



Fabricated Authenticity. The News Cloning in Indonesian Television Journalism

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Abstract. The practice of cloning journalism, in which regional television news contributors replicate reports and videos from their peers, presents a significant challenge and violates journalistic ethics. This issue stems from the unequal attention television stations give to their regional contributors, who often operate under considerable pressure with limited technical and financial support from their headquarters. This study investigates cloning journalism among television contributors in South Sulawesi, focusing on the factors that drive this practice and its impact on the quality of regional journalism. Using a qualitative research approach, this study employs a case study method to analyze the experiences and perspectives of television contributors regarding cloning in journalism. The research subjects, television contributors from South Sulawesi. Data collection involved in-depth interviews and observations. The analysis utilizes a multi-perspective theoretical framework that includes structuration theory, normative media theory, and the political economy of media. The findings indicate that the cloning journalism practice observed in this study reflects the intricate interplay between agents (contributors) and the structures of media organizations. Cloning journalism emerges as a form of labor commodification, compelling contributors to compromise journalistic ethics to fulfill the news quotas imposed by organizational structures. This practice highlights a failure within the media to uphold their social responsibility to provide the public with accurate and reliable information.

Keywords: News, Cloning, Television, Journalism.

1 Introduction

The Television journalism in Indonesia plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and disseminating information on a large scale. The 2024 Digital News Report survey conducted by the Reuters Institute highlights the significant role of television in news dissemination. Although online media have gradually supplanted its influence, television remains a highly anticipated source of information for the public. The survey findings indicate that online media accounts for 79%, print media 60%, and television 46% as primary news sources for the public [1].

In the current landscape of television journalism, regional news contributors play a pivotal role in connecting local events with national audiences. They serve as the

frontline in gathering and reporting news, often from locations distant from centers of power and resources [2]. Despite their significant contribution to news production, limited attention has been given to these regional contributors' working conditions and welfare [3]. The news production model in Indonesia's television broadcasting industry generally relies on two categories of journalists: full-time staff journalists and freelance journalists. Full-time journalists are permanent employees of television companies, while freelance journalists act as contributors or stringers [4]. These contributors work on a contractual basis, and sometimes, their employment arrangements remain informal. This disparity poses serious challenges for the contributors and the overall quality of journalism [5].

The lack of attention toward regional television news contributors has led to the emergence of cloning journalism [6]. Cloning journalism refers to reusing or repurposing the same news content without substantial modifications [7]. This practice is often adopted due to time constraints and limited resources, challenges frequently encountered by regional contributors. Consequently, television news contributors frequently collaborate in news coverage by sharing video footage (video cloning).

Nevertheless, cloning journalism constitutes a serious violation of journalistic ethics, as it compromises originality and amounts to plagiarism [8]. As a result, public trust in the media may erode, and the integrity of journalism itself is at risk. The lack of attention toward regional news contributors is not merely an internal issue within the media industry but also has broader implications for the quality of journalism and the provision of information to the public [9]. These contributors, who operate at the forefront of regional news coverage, often work under pressure with minimal institutional support, placing them in vulnerable situations [10].

News contributors are more susceptible to unethical practices when they do not receive adequate financial and professional support [6]. This diminishes their capacity to report news accurately and hinders the development of journalism based on truth and social responsibility [11].

Cloning journalism is not merely a technical issue; it violates journalistic ethics, emphasizing originality and accuracy in reporting. The Journalistic Code of Ethics (Kode Etik Jurnalistik, KEJ) explicitly states in Article 2 that "Indonesian journalists must carry out their professional duties in a responsible manner." The article further explains that journalists must create original journalistic works and avoid plagiarism. Therefore, cloning journalism directly contravenes Article 2 of the KEJ [12].

This study aims to analyze the practice of cloning journalism by regional television contributors, constituting a breach of Article 2 of the Journalistic Code of Ethics. It will explore how structural disparities within the media industry contribute to the prevalence of cloning journalism and its implications for the quality of television journalism in Indonesia. This study will likely provide new insights into the importance of supporting regional contributors to improve journalism quality and reinforce media integrity in Indonesia.

