

Investigating the Ethical and Logical Dimensions of Indonesian Online News

Bambang Sukma Wijaya

Department of Communication Science
University HR Rasuna Said Kav. C-22, Kuningan
Jakarta, Indonesia
bambang.sukma@bakrie.ac.id

Mirana Hanathasia

Department of Communication Science
University HR Rasuna Said Kav. C-22, Kuningan
Jakarta, Indonesia
mirana@bakrie.ac.id

Suharyanti

Department of Communication Science
University HR Rasuna Said Kav. C-22, Kuningan
Jakarta, Indonesia
suharyanti@bakrie.ac.id

Dessy Kania

Department of Communication Science
University HR Rasuna Said Kav. C-22, Kuningan
Jakarta, Indonesia
dessy.kania@bakrie.ac.id

Abstract—This paper examines the ethical and logical discourse of online news from the perspective of Indonesian news consumer. Two steps of studies were conducted. The first was through in-depth interview and discussion with five active news consumers. There are three aspects that often raise concerns about the ethics of news content, namely verbal, visual and style of news. Regarding the ethics of news context, three aspects were identified relating to the news placement, links and layouts. Meanwhile, the logical dimension of news includes aspects of accuracy, coherence, and manipulation. The second study was conducted through a descriptive survey involving 287 respondents to examine which aspects are the most dominant. Results showed that the verbal aspects and news style, links and manipulation become the greatest concern of the respondents. It means how media construct reality, choice of words, links on the news page, and elements of manipulation in the news are the most disturbing things to online news consumers

Keywords— *online news, ethical dimensions, logical dimensions, news consumers, media branding, consumer audience*

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of communications technology has changed rapidly not only how we access information, but also how the information is presented (Jansson, & Lindell, 2015). If the first news came in the form of printed-paper, and then penetrated the room audio (radio) and audio-visual (television), nowadays news comes in a digital form of the virtual spaces. Information and news are no longer only accessible when the artisan paperboy came throwing the latest edition which

was still fresh from the printing with the smell of mould into our yard in the morning or evening, or simply could be watched to when we sat in the living room, or while listening our favourite radio in the bedroom or in the kitchen while cooking, in the stalls or on the street while driving a car. Now we can access news and information anywhere, anytime and any occasion.

The limits and constraints of space and time disappear. The world without limits makes us like swim freely in the open sea. Not only accessed the news, but also forwarding the news. Free forward, free release, chatter-free, free throws all the information. Ward (2012) argued that this situation should become our concern and should be taken care of. The information technology has presented new ethical tensions and thus requires ethical revolution in the digital world. The versatility, easiness and transparency make digital systems can become opportunities and pitfalls. Become opportunities, because these systems can shape the behaviours of vigilant but productive that will train individuals to be more resilient, intelligent, responsive, and mature. However, the freedom and flexibility can also trap people into arbitrary behaviour, out of control (out of control) and

shallow because these systems require immediacy and the present.

That is why, behaviour, attitude and character of the individual are important for digital citizens to keep being connected online, or the ones we call netizens. This includes online media audiences or online individual journalists as news producer who professionally and non-professionally are active in producing and supplying news to the online realm (Deuze & Yeshua, 2001).

Although not deterministically become a reference, the behaviour and attitudes of individuals ultimately affect the outcome of the news they produce. There is a saying, 'you are what you say' so what and how it is written reflects what, how and who is writing. In this context, the behaviour of news generated significantly correlated with the behaviour of individuals behind the news (Borden & Tew, 2007). If the news is a collective product and/ or systems, the behaviour of any news is a reflection of collective behaviour and/ or systems.

