]. It means that all the news products must be based on objective perception. The word objectively in mass media means a method to accurately describe the world or events through the journalism principle. For the journalist, the principle of objectivity means collecting, processing news without any intention for some interest. The news would be able to claim as an objective if it contains accuracy, trustable, and completeness, describing the facts, the ability of separating the opinion and facts. Independency in journalism refers to fairness, neutrality, factuality, and non-partisan. Lasswell, in his scheme, shows that media presumed as a neutral information channel connect the sender and the receiver of message only. News is made based on data and phenomena in the world, without any opinion from the newsmaker. Then, neutrality in media means media only as seen as a channel to spread the information. The Null Effects Model emphasized that news is free from distortion. This theory clearly stated that mass media gives a fair description of reality and minimizes the distortion. This faith comes up from the traditional assumption "journalist is neutral transmitter".

#### *Why the news is not neutral?*

The news content did not come from a space that is neutral, free of interest, and distortion. There are some internal and external factors in the processing of producing news: Individual factors, routine factor, the organizational factor, the extra media factor.

Some people who influence the process of making news: news source, news income source, government and media partner, Media owners and ideology factor.

Shoemaker-Reese [8] confirmed that internal and external factors exist. This influence divides into some levels: such as individual level, media routines level, organizational level, extra media level, and ideology level.

Politics Media, the media owner serves to judge and to determine the issue and news content. These reflect their policy or interest in politics view which is delivered by the media professionals. People behind the news in charge of selecting, choosing, and determining it are called the gatekeepers [11]. The gatekeeper has an obligation not to publish the news that could make uncertain conditions.

It functions to interpret the message and to analyze it and also to add the data when making the news. The needs of gatekeepers are dependent on how big the system in the media. It means that the gatekeeper is determining the quality of the message distribution.

Gatekeeper is a person who plays the important role in newspapers, magazines, television, radio, internet, videotape, compact disk, and books [12]. Those called gatekeepers include reporters, news editors, or maybe film editors or someone who is working in the mass media industry. The role of gatekeeper is to modify, add, and delete the message the news before publishing.

Therefore, in conclusion, the gatekeeper's role is: transmitting the news, making borders and editing the news before it is published, and broadening the quantity of information by adding the fact and another perception, and interpreting the information.

### *2.6. Media as politic power*

The media in politics could not be neutral, objective, and idealist. It is interrupted by the media owner's ideology in politics. The owner has the power to determine the angle, direction, and framing of the news-published. On the other hand, the owner's business strategy and political consideration also affect the process.

The owner controls the media and finally determines the content. It is, by Altschull[13], called "the second law of journalism": "The content of media is always reflecting the interest of those who fund it".

In the theory of setting agenda, media has the ability to determine the social agenda through the news-published. This power is the main goal of the media owner. The power could direct the society to choose the option that the owners wanted to. Setting an agenda in media can rise or down the electability of a candidate in a political party. This ability is used by the owner to set the angle or direct the news to support the party or candidate.

### *2.7. The journalist's independence*

In reporting the news, a journalist must be independent and is not distracted by external or internal factors as media owners (UU N0 40 1999). The ethic code of journalism was firstly established by the Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia (PWI) in Malang 1947 in the revolution era.

It was intended to develop the freedom of journalism in Indonesia. The Indonesian journalist's code of ethics consist of: a. Respecting the rights of society to get the true information; b. Taking the ethical way to get and to

publish the information within the identity of the source; c. Respecting the presumption of innocent, separating the fact and opinion, balance and verifying the information and not plagiarizing; d. Not publishing the mistaken information, sadistic and pornography and not stated the victim's identity of sexual abuse; e. Not accepting a bribe and mislead the profession; f. Having the right to decline or to respect the embargo, background information and off the record as the deal; g. Taking down and clarifying, as well as making a correction to serve the right answer.

**3. METHODS**

This paper used autoethnography. This is an application form of ethnography, but it has methods as same as it's. The difference lies on the way of getting data, i.e. in this method the data was gotten g from the author's experience memories of certain issues. This method gives the author space and opportunity to use authentic feelings and personal memory to understand and to comprehend the cultural situation around them [14]. In brief, autoethnography is based on the author's experiences about an event or phenomenon but it gives the author the opportunity to update recent actual situation. This method is unique as it optimizes the author's experiences do research, to write: and to describe knowledge from the inside of a person who is a cultural situation; describing and criticizing the norm of society, experiences and habit; looking response from the reader [15].