Existing literature on cloning journalism remains mainly limited to ethical discussions and case analyses. Plagiarism and cloning journalism fundamentally contradict journalistic ethics, emphasizing originality, accuracy, and accountability [7]. Cloning journalism has been primarily observed among online media journalists due to

the ease of digital technology [6] [13]. Previous studies have mainly focused on the impact of cloning journalism on media credibility and public trust [14]. However, few have examined its root causes—mainly how the unequal working conditions between regional contributors and central newsroom journalists drive this practice. Existing literature tends to overlook the perspectives of regional contributors as key actors in this dynamic despite their critical role in ensuring the quality and originality of news reporting [15].

The novelty of this study lies in its approach, which combines ethical analysis with an examination of the structural dynamics of the television media industry. This research critiques cloning journalism in television as an ethical violation and seeks to understand the underlying factors influencing journalistic decisions. Thus, this study offers a new perspective that explores the superficial manifestations of cloning journalism and investigates its deeper root causes, which are closely linked to inequities in attention and resource distribution within the television media industry.

2 Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method. According to (16), a qualitative approach is a research procedure that generates descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from individuals and observable behavior. The primary objective of this research is to elucidate the reasons and mechanisms underlying the practice of cloning journalism among television news contributors.

The research method applied in this study is the case study method. As Yin (17) stated, case study research examines various characteristics of a limited number of cases, including individuals, groups, organizations, movements, events, or geographic units. This study explicitly investigates individual South Sulawesi television contributors who engage in cloning journalism practices.

The research subjects or informants provide information regarding facts or opinions. As Creswell (18) described, research subjects are those the researcher targets to uncover field data. In this study, the subjects consist of seven television contributors in South Sulawesi, selected through purposive based on the criterion of having worked as journalists for more than five years.

The research object pertains to the issues investigated to seek solutions. According to Neuman (19), a research object refers to an attribute, characteristic, or value of individuals, objects, or activities that exhibit specific variations determined by the researcher for study and conclusion drawing. In this study, the research object is the nature and process of cloning journalism practiced by television contributors in South Sulawesi.

Data collection techniques in this study include in-depth interviews with informants, direct observation, and documentation. The collected data is then processed so that the research findings can be systematically described and analyzed, supported by a literature review previously conducted by the researcher.

The collected data is then used to carry out a data validity technique in the form of a credibility test, namely triangulation. The triangulation used in this research is source triangulation, which involves checking data obtained through several sources.

3 Results And Discussion

Results

The study reveals that all informants know the practice of news cloning or collaboration among television news contributors in sharing news materials, including images and data obtained from their coverage. However, not all informants approve of this practice. Some acknowledge engaging in news cloning to meet the required news quota, while others reject the practice but admit to sharing news materials as a gesture of camaraderie.

Territorial divisions of coverage often compel contributors to engage in news cloning. Certain events occur within a short time frame and at geographically distant locations, making it impossible for a single contributor to cover multiple events simultaneously. Consequently, they must cooperate by sharing news materials. Television stations frequently assign extensive coverage areas to a single contributor, sometimes encompassing an entire province. For example, a contributor based in Makassar may be responsible for covering events across South Sulawesi Province, which comprises 21 regencies and three cities. Given such vast coverage areas, obtaining news independently without assistance from other contributors or stringers is nearly impossible.

The type of news most frequently shared among contributors is crime-related news. Criminal incidents often unfold rapidly, making it difficult for all journalists to be present at the scene. Police raids, for instance, occur spontaneously, preventing many journalists from capturing footage. Journalists fortunate enough to be at the scene are expected to share their video footage. The recorded footage is distributed (cloned) among journalists, while each journalist independently composes the news script.