As result, the incongruent and inappropriate news become spotlight as well. Incongruity and impropriety are usually related to what extent such news appears ethical and logical (Borden & Tew, 2007). The latest example of this highlight in the Indonesian context is the development bullying by netizens to news of violence of residential eviction occurred at Kampung Pulo, East Jakarta. Netizens uncovered the fake images displayed in the news which turned out to be online media images of different events and different locations a few years ago. The images had been presented in such a way as if they were parts of the context of events in the news of the Kampung Pulo. With the development of this netizen's bully, the credibility and the image of the news, as well as the author, are potentially crushed. Consumers do not trust the news. Moreover, there is possibility that they will harass media that publish it Unethical news used to broadcast by the mainstream media in Indonesian TV station. They broadcasted airplane crash victims directly without censorship in Java Sea waters some time ago. Apparently, unethical news also penetrated the non-online media, although ultimately no impact to the online realm.

This is because in today's era of post-TV, every impression is always duplicated to the online realm as part of convergent technology and culture (Chouliaraki 2010; Boczkowski, et al., 2011).

The unethical news also comes in the inappropriate diction (Margianto & Syaefullah, 2012), unethical commentators (Haridakis, 1999), corrupt communications (Wijaya, 2013b), annoying advertisements and links (Vobic, 2014), while the incoherence usually emerged from the lies, inaccuracies, manipulation, and hyperbolizing news that tend to create a stir (Rafter & Knowlton, 2013; Voorhees & Keith, 2015)

In addition to the quality and integrity of the individual behaviour of journalists, unethical and incoherence news generated can also be caused by the system in the medium itself which are subject to the laws of capitalism (Cohen, 2002) resulting in news which mixed the interests of editorial and commercial interests (Andersson & Wiik, 2013; Carlson, 2014) often even changes the role of online journalists (Vobic & Milojevic, 2014) which is a true servant of the news. It becomes a dilemma for journalists whether to be with public or to save his profession as a journalist affiliated with media industry (Wurff & Schonbach 2011; Hartley, 2013).

However, above all, the voice and perspective of consumers who should be prioritized, in this case including the public interest, because in the context of capitalization and marketization of media, the consumers are actually the breath of life for a media, so that consumer audience loyalty is crucial for online news media (Shaver & Shaver, 2008). This paper seeks to explore consumer perceptions toward online news related to the ethical and logical discourse of news that they consume.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Online News and the Ethical Issues

Online news media has become a new alternative for the public in accessing information. Although still classified as new media, this type of media has quite a lot of takers. This is because the media has become the typical characteristics of advantages over other types of media. Briggs

(2013) outlines some of the characters of media and journalism online news include: 1) the audience's control, online journalism allows the audiences to be more flexible in choosing news they want to consume, 2) nonlinearity, online journalism allows any news delivered independently, so audiences do not have to read sequentially for understanding, 3) storage and retrieval, online journalism allows news to be stored and accessed again easily by the audience, 4) unlimited space, online journalism allows the number of news delivered or shown to the audience much more complete than other media, 5) immediacy, online journalism allows information can be delivered quickly and directly to the public, 6) *multimedia capability*, online journalism allows for the editorial team to include text, sound, pictures, video and other components in the news, 7) *interactivity*, online journalism allow the increased participation by the public in any news.

With the development of media and online journalism, ethical factors also become the consideration for some academics and media practitioners, it is mainly because of the nature of online media is different from the conventional mainstream media. Ward (2012) proposed a rhetorical question about the ethics of media and online journalism about what is suitable for new media now and in the future which is immediate, interactive and "always on", both in the context of amateur and professional journalism? The issue of objectivity also becomes debatable. In this case, at least there are some phenomena that become consideration related to online journalism ethics, such as the presence of false news, bias, conflict of interest, partisan journalism, journalism donation, and the use of social media to use pictures. The challenge is how to articulate their ethical guidelines in dealing with rumors and false news, consistent corrections system with the principles of accuracy, verification, and transparency. Another challenge is redefining the independence of journalism, how to develop social media guidelines that journalists can draw a reasonable limit to personal opinion, as well as how treating images or photos correctly for changing the

meaning or content of the picture can be misleading viewers and considered unethical

Meanwhile, Spence & Quinn (2008) expressed their strong arguments objectively and intrinsically linked values that must be owned by online journalists such as truthfulness, honesty, sincerity and justice. Thus, the journalists should be more accurate in collecting and presenting information. Journalists also need to be sincerer with the intention of delivering information as much as possible, so that the principle of objectivity is always held.

