

Journalists' Preferences in Covering Health Crisis in Indonesia

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Abstract: Online-based media has significantly changed information technology, and currently affects a quick spread of health crisis information to the public. All the news presented is provided by journalists through the activities of reporting, writing, and criticizing news. Therefore, this study aimed to identify and analyze journalists' preferences in reporting the health crisis in Indonesia using qualitative methods. The data were collected using semi-structured interviews from 54 Indonesian health crisis journalists. The results showed that journalists preferred collecting accurate data, positive news, educating with opinion, straight and features news, and investigative reports. However, some weaknesses of opinion and features news were also reported, including failure to cover health crises.

Keywords: COVID-19, Health News in Crisis, Journalist

Introduction

Internet affects journalism and news producing activities [1], leading to rapid and significant changes in the industry [2], [3]. For instance, digital technology and social media have led to changes in the newsroom [4]. Journalism studies may promote learners to argue about the autonomy of journalism [5]. Therefore, journalists have different preferences in reporting and may cover political news, including general elections, crime and law issues, such as corruption and religious matters. Health issues are considered attractive and primary topics by the media when involving conflict of interest [6], legalizing abortion [3], religion, morals, and law [9].

Health News is an essential topic for the media and communication scholars [7], regardless of its limited references to the health industry. Specifically, online media has focused on finding health information [10] about smoking issues and their impacts on the industry and human life [11]. These issues are highly prioritized by journalists compared to discussing malaria, dengue fever, and malnutrition.

Journalism practices are commercialized since news organizations maximize the number of readers, listeners, or viewers using new popular practices unsuitable for the public [12]. In general, journalists need to report based on the preferences and habits of readers and editorial judgments to maintain them [5].

The internet interferes with journalism practices [2], leading to reduced roles due to dramatic online expansion in providing information [13] that is vital to the public, especially during a crisis. Specifically, journalists play a vital role in providing information and educating 7.53 billion people globally [14]. Their public information is essential and affects the understanding of the people. The public can receive critical and influential news concerning health issues [6] from the media since it is considered a significant source of information [15].

Indonesian journalists focus more on business [16] and many issues that create panic and mislead the public, contravening the code of ethics. Therefore, health crisis news has greatly been affected, putting the role of journalists at risk, yet they have to provide reliable and educative information to the public. Journalists' role is less recognized in reporting the health crisis in Indonesia, where the news is less objective and inaccurate, leading to difficulties in solving the crisis. Conversely, Western journalists deliver the relatively strong subjectivity of professional ethics [17]. A need to adhere to the principles of the code of ethics and run their functions is crucial. These functions are divided into three in a health crisis [18] including, reporting accurate news to the public, medical professionals, and policymakers, acting as an intermediary for the public, decision-makers, health and science experts, and monitoring the government responsible for the public health response.

The difference between facts and theories creates the Indonesian health crisis journalist gap. Generally, studies show a sharp criticism of patterns and ethics that highlight dramatization and exploit disaster victims in narrative and audio-visual [19]. Online media reporting using many clickbait offers inaccurate reports to the public concerning health issues during the crisis. Also, journalists produce objective reporting depending on their preferences and the accuracy and suitability of data.

The preference factors in reporting during health crises are important. The media writes and reports a directly witnessed incident by journalists in the field. There is need to examine health-related news with different interpretations based on ideology, business, or editorial policy.

Journalists of print, electronic, and online media are required to adhere to the Journalistic Code of Ethics during the crisis [20]. The media should avoid information that triggers panic and present more educational content to stop the spread of the virus. Consequently, this study aimed to examine and analyze journalists' preferences in covering the health crisis in Indonesia. It is expected to contribute to more references in increasing knowledge and understanding in reporting health crises.

This study examines and analyzes the preferences of journalists in covering health crises. Journalists were used as a source of information to provide understanding to the public regarding the importance of health news. It is presented with a structure as follows; Section 1 shows the background and objectives while theoretical and previous studies relevant to different theoretical frameworks are discussed in Section 2. The types of study, samples, data collection techniques and data analysis are presented in section 3, while the results and discussion of the findings are discussed in section 4. The last section presents the conclusion of the study, including contributions, implications, and limitations of the study.

Literature Review

Journalists are intermediaries between the government and society during a crisis [21]. The community has anxiety and distrust of official information reported by the media during a crisis [22]. Therefore, the health crisis information center helps in handling a pandemic [23]. Journalists should understand and interpret the data to avoid providing inaccurate information to the public [24]. Since people's beliefs, attitudes, and behavior can be influenced by news coverage [25], journalists play a vital role in conveying information to the public [26]. The public trust is affected by the media's response time to a crisis. [27]. Similarly, journalists' perceptions, risks, and preparedness depend on the public, which affects their response [28].