"Yes, cloning happens. Typically, it occurs in crime-related news, such as police raids. During these raids, journalists usually only capture footage of the crime scene." (Informant 7)

"The most frequently cloned footage involves short-lived events, such as riots. Riots often last only a minute before police intervene. Since contributors from Makassar are located far from the scene, they often have no choice but to request cloned footage from other contributors, sometimes even at the newsroom's request." (Informant 1)

"Regarding cloning, only the footage is usually shared, while the script is written independently. Even if we use shared footage, we still verify information directly with sources for major news events." (Informant 5)

Crime-related news cloning is also driven by reliance on a common source—the police. Law enforcement agencies frequently document crime suppression operations and distribute the footage to journalists as part of their press releases. Consequently, journalists use identical video footage in their news reports, leading to uniformity in visuals across multiple television stations. This practice discourages journalists from conducting on-the-ground reporting, as they become reliant on police press releases for crime-related news.

Various factors motivate television news contributors to engage in news cloning. According to informants, cloning is necessary to maximize news output. Some contributors fear missing out on a significant news event, which could result in reprimands from producers. Poor performance assessments by producers could ultimately lead to contract termination with the television station.

"Television contributors most commonly practice news cloning. This explains why contributors in Makassar are highly productive—if five different contributors cover five different stories, they share the reports, allowing each of them to submit multiple news stories." (Informant 3)

Additionally, the vast coverage areas assigned to contributors necessitate mutual dependence. A single contributor is often responsible for monitoring events across four regencies, making it impossible to cover all newsworthy incidents occurring within 24 hours. As a result, they must collaborate and share news materials to manage their workload. This was experienced by one of the informants who was a contributor to a Jakarta television station assigned to the city of Makassar and responsible for guarding the coverage area throughout the province of South Sulawesi.

"I have engaged in news cloning before. Sometimes, I cover up to four regencies in Makassar, and my colleagues face similar challenges. Occasionally, I receive footage from others or provide it to them. Although newsroom policies previously prohibited sharing footage due to concerns about identical broadcasts, contributors have started sharing materials out of necessity over time. Since contributors are not salaried employees, they rely on mutual support." (Informant 1)

"In Gowa Regency, for example, there is only one stringer. Contributors from Makassar often request all of his footage, which he sells to them. This explains why news reports from the same region often feature identical visuals—because they originate from a single source." (Informant 5)

Producers and coverage coordinators at certain television newsrooms often legitimize news cloning. If a significant event is not covered, producers or coordinators may instruct contributors to obtain footage from fellow contributors. This indicates that news cloning is not strictly prohibited. In other words, it is not only the field contributors who engage in cloning but also the newsroom editors who tacitly endorse the practice. Editorial teams prioritize news quantity over journalistic originality.

"Sometimes, even our newsroom in Jakarta requests cloned footage. They ask who has the footage and tell us to acquire it. As field contributors, we must comply, even if it means using identical footage because the request comes directly from the newsroom." (Informant 4)

"Newsroom managers sometimes instruct us to source footage from our colleagues. If I refuse, they insist, saying that the moment is fleeting and will not happen again. So, we are compelled to comply." (Informant 2)

However, some journalists refuse to broadcast cloned news footage. Those who reject cloning practices tend to hold higher editorial positions, such as producers or bureau chiefs, rather than field contributors. Informant 6, the Bureau Chief of Kompas TV South Sulawesi, explicitly prohibits airing cloned footage. Within their newsroom, cloned news is called "plugged news." Kompas TV appears to enforce strict policies on news originality.

"We call it 'plugged news'—footage taken from another source and transferred. To verify authenticity, we check the original files and recordings. We analyze the metadata, including the camera type, recording date, and shutter settings. If our journalist genuinely captures the footage, we use it. Otherwise, we discard it." (Informant 6)

Observations of news broadcasts from several national television stations, particularly those covering events in Makassar, South Sulawesi, confirm that many

news reports feature identical visuals and interview sources, with only minor differences in editing. This suggests that television newsrooms ignore whether coverage is original or cloned, prioritizing content quantity over journalistic ethics.

Another reason contributors engage in news cloning is the fear of social exclusion from their peers. Interviews reveal that some contributors refrain from requesting footage from others but still share their footage upon request. This practice stems from a concern about being ostracized by fellow contributors. Social exclusion could result in a lack of collaborative support in the field. Contributors admit to sharing footage and data without monetary compensation—solely for maintaining friendships and professional networks.