III. METHOD

This study attempts to explore the ethical and logical discourse of online news from the standpoint of a consumer as the audiences of online news. Digging discourse ethics from the perspective of the audience is a method of "listening" that are often overlooked by practitioners and observers of media ethics (Ward & Wasserman, 2014). All this time, ethics is only be seen as professionals' responsibility (Meyers et al., 2012) while society and other professionals outside media are often be marginalized from active participation in media ethic's discourse. It becomes problematic; it is not only limiting discourse's space and sphere but also removing or decentring other potential communities that should be able to give significant contribution toward media ethics discourse. Ward & Wasserman (2014) argued that the disseminating of information technology nowadays makes media run into global democratization and it makes media practice to be more fluid and open. This reality also shifts the role of close media ethics into open media ethics which participation of audience and society becomes stronger and more important (Cenite & Zhang, 2010).

The approach involving a consumer audience is also referred to as *commonsensical* (Glasser & Ettema, 2008) the approach which is not only relied on moral judgment is intuitive, but also on joint assessments that are shared or jointly Appreciated and recognized by a community Glasser & Ettema (2008) realized that maybe not everyone recognizes the assessment that is

commonsensical, but at least it gives “Appreciation for if not always a deference to, the interests of others” (p. 530).

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From interviews and discussions with some of the research participants, it was found that at least there are some stimulus to encourage informants to access an online news, the kind of news they are interested in, as well as the website, resources that they used to access as shown in the table 1.

The table shows that all informants were interested in the topics of politics and social. Almost all also access news through aggregate channels such as Yahoo and Google. Most were tempted by the interesting title news, buzz on social media, and partly because the interesting news link ads. The sources of the news media that they access are also generally a mainstream online media that are part of a corporation or conglomerate media (converging with offline and broadcasting media). In addition to the political and social news, men tend to favour economic news, sports, law, criminal defence and automotive whereas women tend to like entertainment news, femininity, education, religion, culture, and economy. Although this research does not intend to explore gender stereotyping in readership audience but seemed from the media habits we found that women prefer the domestic issues that are interior, while men liked exterior issues

4.1 Ethics of the News Content

Online news consumers give their own assessment of the news they consume. However, from an ethical perspective, almost all informants pay attention to how journalists present news and the choice of words that are sometimes inappropriate. Cynthia is for example. From the experience of reading news online, he ever felt less comfortable when reading news about a female prostitute who was murdered with a detailed depiction of the events that are not appropriate. Moreover, her picture was on display and revealed her family background.

Another critic was delivered by Wahyu. With his background as a former activist of a public

university, he highlighted the political news that was sometimes too obvious showing the personal opinions and political views of journalists, so that the readers were immediately escorted on opinion and not on objective facts which provided the opportunity for the readers to judge on their own. Ideally, journalists rely on knowledge obtained through the strict verification (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001 in Borden and Tew, 2007) which epistemologically have certain standards in creating and communicating knowledge about the social world such as reliability, truthfulness, and independence. The goal is to help citizens participate meaningfully in public life (Borden, 2007 in Borden and Tew, 2007) and therefore journalists adhere to the series of moral commitments, which are normatively forming the performance and behavior of the news they made. However, in reality the verification principle is often overlooked especially by online journalists (Margianto & Syaefullah, 2012).

As a result, there are many misperceptions and misinterpretations of fact (Maryadi in Margianto & Syaefullah, 2012). Aldo has also found the news with tendentious languages. For example, “the headline said ‘Ahok bans *Qurban*’. In fact, Ahok meant to prohibit doing the *qurban* procession on the roadside and schools. However, the title is likely created incompletely to encourage the anger of Muslims” (Aldo, interviewed on November 20, 2015). Doing framing with a specific purpose to shape public opinion in accordance with the agenda or interests of journalists behind media today seems increasingly vulgar and seems to be a trend, especially in the middle of the strengthening of the political ideology behind the media conglomerate. Even the Press Council has repeatedly reprimanded and released the tendentious media that often violate the journalistic ethics (Soares, 2014).