Journalism and public health are interrelated because information can be seen from news framing [29]. Past studies showed how social media made journalists violate old and maintained norms [30]. Their opinions on health are often displayed when facing health problems to liven up the news [31], [32]. For example, findings on H1N1 reporting in 2009 were predominantly framed by journalists, causing panic and fear [33]. Journalists should build good communication with health experts during emergencies and crises [34] even though they have reported on health crises for a long time [35]. Journalist credibility can be enhanced through increased discussions with the experts [36] since the public believe journalists know the field [37]. However, they need to obtain information from academic and medical experts to help explain and contextualize complex and technical health problems [7]. This is because they have the potential of being mobilization actors of public perceptions and government partners when reporting on health-related issues [38].

Apart from health workers, journalists are also at the forefront of the health crisis [39]. Today, health is an important topic [8], hence journalists are responsible for reporting without resource and time supports [40]. Media operations have changed worldwide for the journalists to adapt to face the health crisis [41]. Their role in covering the health crisis shifted [39] from public mobilization actor to risk classification and from a supervisor to a more cooperative role in the previous study.

During this Covid-19 pandemic, journalists are challenged to report and justify wrong information [42]. They face difficulties reporting health news because it is their responsibility [43] and want to be factual and professional [45]. Inaccurate and irresponsible information during the pandemic affects mental health [46]. Health news has a significant influence on perspective and behavior of citizens [47], [48]. For instance, the local media protected the community from crises, such as during hurricane Katrina [49]. Journalists should be directly involved in news

research [51] to produce trustworthy news. This is because they specifically consider health experts unimportant. Apart from using different Media's news to be their agenda [52], they also perceive themselves as information providers [53]. According to studies, journalists offer health news only to discharge their role.

COVID-19 pandemic significantly influences people's behavior towards irresponsible news that affects their mental health. Negative news has led to uncontrolled pandemic situations. Therefore, independent journalism should be used to combat irresponsible information [55]. In general, independent journalism does not receive pressure from the media and produces valid and responsible news. According to a study in Pakistan, the current news coverage is the origin of the pandemic, its dangers and the responses [56], a completely different situation in Indonesia.

Materials and Methods

This qualitative study analyzed the journalists' preferences and prominence during the health crisis in Indonesia. It used the random sampling technique with 54 Indonesian journalists aged over 21 years and at least 3 years of experience opportunities to be used as samples. The journalists were invited for physical and online interviews to show their preferences in covering the health crisis. It was supported by government official data from websites, media, and international journals relevant to this study. The survey was conducted in Indonesia from March to August 2020 during the health crisis.

The data were collected using three aspects: observation, which concerned the phenomenon of health crisis journalists; in-depth interviews involving journalists who responded to the invitation (via email and telephone or WhatsApp); and documentation that covered processed valid data from various reliable sources. The semi-structured in-depth interview used a single guideline to analyze data through reduction, presentation and concluding.

Results and Discussion

Results

The results covered the characteristics (sex, educational level, and professionalism as journalists) of the respondents obtained from the semi-structured interviews. (Figure 1).

