Toward a Working Model of Peace Journalism in Reporting Interfaith Communication

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Abstract. Having six official religions and numerous ethnic-based religions, Indonesia is prone to interfaith conflicts. There have been several interfaith conflicts recorded, but many left unnoticed. This leads to the importance of promoting interfaith communication, in which mass media inevitably play a major role. This research aims to reveal the portrayal of interfaith communication in Indonesia on major online media. There has been a growing body of research on interfaith dialogue, but this study seeks to view it from a wider perspective of communication and put the study in the context of the pandemic, a situation in which people rely more on mediated communication. Practically, this research might contribute to building an initial model of interfaith communication in Indonesia. Theoretically, this study expects to contribute to the development of peace journalism by assessing its premises in the context of interfaith relations. The study uses qualitative content analysis, revealing the theme of news about interfaith encounters. The result shows that online media in Indonesia performed peace journalism by regularly portraying interfaith communications in the aspect of cooperation, but lacking in the portrayal of alternative views and positive experience. This research implicates the need for media to intensify and deepen the coverage of interfaith reporting to further promote the discourse of interfaith harmony.

Keywords: Online Media · Interfaith Communication · Peace Journalism

1 Introduction

Religious pluralism is inevitable in Indonesia, with a variety of ethnic groups and races. There are six official religions and many local beliefs that influence the values and behavior of people living both in rural or urban areas. Being a home to various religions can be deemed positive for developing tolerance among the people, but it can be also challenging as it is prone to conflicts. Religious segregation is eminent, and in many parts of the country, religious exclusivism is on the rise.

For example, several provinces in Indonesia start to implement legal systems, as well as the education system, based on religious teachings. Some students reportedly were told to wear certain religious attire against their own will [1]. Building a house of worship might be easy for those belonging to the religious majority, on the other hand, it

could take years for the minority religions. They are required to get a certain amount of support from local people as well as getting support from the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB).

At the surface level, religious pluralism seems to be fine, but under the water, conflicts have been reported from time to time. Physical attacks on minority religions have been reported to be happening nationwide, taking some fatalities. The attacks were not only targeting the buildings of the house of worship but also attacking people.

Conflicts have taken victims both from majority and minority religions, however, mostly targeting minority religions and sects. In 2018, there was attack to Ahmadiyah believers in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara. Several houses were damaged, motorcycles were destroyed and a dozen of this minority group had to be evacuated [2]. A year later, there was attack to a Catholic church in Yogyakarta that by an individual assaulter, injuring congregation members and a pastor who was delivering a sermon [3].

The role of media is considered important in deescalating conflict. This is particularly true in the implementation of peace journalism, which highlight the resolution and offers wider perspective to view a conflict.

The core problems of the research are both practical and theoretical. This research stems from a practical problem of increasing interfaith conflict in Indonesia. In a conceptual level, the application of peace journalism as a concept and model for covering conflict is potentially developed into wider areas, including interfaith segregation problem.

This research therefore, attempt to provide the way media implement peace journalism in the case of ongoing interfaith segregation by promoting news on interfaith dialogue. Practically, this research might contribute to building an initial model of interfaith communication in Indonesia. Theoretically, this study expects to contribute to the development of peace journalism by assessing its premises in the context of interfaith relations.

2   Literature Review

There are two important concepts which stand as the building blocks of this research. In this context, interfaith communication is seen as an encounter between individuals with different religions, or between religious organizations. Peace journalism, the second main concept, is used to highlight the role of media in promoting harmony between religions.

2.1   Interfaith Communication

In a broad context, interfaith refers to engagement with a diverse range of religious and nonreligious worldviews [4]. Interfaith communication therefore is translated as the encounter between those with different religions.

Most of the studies use the term interfaith dialogue which described as bilateral or multilateral meetings between different religions with the attempt to discuss theology of which both parties agree or not agree upon [5].

Another scholar defines interfaith dialogue as a purposive encounter between those with different religious background to promote understanding, respect, and cooperation

between groups through dialogue. The participants of the dialogue relate to another's traditional to understand what they consider meaningful, their experiences and what they believe as sacred [6].

While this term, interfaith dialogue, is mostly used, in the context of conflict prone society, such dialogue might not end up well. Particularly in Indonesia, discussing other religions' belief could lead to disagreement that might lead to conflict between groups, or legal suit with the accusation of tainting a religion.

2.2   Peace Journalism

Peace journalism is an old concept coined by Johan Galtung. He criticized the tendency to overemphasize the negative impacts of a conflict and ignore the benefit of peace. Contrasting peace with war journalism, he promotes a constructive approach to highlighting peace initiatives in an attempt to reach resolutions. This style of journalism has been criticized for standing against news values, particularly 'conflict'. Opposite to peace journalism, war journalism focuses on the event and its dependence on the official source [7]. Since the term firstly coined, peace journalism has been used as a framework to assess conflict reporting on media and its implication, as well as methods for peace resolution [8].