Agenda setting is not new in the world of media. Research and concepts on this issue have also been widely produced. However, journalists should prioritize conscience, with the values of integrity, fairness, honesty and truthfulness in presenting the information through the news he made included in the framing of an event (Spence

& Quinn, 2008). If the tendentious news was based upon a consideration of the value of news just that proposes 'what attracts so favoured public', then surely the reporter has refracted the meaning of news value with market value which is the realm of advertising (Wijaya, 2013b). Thus, the news that is made with consideration of 'taste' market and contains strong sales lust could no longer be called news, but advertisement.

Meanwhile, Ayu highlighted the news with biased and sensational words which was contradictory and provocative using religious symbols such as the connection between the word 'hijab' with naked or doing the nasty.

What does it mean? It seems that the writer of the news tries to revenge the people who are wearing the hijab. People who do nasty are nasty, it has no connection to the hijab (Ayu, interviewed on November 30, 2015).

According to Ayu, the title was interesting, because it linked contradictory things between a symbol of religion and prohibited activity in religion, thus potentially causing curiosity. However, "if it was not essential, why should be linked. Looks like they just want to be famous!" said Ayu angrily (interviewed on November 30, 2015). In addition, Ayu also highlighted how the media described the news of the arrest of female prostitutes by giving the degrading designations, such as man's satisfiers, hussy, lined up and then selected by the appropriate tariff, the words '*itunya*' [hers], '*anunya*' [specific hers], and many others. The context of '*itunya*' and '*anunya*' refers to the female genital.

"Really it is degrading women. What if the prostitutes were male, would they be described the same way?" (Ayu, interviewed on November 30, 2015). She also does not agree with the way these women photos displayed in a vulgar pose like semi-pornographic one, just to reinforce the narration in the news.

Related to the news style which telling the events in detail, Wahyu paid attention to the presentation of crime and accidents news.

I've read the news that tells procession murder vividly, with the words that I think inappropriate, such as 'cut', 'the neck was almost fully cut', 'cut up body parts', 'the flesh is put into a plastic bag', or the accidents with horrible illustrations, like 'broken head', 'the contents of his head blown', 'run over by the truck until the of the body is torn apart', 'much blood splattered' complete with images of victims covered in newspapers like dead animals (Wahyu, interviewed on November 3, 2015).

Aldo and Ipung also highlighted pictures that are sometimes not appropriate to display. The pictures are in the form of direct photo, photo illustration, illustrations and even memes tend to be slovenly or impolite.

Is it permissible to display the photo of the suspect who has not been convicted? Or families of victims of kidnapping and murder? I do not know the rules, but if I were one of them I would have been objected (Aldo, interviewed on November 20, 2015).

According to Aldo, featuring a photo of the suspect before the trial judge is like judging him. It has the potency to embarrass his family and defame him. While showing photos kidnapped or murder victim's family is very dangerous because it can be identified the doer and thus potentially become the next victim. Therefore, the media should be more careful in showing pictures of victims and suspects.

Ipung sees that the online news sometimes does not display the real photos, but photo illustration that they take from some sources. It is either in the form of photos and illustrations, sketches or meme. Ipung questioned, first, the copyright, and second, the suitability. "Sometimes the illustrations are not related to the news, and sometimes they are more exciting than the news. The media is really overreacted!" said Ipung (interviewed on December 5, 2015).

Ipung added that he even found the photo that is somewhat porn, featuring pose on the bed showing the sensitive parts of the body, whereas the news is about a wife who has an affair with another man. According to Ipung, the picture is like leading newsreaders imagination in the sordid atmosphere

made by the wife and the other man. "So what? It is news, not a hot novel!" said Ipung angrily (interviewed on December 5, 2015).