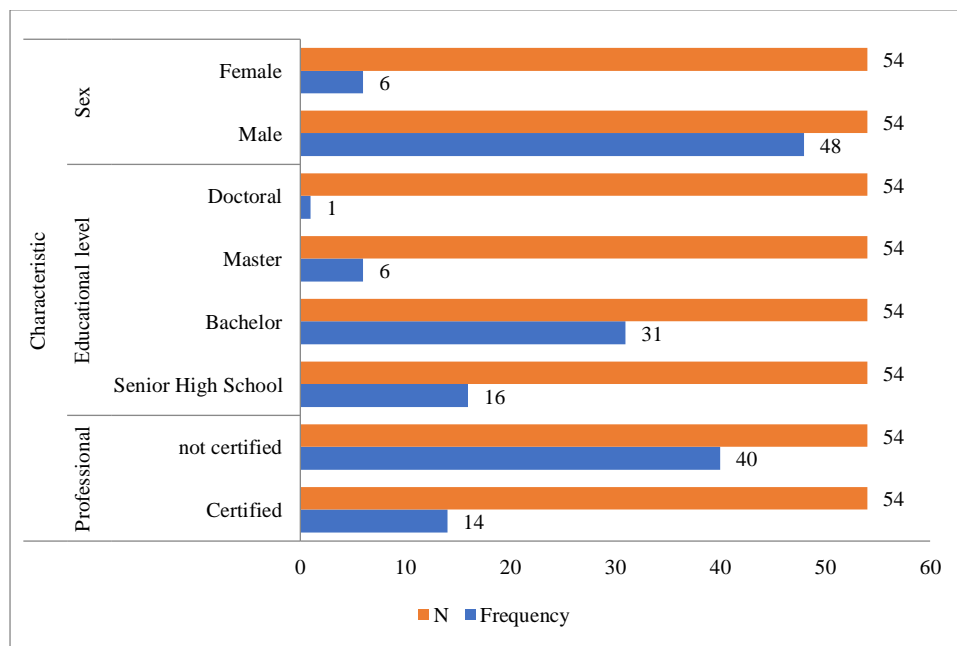


Figure 1: Characteristics of respondents.

The interview, dominated by men with scholars' educational level, provided essential characteristics of the respondents. Of the total, 14 were certified and active journalists in various Indonesian media, hence the accuracy of the data was guaranteed.

Table 1: The conclusion of the results of the interview.

No.	Key questions	Conclusion of the Result of the Interview	Responses	
			Agree	Disagree
1.	The role of journalists in reporting during the crisis	The roles of journalists cover encouraging the public to follow government direction for the benefit of all parties; factual data (valid) and educational information; reporting positive events; reporting the progress of the crisis; reporting without causing panic; educative reporting; fully reporting educative information; reporting recovery cases, and providing balanced information.	38 respondents (journalists)	16 respondents (journalists)
2.	Type of reporting during the crisis	Preventing crisis; impact/danger of ignoring the crisis; raising solidarity; creating solutions and hopes for an everyday awareness; encouraging to work together; inspirational stories of people who have survived the crisis; encouraging the public to face the crisis together, and economic crisis prevention and management	35 respondents (journalists)	19 respondents (journalists)
3.	Type of reported news during the crisis	Opinion, straight news, feature news, investigative reports	40 respondents (journalists)	14 respondents (journalists)
4.	Determination of sources in reporting during the crisis	Public figures, government, observers, academics, religious leaders, scientists, doctors, hospitals, and victims' families	36 respondents (journalists)	18 respondents (journalists)
5.	The covering process in the field by journalists in reporting during the crisis in Indonesia	Sufficient and less frequent	20 respondents (journalists)	34 respondents (journalists)

Source: primary data.

Generally, interviews results indicated the number of the statement from all respondents. The proposed question was based on the journalists' roles during a health crisis, including accurate news reporting (the form of reporting, types of news), as an intermediary (the role of journalists, determination of sources), and as a supervisor (the reporting process by journalists) in reporting during Indonesia crisis. The result was obtained from semi-structured interviews with 54 respondents from all over Indonesia. The responses to each question were concluded and discussed (Table 1).

In health news, journalists prove their role by promoting the public to follow the government's appeal in various media. They report facts about the health crisis and provide educative information by prioritizing the progress of the crisis without causing panic. Additionally, they present educative and recovery information, impacts of the

health crisis, and balanced information that present positive news and the risks during the crisis. Journalists have a crucial role in controlling crisis but can cause panic when misused by presenting non-educative information for the media's benefit.

The reporting forms were dominated by educative news about the impact/danger of the crisis and building solidarity. The news covered created solutions and hopes for an everyday awareness, encouraged the public to face the crisis together, inspirational stories of survivors, economic crisis prevention, and management.

The journalists frequently presented opinions, investigative reporting, strategic and feature news. They depended on public figures, government, observers, academics, religious leaders, scientists, doctors, hospitals, and victims' families for their information during the crisis. The information reported during the health crisis in Indonesia is not entirely based on facts since some journalists do not take information directly from the field.

Discussion

The Indonesian health crisis has led to various problems, such as unbalanced media coverage which causing panic. The media continues to air the progress of the health crisis with stories, endless news headlines, and continuous status updates. Journalists face challenges during the health crisis, including media control [57]. Journalists should update their data to report the same information and win public trust because health crisis cases change rapidly.

Journalists and the media have vital roles in following health crisis progress with reliable information and clarification on trusted facts and sources. Online media can quickly report information because people's knowledge, attitudes, and behavior are greatly affected by health news [40]. Mass media conveys information based on applicable journalism principles [57].

Journalists should present health news based on the code of ethics [6]. Their report on the health crisis encourages the public to follow government direction, factual data and educational information, reporting positive events, recovery cases, and the progress of the crisis without causing panic. Furthermore, they should offer educative reporting and balanced information.

The government appeals to the journalists to remain disciplined and educate the public with accurate data. Positive progress such as recovery cases that do not cause panic was also reported. The main objective of journalists during a crisis is to help in optimizing public health goals and reduce risk and panic [58].