**4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

This paper presents the author's experiences with working in MNC Group as journalist since 2003. Therefore, this study also discusses newsroom conditions, both before and after the influence of media owners in politics.

The broadcasting process in television principles is the same as the communication process. There are three factors: studio, transmitter, and receiver. This is said as a trilogy of broadcasting[16]. The studio is a place for producing the information and also broadcasting it through the transmitter, and then to be accepted by the receiver.



**Figure 1** Television Broadcast Trilogy

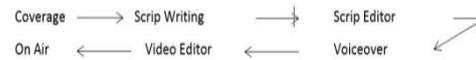
Based on the author's experiences in the journalism process, the communicator is a lot of factors. It could be described like this:



**Figure 2** Television Journalistic Process

Based on the author's experiences, journalism is an activity of collecting, reporting, and writing the news and then sending it to the editorial.

Generally, a journalist is under the newsroom coordination. At this point, the news producer is responsible for a program. Sometimes the producer is also helped by the script editor. After that, the video editors are taking the charge. They combine the video from the reporter described in the news anchor's script, and then send it to MCR for broadcasting. In a program, there is a director program is responsible technically for one broadcasting program. The steps are described below:



**Figure 3** News Broadcasting Television

In reporting news, a journalist should be accurate, objective, and neutral. But, since the media owner has been involved in the politic, those principles of journalism are difficult to conduct. The journalist is powerless to do the work with conscience and heart, as Bill Kovach said in his book, Sembilan Elemen Journalism[3]. In certain cases, such as political issues, the journalist has no choices in deciding the angle of the news. The same situation has happened when reporting the person who is involved or related to the media owner's interest. Usually, journalist is always assigned by the editorial, to report the event with no news values.

As we know, the fact is not always become published as news. It must contain values (e.g. important, urgent), give an impact on society, and be updated. Sallot, Lynne M; Steinfat, Thomas M; Salwen[17] said that news values contain factuality, accuracy, attractiveness to readers, usefulness to readers, completeness, prompt, timely publications, and depict the subject in a favorable light, mechanical/grammatical accuracy, fairness to different views and become a reference. Based on those values, news is not only factual or actual but also gives education for the people.

The media owner's political interests also could be seen as advertising slots. This situation is quite complicated related to the client of advertising. It will trigger the client's complaint and the media has the risk to pay penalty or may cut the cooperation in business and give a negative impression to the institution.

In relation to the media owner's politic interest and coalition, the news must emphasize on the positive side. On the other side, for the opponent, the news must emphasize on the negative one.

Based on this situation, we could see that emphasizing the issues, image, and certain characteristics, in media will give perception construction of the public significantly, including the candidate in politics [18].

It constructs the issues about what people should think of and talk about in public. One of the ways is to share the positive image of the selected candidate. It is not only by the news but also through the TV programs, such as talk show, editorial review, headline, or news talking.

The media's influence is not linear that could straightly show the impact. It was kept in people's memory and suddenly came upon the surface of people's opinions in several forms, such as permissive attitude[19]. Television is still believed as a media that has the power to make public opinion. It can combine the audio and video which can bring people "seeing is believing". The involvement of media owners in editorial is not by directly ordering the news.

The following table shows certain issue, media, and public perception about setting the agenda:

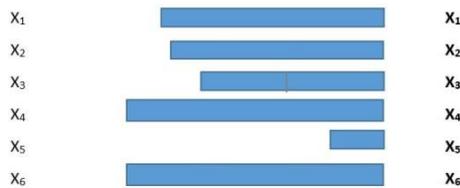


Figure 4 Image of Agenda Setting model

Based on the model, it is clear that an issue considered important will attract public intention (X1). On the other hand, if one issue is claimed as not interesting to the media, the issue will not get public attention (X5). In Indonesia, some newspapers are powerful in describing the agenda media through the editorial, headline, in-depth reporting, or talking news with the expert source. For television, it could be held in talk show program and the news producer has an opportunity to sharpen the issue through that program. Usually, news producer has the team, consist of experts in their field, to choose the topic or certain updated-issue. Therefore, the publisher has the writer to produce different articles based on their expertise.