Related to the uneducated news, Ayu deplored the selection of the angle of news that displays events that are inappropriate for by children, such as 'biological father raping his daughter', 'holding his penis', 'sodomized', and so on including drama of the hostility between parent and child of the celebrity. Preferably, according to Ayu, the words in the headline should be changed, or use other points of view that are more educated. Therefore, there is not a psychological impact on children. "It is possible that the children will ask, "Ma, what is sodomy? Or, can father rape me?" said Ayu (interviewed on November 30, 2015).

4.2 Ethics of the News Context

Although it is not as much as the news content, this study also revealed some things beyond content that significantly 'disturbs' the consumers reading of news, including placements, layout and links. Aldo assessed that the placement of advertisements and news arbitrarily is often annoying when you are reading a story. When clicking the title, the page is already blocked by ads that are stuck in the news. Above, beside and below the news are full of advertising, not to mention links to other headlines that stuck everywhere. It feels really awful seeing them (Aldo, interviewed on December 12, 2015).

Meanwhile, Ipung who enjoys reading the comments which are he said 'funny', sometimes could not find it easily. "There are media that locate it at the bottom of the page with very small fonts, and if I want to comment I have to register," said Ipung (interviewed on December 5, 2015). In addition, he also often feels disturbed by the news link on the news, which he said often traps, as well as pages that are not complete. "I thought the story was finished, but I found that I have to click again to continue. It is really uncomfortable!" (Ipung, interviewed on December 5, 2015).

Another experience of Aldo was the hyperlink that turned out to be spam links of promotional product and even promotional link that belong to other websites that offer software or porn sites. But, he said, lately it has been rare. "Maybe it was

banned at the minister," said Aldo (interviewed on December 12, 2015) smiling. Related to the implementation of hypertext in online media, Vobic's research (2014) found that there are weaknesses in the mind set of online journalists in conceptualizing the hypertext, so the use of hypertext leads to subordination to speed delivery of the news, as well as weaken the social relevance of a story. Instead of heeding the public interest, the use of hypertext is regarded as a mere commodity. The emergence of the phenomenon of hypertext is inseparable from the concept of "media logic" of Altheide and Snow (1979, in Vobic, 2014) who stated that the consequences of the online media presence is the emergence of certain features of a media that is present as organizational attributes and inherent feature of technological as well as the impact on what will be represented and how the representation was presented.

4.3 Logics of the News

Readers now are critical (Nielsen, 2013). They can easily judge whether the media presentation makes sense or not, true or not. Especially with internet capabilities today that allow the public voice their opinions and criticisms without filter (like format of reader's letterbox of the conventional print media), therefore it may change the world of journalism itself (Benkler, 2006; Beyers, 2004; Paulussen and Ugille 2008 in Nielsen, 2013). Margianto & Syaefullah (2012) considered that in the world of journalism marked with the outbreak of social media, news content is no longer the result of a verification of journalism discipline, but the verification process itself is the news.

With the changing of the journalism landscape marked by the development of the information technology, Eko Maryadi, chairman of AJI (*Aliansi Jurnalis Indonesia* –Indonesian Journalists Alliance) still sees that the main problem in the world of internet media journalism is precisely the quality and credibility of information that reaches the public. The quality and credibility of this come from what is consecrated in the mass media as the speed of conveying information online. On behalf of the speed, page views, and business growth, online

news agencies often fall conveying information that has not been verified to the public. Therefore, it sometimes causes misperception and misrepresentation of the facts (in Margianto & Syaefullah, 2012, p. vi).

This phenomenon is similarly understood by informants. Some of the news is considered less plausible, less relevant, less accurate, and even wrong. Wahyu often finds some of the headlines that override the logic of the reader. "It is weird. They said the dead is lifeless. It is obvious that dead is lifeless," said Wahyu (interviewed on October 28, 2015). Another anomaly encountered Wahyu was the headline that was in line with the news content, even tend to 'cheat'. One of the examples was the news headline about husband and wife who were ticketed for talking while driving. "Is it reasonable that people got ticketed just because of talking? It turned out that they chatted and then violated the traffic rules. Perhaps the intention was to make people curious, [using disguised headlines like that], but is absolutely not funny!" (Wahyu, interviewed on October 28, 2015).