In the modern era, journalists play various roles in reporting, including carriers of truth sources, producing employees who adapt to market mechanisms, and being news marketers [59]. Furthermore, they need a balanced understanding and performance in every media [18]. Positive information helps build public awareness and discipline. However, the form of reporting should follow the code of ethics covering news on preventing crisis, impact/danger of ignoring the crisis, raising solidarity, creating solutions and hopes for an everyday awareness, encouraging togetherness, and crisis prevention and management.

Information from journalists can be in 4 aspects, including opinions from various sources, straight news having headlines inspirational stories of survivors; encouraging the public to face the crisis together; and economic and informative messages, features news processed indirectly to spice up content, and investigative reports. The opinion aspect is commonly used in Indonesia, though it leads to misunderstandings in the community concerning health crises. In general, opinions make readers have new thoughts far from facts [60]. According to a study, Pakistan journalists reported the origin of the pandemic, the dangers, and the response [56], while Indonesians focused on developing unaccounted opinions.

During the Indonesia health crisis, opinion news caused a lot of panic to the public. There is need for Indonesian journalists to present investigation news that is valid/accurate data, examine the information obtained, and take relevant sources. In case interviews, reporting, or observations in the field cannot be conducted normally, they can be issues in investigations [61]. Indonesian journalists created and reported negative information and non-educative news [62]. Exaggeration of health crises and reports with unstable titles result in panicking, making the readers nervous. Attracting titles, un-educative news content, and the lack of literacy in Indonesian society cause panic [63].

Indonesian journalists publish opinion and feature news, leading to several problems due to inaccurate information, especially irrelevant health news with exaggerated headlines. Political and ethnic, religious, racial, and intergroup (SARA) issues are mostly associated with the health crisis. Some media take advantage of using issues that attacked or discriminated against one another [63].

Direct involvement of journalists in the field is key in the production of responsible news [51]. Current public assessments showed that journalists' credibility is low due to fake news and media manipulation, necessitating transparency [64], [65]. Wrong sources of information result in fake news [66], a threat to public health [67]. This is common in Indonesia because of the different information from the facts in the field, leading to inaccurate and irresponsible news. Conversely, Pakistan journalists have secure access in combating the infodemic and disinfodemic during a pandemic [56]. Therefore, they have a positive view of the pandemic, which promotes positive information to the public.

In Indonesia, data quality is affected, and therefore, news are packaged without facts. Furthermore, many journalists are not certified and use clickbait when the title differs from the content [63]. They should avoid publishing content that triggers public panic, using adjectives that can increase anxiety in society or associating the virus with certain citizens indicating racist or xenophobic tones, and triggering stigma against certain groups [68].

It is important for journalists and the media to present relevant news and discourage panic [69]. In general, Indonesian media lacks finer framing and use clickbait titles about the health crisis. This affects the public understanding [70] and leads to panic. Furthermore, this issue has increased prices due to high demand and the stockpiling of consumable materials.

The Indonesian government has been accused of causing panic by providing nontransparent and inconsistent information [71]. However, it claims that there is no cover up of data and information related to the health crisis [72]. This shows that reports on the Indonesian health crisis are inconsistent and violate the code of ethics, especially for journalists and the media. The reporting errors are caused by inconsistent and nontransparent data in providing information to the public.

This study contributes to journalistic practice during a health crisis. Furthermore, journalists, government, and society are intertwined in this health crisis. and valid information should be published through various preferences. As a policymaker, the government needs to be keen on information conveyed to the public and collaboration with the media. The public must be intelligent to observe the situation, filter information obtained from the media, and avoid being provoked by clickbait used to attract readers' interest.

Conclusions

Health workers and journalists are the key actors in handling and educating the public about a health crisis. Indonesian journalists have various preferences, including valid, positive, and educative news reporting on health crisis. They depend on their nature as reporters, writers, and critics to get information. Journalists are encouraged to report good news as an intermediary between the community, government, and medical personnel or experts.

Journalist reports should help the government to provide understanding to the public regarding the health crisis. Apart from contributing to journalistic practices in the field, especially during the health crisis, journalists also report on the implications on economics, politics, law, education, and other fields. This news is considered to be worthy since it is still relevant topics, thereby adding value for journalists and media.

Results provide journalists' preferences in covering health news during a health crisis. However, this study has limitations in the coverage of the respondents/participants since it focuses on all journalists without classifying them based on their respective fields. Future studies are expected to classify the respondent based on their field and further expand journalists' preferences in all aspects of life, such as economics, politics, law, culture, education, and others.

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