Peace journalism is defined as the choices made by editors and reporters on what and how to report conflict that open up the possibilities for the audience to consider and appreciate nonviolent response to conflict. It is considered superior to war journalism as it focuses on proactive reporting and critically questions the elites about the war [9].

In practice, peace journalism is influenced by several factors, including the structural aspects of media, the interest of the audience, the situation of the conflict, personal attributes of the journalist, political situation, lobbying groups on coverage, and audience interest.

This style of journalism has been criticized for standing against news values, particularly 'conflict' [7]. But to the proponents, peace journalism might facilitate the peace by offering widest conflict scenarios and offering peace alternatives. Thus, peace journalism can promote peace initiatives [10].

2.3   A Peace Journalism Perspective on Interfaith Communication

Recent research on peace journalism mostly concentrated on war reporting [10]. Beside of war reporting, scholars also implement this concept to assess racial conflict portrayal, for instance a study about the construction of blackness in men's magazine [11]. Attempt to bring peace journalism to a more extensive fields were done among others by utilizing it in the study about immigration. Among such studies is research on the portrayal of immigration in Greece [12].

This research uses peace journalism as a perspective to assess media reporting and expand the use of such framework to the study on interfaith communication. Another different approach to the concept is by implementing it to the continuous efforts of the media in promoting harmony through communication. Peace journalism was previously seen in the perspective of certain conflict of war.

Research on media reporting on interfaith communication is significant amid the continuing conflicts and potential conflicts in many regions. In such situations, media play a major role in presenting the way conflict is seen. However, in this research media is seen to have inherent capability in promoting interfaith communication which might lead to harmony. Despite the digital landscape provides alternative sources of information, people still rely on media as one of their primary sources.

3   Method

This research uses the approach of constructivist paradigm, which understood social reality as something that could not be generalized. Methodologically, constructivist paradigm is part of hermeneutic tradition that seeks to interpret social reality and stresses on data-driven analysis [13]. This study uses qualitative content analysis, focusing on discovering meaning within the text and analyzing their communicative content, and relying on hermeneutical traditions as the principles to understand and interpret the text [14]. Amid the critique that qualitative content analysis was subjective, the definition provided by Schreier that emphasizes on systematic way of analyzing qualitative material shows that this method also stresses on the importance of validity and reliability of the data [15]. Qualitative content analysis examines language intensively by classifying text into categories, both data driven or conceptual driven, that represent similar meaning [16].

The data were collected from news about interfaith communication published on major online media, including *Republika.id, Suara.com, Kompas.id.* The stories were purposively searched with the help of search engine platform and search function on the websites of the media. After building data corpus, data cleaning was performed to eliminate irrelevant news.

Each news then coded to build major thematic categories. The unit of coding is text segments. A change of topic in the same news was put under different code. Different from quantitative data analysis that mainly driven by theory or concept, qualitative data coding is partly data- driven. However, in this study, the coding frame is fully built from the data. It is deemed effective particularly if the goal is to provide detail analysis (Fig. 1).

Double coding is performed to assess the quality of the coding. This research relies on double coding by the same coder at two different times. The codes then transformed into themes and subthemes. After finishing this process, themes realignment was performed to build the link between them.
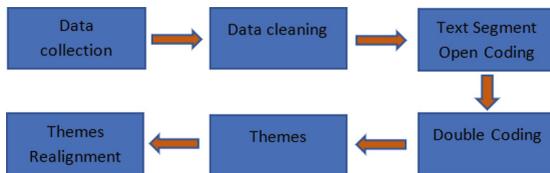

Fig. 1. Steps of Data Collection and Analysis

4 Result and Discussion

4.1 Result

There are several themes developed from the codes derived through the content analysis (Table 1).

The first theme is portrayal of organized efforts to maintain harmony. This theme comprises of some subthemes. One of them is the importance of including messages on brotherhood through education system. Another subtheme is the role of culture in promoting harmony. In Papua, for instance, the tradition of "Stone Burning" symbolizes religious difference and act as peace medium to solve conflict.

Media also stress on the important role of interfaith forum in bridging differences and promoting dialogue. There were two interfaith forums appear on the news. The first one is the Interfaith Harmony Forum, known as FKUB, which establish by the government and have local branches in the regions. The forums have members representing all official religions in Indonesia.

The media also featured a civil society organization named Interfaith Cooperation Network (Jakatarub). This organization actively conduct dozens of annual events that gather youths coming from different religions. One of its events carried out in Bandung screened film and book discussion about tolerance. It also conducts annual Chinese New Year Tour by inviting youths to visit different houses of worship in Bandung.

Such forum was also reported to have anticipate potential conflict, for instance during the celebration of the Ascension Day that coincides the celebration of Eid Mubarak. FKUB West Java branch came up with a statement that the moment should be used to beef up cooperation and tolerance between religions.