Wahyu also used to find sports news whose title mentioned the game of football, but it turned out that none of it told about the game. "We are curious because we did not watch it, but we were deceived," said Wahyu (interviewed on October 28, 2015) upset. This phenomenon is usually called 'traps click' or click-bait. It is often done by online journalists to pursue page views (Apriliana, 2015). Trap click occurs mostly in entertainment news, politics and news related to sensitive issues as well as issues related to the public interest. The worse thing is that the trap clicks could develop into public discourse, especially if it has been entered the realm of social media, such as the case of BPJS that was stated forbidden by MUI, or news of Megawati requesting to disband the KPK which, in fact, was twisted by reporters. This is because in today's era of social media, sometimes reporters are lean sources of information from social media (Eddyono, 2013) without verification according to the rules of journalism, thus potentially 'mixed' by certain parties in order to satisfy their ideological interests. According to the Press Council Chairman, Bagir Manan, the twisted news is not the work of

professional journalists, because journalists are supposed to proclaim the reality of the news source, not making it (Murjani, 2015).

Meanwhile, Cynthia highlighted the news that he thought to be 'forced' displaying certain symbols and identity even though it is not very significant. The example was linking Miss Indonesian with urination. Cynthia also used to read the news with the mention of the symbols and identity that discredited religion, ethnicity and a particular race, however, they were not essential and even irrelevant. "Maybe it is important for the journalists. Yes, because he had the specific intent, may be," said Cynthia cynically (interviewed on November 22, 2015). Similarly, the overreacted or exaggerate news is sometimes blown up, whereas it is not that important. So is the news that makes comments of an observer as if it were fact even becomes the headlines. For Cynthia, it is not smart. "As if journalists make the news only making use the observers to support his personal opinion, and perhaps his media as well," said Cynthia critically (interviewed on 22 November 2015). That is why Cynthia rarely read sensational headlines in the media sites in Indonesia, "Moreover, if the title is already subjective, I will not read it" (Cynthia, interviewed on November 22, 2015).

The interesting things in the aspect of the link in the news context, all respondents without hesitation stated their agreement to questionnaire statement. It means that the problem of news context which being associated with disturbing links and considered unethical should be a serious concern for producer and online news makers because there are no consumers who never experience that. Links in the news actually are a consequence of multimedia technology or multimedia logic (Deuze, 2004), cyberspace media logic (Dahlgren, 1996), and online media logic (Deuze & Dimoudi, 2002). For some of the critical researchers of media studies (Paulussen, 2004; Oblak, 2005; Engebretsen, 2006), this phenomenon is being considered as an experiment in hypertext journalism approach. Vobič (2014) stated that all this time, hyperlink indeed going toward in-house archival news and based on cost saving reason (Engebretsen, 2003) so that it is not

part of routines and normality in online journalism's creation. However, seeing its impact on the readership of new

V. CONCLUSION

The uncovering of various public perceptions about the behavior of online media news consumers, especially with regard to ethical issues and logically, give us a lesson that the media should not be 'arbitrarily' in producing and presenting the news. This is because the news behavior is part of the news media brand behavior, and the behavior of media brands is the dimension of the bad brand media image. The damage to the image will affect the reputation and credibility of the media brands that will have an impact on media brand preference as well. Maybe for some media practitioners, branding media have not become an important consideration.

Although this research has revealed some dimensions, aspects, and indicators related to ethics and logic of online news, and also measured how much the concern of audience toward factor of ethics and logic based on their experience and consuming online news, but this research has not been able to prove definitively correlation and effect of dimension of ethics and logic to other variables such as media brand image and reputation, consumer preference to media, or other variables related to consumer behavior of online news. Those connection and relation described in this research conclusion are still an assumption. Because of that, measuring connection and relations of the dimension of ethics and online news logic with others variables as mention before can develop this research

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