"I do not charge for sharing footage; I just give it away. If I refuse, others might perceive me as stingy. I worry about being disliked or avoided by my peers. However, when we meet in Makassar, they often treat me to meals and coffee." (Informant 2)

"I know a journalist from Kompas TV who was ostracized for refusing to share footage. Eventually, he transferred to Manado because he was shunned. I try to maintain close ties with my peers to avoid being excluded." (Informant 1)

Contributors working in regions without other television correspondents often serve as the primary sources of news materials for colleagues in other areas. For instance, Informant 2, the only television contributor in Pangkep, South Sulawesi, regularly provides footage and information to others. He strategically films from multiple angles using two cameras to prevent duplicate broadcasts.

"I have never been reprimanded because my footage always appears different. I use two cameras—one for official recording and one on my phone. I send the phone footage to colleagues who request it. Since I am the only contributor in Pangkep, I ensure that no two broadcasts look the same." (Informant 2)

Discussion

The research findings presented above can be analyzed from multiple interrelated perspectives. The researcher employs a multidimensional approach to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of news cloning among television contributors. This practice of plagiarism involves not only individual and organizational dynamics but also fundamental principles of journalistic ethics. The researcher integrates structuration theory, normative media theory, the political economy of media theory, and journalistic ethical codes to delve deeper into how this practice develops and its implications for the media industry.

Various theoretical perspectives provide distinct yet complementary lenses to explain this phenomenon. Structuration theory highlights the interaction between agency and structure, illustrating how organizational pressures influence individual behavior (20). Meanwhile, normative media theory underscores the significance of social responsibility in ensuring accurate and trustworthy information dissemination (21). The political economy of media theory examines the commodification processes within the media industry (22). Simultaneously, journalistic ethical codes establish a framework for evaluating news cloning practices from moral and professional standpoints (23). This integrated analysis offers a holistic understanding of the complexity surrounding news cloning practices within Indonesia's television media ecosystem.

Anthony Giddens' structuration theory emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between agency and structure in social processes (24). The theory posits that social actions cannot be fully understood without considering structural constraints, just as structures cannot be comprehended without acknowledging the role of agents in producing and reproducing them (20). In the context of this study, news contributors act as agents operating within the structural constraints of media organizations. Findings from interviews and observations reveal that news cloning practices emerge due to interactions between agents (contributors) and structures (media organizations and editorial policies).

While contributors possess the capacity to make independent decisions, they often find themselves trapped within a system that compels them to adopt certain practices to meet performance demands and maintain professional relationships with colleagues and superiors. The structural legitimization of news cloning within media organizations establishes a working system that enables and, in some cases, actively encourages such behavior. This creates a dynamic in which agents (contributors) and structures mutually reinforce the normalization of news cloning within the newsroom environment. Consequently, news cloning is not merely an individual decision but a product of structural pressures embedded within media organizations.

According to Giddens, structure does not solely constrain agency; it is produced and reproduced through agents' actions (25). In other words, structuration theory underscores a dynamic and continuous cycle wherein structures influence agents, and agents, in turn, shape structures through their social practices (26).

Additionally, this structure creates a situation where contributors feel they have no real alternatives but to conform to existing norms to protect their positions. This demonstrates how structures can either limit or enable individual agency, which can reinforce or change the structure itself (27). As an integral part of the broader media structure, television newsrooms are pivotal in legitimizing news cloning practices. Editorial leadership inadvertently perpetuates this practice by prioritizing news quantity over quality and allowing contributors to share content among themselves. This demonstrates how overarching media structures shape the actions of individuals operating within the industry.

The relationship between agency and structure within structuration theory also reflects how the working system of contributors is influenced by power dynamics within media organizations. Producers and news coordinators wield the authority to dictate work norms, ultimately shaping how contributors perform their duties. This suggests that agents are not entirely autonomous but subject to overarching structural forces within media organizations (28) (24).