The scheduling production programs could be changed if suddenly the owner needs that time to campaign. The media owner becomes the gatekeeper who has the highest position. This alignment is influenced by the politics disadvantaging the journalism idealism and also the public.

Meanwhile, the journalist was already making the news as good as the code ethics hoped. Even though the journalist has been already neutral in fields, it means nothing when the gatekeeper serves the media owner's wants. After the news was sent to the editorial, it would be managed by the editorial staff (gatekeeper).

After the owner is getting involved, it affects the journalist in producing the news. The news tends to serve the owner's interests even it was made by the rule of ethical code of journalism.

The situation in the newsroom in which the owners involved in politics was also different from the media that still keep the distance between owners and the editorial newsroom. Following is the directional assignments from newsroom/gatekeeper to journalist.

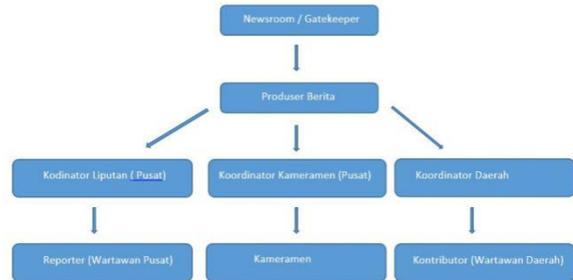


Figure 5 Task Line of Newsroom in MNC Group

In political years, the owner of media is involved in the newsroom. So, the published-news serves what the owner's decision. To cope with that situation, the owner asks the news producer to set the agenda that related to certain issues if the news. Technically, the news producer would order the news coordinator to ask a journalist in Jakarta, cameraman coordinator, and also local coordinator to order the local journalist. The journalist's report would be managed and then become the media agenda. This agenda was designed in rundown news that would be published in each news program. These agenda accommodate the owners.

In General, MNC news production process that influences with the gatekeeper's could be seen in this table:



Figure 6 MNC Group news production process.

In a political year, all assignments will accommodate the owner's political view. When the assignments were continuously ordered and conducted, it will construct the public perception and opinion in a certain phenomenon. In other words, it will make public opinion, especially for television viewers. The role of news producer is very significant in framing the agenda and accommodating the media owners. In other words, the media agenda could direct the opinion or understanding of television viewers to

do something or not. In this step, the news producer's role is very important. Besides having authority for setting the angle, the producer is also the "right-hand or confidant" of media owner to accommodate his intention or policy. Meanwhile, as a subunit in the news production scheme, the journalist was asked to be professional. They were demanded to do the ethical code. These are some examples of agendas setting in news production, related to the media owner's interest.

The agenda was conducted in 21st December 2018, assignment for the central journalist and local:

- a. The debriefing activity for legislative candidates in South Halmahera, at 09.00 WITA, had to arrive at the location. Coverage must be done until the event is over. The assignment was accompanied by a note regarding the event contact person.
- b. Perindo Party Activity: Socialization in Teratai Medan market, for local broadcasts. The time is 15.30 WIB until finished. Location Teratai Market Jalan Teratai Kel. Karang Sari District of Medan Polonia, Medan City. The contact person is already chosen.
- c. Covering the football game between Perindo Party Team in West Java versus Persib Legendary.
- d. Kartini Perindo Surabaya's social service activities.

From the several examples of reporting assignments, it could be seen that the agenda has low news value and no relevance to the public interest. But, this agenda is related to the media owners. In a regular situation, this kind of news would not be published, but with the intervention of.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, news are true the result of reality construction. The mass media has an opportunity to construct the meaning and images of reality. Most of the news is a reality construction containing ideology and media interests itself. It could be found when choosing the issues, information, or other content based on the media owner's interest. Selecting news angle, setting direction, and agenda and content news reflect the gatekeeper's decision which is accommodating the media owner. Media alignments in viewing the news have either good or bad impact. This is related to reporting issues or events. Meanwhile, the journalist's freedom is merely put aside because of the interests of the media owner. This condition is harmful to the process of society's resilience. Society should be protected from biased information that benefits the media owners only. This study hopefully can educate society to choose information selectively from the mass media. Therefore, media should educate the society, and give actual, verified, and balanced information, to build resilient society in the challenging globalization era.

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