Table 1. Themes and Subthemes of News on Interfaith Communication

Themes	Subthemes
Organized efforts to maintain harmony	The importance of sharing values through education system
	The role of cultural tradition
Interfaith Forum	Promoting messages of tolerance
	House of Worship visits
	Joint statement on certain issue
Interfaith Joint Events	Promoting dialogue through events
	Religious encounters through events
Conflict Dialogue	Religious leader discussion
Religious Holiday Encounters	Religious leader visits
	Involvement of different faiths in preparing celebration
	Religious holiday greetings

Joint event was also considered important in promoting harmony. For instance, an event of Indonesian Council of Churches (PGI) staged speaker from the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI). MUI was not only dealing with internal members, but also play a role in building communication to other religions. Jakatarub also one of the organizations that reportedly performed joint events. The organizer involved youths who would be the next generation in the events with the goal for the youths to internalize tolerance in their daily life.

When interfaith conflict arises, attempt to find solution by having dialogue between the conflicting parties were also shown. In the conflict regarding the building of Holocaust museum in the complex of a synagogue in North Sulawesi, the Indonesian Ulema Council initiated dialogue with the caretaker of the museum. However, the media reports fall short to highlighting the different opinion between them, but not describing alternative solutions available. A third party, member of ICRP, who was an outsider to the conflict, were only quoted to criticize the rejection toward the building.

Several news on interfaith encounters were centralized around the religious holiday celebrations. Some subthemes appeared in relation to religious holiday encounters. The first is the preparation of the festivities which also involve those from different religions. For instance, during Christmas celebration in Surabaya, Moslems were helping with the security of the services and decorating the Christmas tree.

During the celebration period, visits from religious leaders were also reported. The visits, for instance by Islamic leader Nuril Arifin Husein to a Catholic church in Surabaya was used to emphasize the message of religious tolerance and combat radicalism.

The third subtheme is the religious holiday greeting. One of the news reported the positive ambience of Eid Mubarak celebration in Semarang where people from different religions gathered to greet and forgive each other.

4.2 Discussion

The success of interfaith communication depends on several factors. According to Abu-Nimer for an encounter to lead a transformation toward other religious orientation, it requires three things. The first is to address cognitive elements in which alternative views are exposed. The data shows that while the efforts to build more room for communication, alternative views during the encounters were not substantially shown [17].

The second step is to build a positive emotional experience during the communication by providing an environment that is safe and trusting. In this regard, media as the medium for the encounter have not deeply covered people's experience in interfaith communication. In fact, such encounter might only have a slight chance to pass the editorial review. Regardless of the limited role, such effort might later be expected to contribute to a better interfaith environment.

The third step is to cooperatively working together in an activity. Media have reported numerous events that requires people from different religions to work together in an event or other activities.

Peace journalism, as opposed to the war journalism, criticized the dependence of journalists to the elite sources. Most of the news were still interviewing authorities to get official quotes, but rarely stage the opinion of alternative view or from the grass root.

Fig. 2. Toward A Model of Peace Journalism Perspective on Interfaith Communication

Some sources were local, but mostly foreigners. This alternative view was not developed well in many campuses, encouraging students to look and focus from one point of view.

The essence of peace journalism is to present alternative views, thus quoting authorities as well as getting opinion from the bottom. But in reality, most of the news articles analyzed here depend on official sources.

Another perspective of peace journalism is to focusing on resolution instead of the conflict news values which portray pro and cons. Even when interviewing a source who may came up with a more objective opinion, alternative source from third party only came up in the form of criticism and comments.

Figure 2 portrays the way peace journalism perspective might be developed. In the case of Indonesian media, more weights were put on cooperation, but rarely were found on the efforts to show alternative view and positive experience.

5 Conclusion

Peace journalism as a model to promote interfaith communication might be a utopic will. However, the initial steps toward the involvement of media in promoting interfaith communication could be found on the articles.

However, for the message to transform people's view, attitude, and behavior toward other religions need a deeper and comprehensive coverage on the alternative views of all religions. Several articles portray the experience of communicating with those from different faiths, however only implicitly portrays the positive emotion. As for the cooperation between faiths have been adequately covered.

This research is not without weakness. The difficulties to find news regarding interfaith communication results in the limited amount of data which might miss some aspects of interfaith communication portrayal. Further studies might be better use computer programs to get a more comprehensive data.

Implications of this study is two-folds. Originating from general war or conflict, the concept of peace journalism has the analytical power to expand to other related areas, which in this case is interfaith communication. The concept might also applicable for other fields such as politics. The other implication is that studies on interfaith communication as portrayed in media might have concentrated on the aspect of exposure to

cooperation, but lacking exploring the positive experience and exposure to others' point of view.

Future research on the topic of interfaith dialogue might be better to be carried out using a method that relies on observation, such as case study or ethnography. Using such methods, the research might point out deeper situation of interfaith dialogue in Indonesia. As from the point of view of peace journalism, future research might explore the concept in a more extensive fields aside of war or general conflict. It would be theoretically useful to view different outcomes of the implementation of the model.

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