Additionally, social relationships among contributors shape the practice of news cloning. Several informants acknowledged sharing news materials to maintain camaraderie and avoid professional isolation. This underscores how social norms within contributor communities influence their actions. In this context, solidarity and interpersonal relationships become crucial factors influencing news production alongside structural pressures from editorial management.

Criminal news cloning frequently occurs due to contributors' dependence on a limited pool of sources, particularly law enforcement agencies. Press releases featuring police operations are standardized news materials disseminated across multiple television stations. This highlights how power structures (in this case, law enforcement)

influence television news production. Contributors, as agents, become ensnared within a structural framework that compels them to rely on official sources (29).

Within the working system of contributors, structuration theory aligns with the concept of labor commodification in the political economy of media theory. Contributors are transformed into commodities in the national television industry, and media organizations exploit them to maximize news production (3) (30).

Commodification is the process of transforming the use value of goods or services into exchange value, thereby ensuring their viability within the market. This concept is essential to the political economy of media theory (22), which investigates capitalist media systems motivated by economic profit and political influence. To accomplish these objectives, media industries generally incorporate commodification practices throughout their production processes (3).

Mosco categorizes commodification into three forms: content commodification, audience commodification, and labor commodification (3). Workers are the primary driving force in media production, with media owners leveraging their labor and creativity to generate media content (22).

From a Marxist perspective, capital owners exploit labor to extract surplus value as a means of capital expansion. Labor is treated as a commodity or production factor, equivalent to land and raw materials (31). Workers are compelled to exchange their labor for wages that do not equitably compensate their contributions. This labor commodification materializes through absolute exploitation (extended working hours) and relative exploitation (increased work intensity), further deepening surplus value extraction (32). Consequently, labor exploitation within media organizations persists. News cloning represents a manifestation of labor commodification, wherein contributors are pressured to disregard journalistic ethics to meet output targets imposed by organizational structures.

When linked to normative media theory, which emphasizes the role of media in society and how it should operate based on values such as truth, justice, and social responsibility (11), this study reveals deviations from these ideals. Despite being legitimized by producers and news coordinators, news cloning violates journalistic originality and accuracy principles.

This practice indicates that media organizations prioritize news quantity over its quality and authenticity. By adopting news cloning practices, media outlets breach their social responsibility to provide the public with accurate and reliable information. Dependence on unverified contributor materials jeopardizes public trust in the media and undermines institutional credibility.

Journalistic ethical codes mandate that journalists uphold integrity, honesty, and accuracy in news reporting. However, this study finds that contributors and editorial teams in Jakarta consciously tolerate or even encourage this practice, constituting a severe breach of journalistic ethics. The justifications informants offer, such as the pressure to fulfill quotas and the necessity to maintain workplace relationships, do not provide a legitimate rationale for ethical violations. The ongoing prevalence of this practice highlights the critical need for media organizations to reinforce their dedication to journalistic integrity and ethical standards.

4 Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, the practice of news cloning identified in this study reflects the complex interaction between agents (contributors) and structures (media organizations). News cloning is a manifestation of the commodification of labor, wherein contributors are compelled to disregard journalistic ethics to meet the news production targets set by organizational structures. This practice presents an ethical dilemma for contributors. On the one hand, they recognize that cloning contradicts the fundamental principles of journalism, which emphasize originality and accuracy. On the other hand, structural pressures, such as the vast coverage area and the demand for high news volume, force them to adopt this practice.

Despite the structural pressures that drive this practice, media organizations must realign with the fundamental principles of journalism as governed by journalistic codes of ethics and the normative media theory framework. Efforts to rectify this issue must involve structural reforms that promote journalistic integrity and uphold news originality. Without such reforms, media organizations risk losing public trust and undermining the integrity of the journalism profession.

Furthermore, reform initiatives should include stricter oversight to ensure all contributors and editorial staff fully comprehend and adhere to journalistic ethical standards. Promoting a more ethical and professional work culture in the media industry is crucial. A collective effort from all stakeholders in media organizations is essential to combat news plagiarism and rebuild public trust in journalism. Implementing structural reforms and committing firmly to high journalistic standards are key to creating a more responsible and credible media environment.

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The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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