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How Organizational and Non-Organizational Factors of Media Shape the Nature of News

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ABSTRACT

Makalah ini mencoba memaparkan faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi organisasi media dalam proses produksi berita. Bahasan diawali dengan elaborasi kritis tentang bagaimana sisi-sisi organisasional di lingkungan media dengan segala aspek prosedur rutin, aturan dan struktur hirarki menjadi faktor penting untuk menentukan produk akhir yang disebut berita. Pembahasan tajam lalu beralih ke news sources (nara sumber) yang begitu kuatnya menjadi determinan atas proses pembuatan berita. Dari sisi logika ekonomi, dipaparkan pula betapa faktor audiens dan pengiklan menjadi aktor-aktor penting yang tak patut dikesampingkan.

KATA KUNCI: *News, news sources, journalistic process, media organization*

There is a debatable issue nowadays whether the nature of news is determined more by the organizations in which journalists work or by the sources upon whom journalists always depend on. Such a difficult proposition appears due to the fact that the media organization with its complex set structure of routines and procedures is deemed to have many interests that affect the journalistic process ends up with its "end-product" called news. The fact that the routine works of journalists rely so much on their sources to get raw material of news, has also been dubbed influential on what should be called news.

Defining News

To be really able to discuss the topic further, first we need to address to the issue: what is actually the nature of news? Many academicians have determined the definition of news in various ways. News is said as what newspapermen make it; or news is the result of the methods newswriters employ; or even something which is manufactured by journalists (Schudson in Curran & Gurevitch, 1991: 141). Moreover McManus (1994), quoting

Wilbur Schramm, states news as an attempt to reconstruct the essential framework of the event. Meanwhile Tuchman describes news as a work result of newsmen who "stand out as workers called upon to give accounts of wide variety of disasters—unexpected events—on routine basis" (Tuchman 1973:111). McNair explains news as follow: "...is produced by an industry, shaped by the bureaucratic and economic structure of that industry, by relations between the media and other industries and, most importantly, by relations with government and other political organizations" (McNair, 1996: 33).

Therefore, news is never a mere recording or mirroring of what happens in the world as the practice of journalism involves the process of manufacture, fabrication, gathering or construction. One thing to note, this is not to suggest that journalists deliberately fabricate stories or lie. Rather, it is to point out that the production of news each minutes, each day, each week, as reminded by Manning (also by Tuchman's definition above), involves routine gathering and assembling of "certain constituent element which are then

fashioned to construct or fabricate an account of the particular news events” (Manning, 2001:50).

From the definitions above, I would say that we could draw a silver line as an essence: that news is not something that exists from the beginning as a natural phenomenon derived straightly from reality. It has to be produced in a regular basis—can be in the form of writing (like in the print media), broadcasting pieces, and online version—by journalists through a process. In short, it is a product produced in a routine basis.

To be able to fulfill the task of manufacturing, gathering, or producing news in a regular time basis (be it everyday, every week, and so on), journalists need to follow the shared routines, standards, procedures or rules within the organization or outside the organization. Within internal organization, it is undoubtedly true that news is never a mere product of one journalist or reporter who produces it. Rather, it involves a collective work since there are many actors involved within editorial division (such as: editor-in-chief and sub-editors) or other powerful non-editorial division (such as owners, investors). Within the outside organization, journalists depend on actors, such as Government (which regulates law for the media) and importantly, news sources (be it organizations or individuals) that consistently could provide them with raw material of news.

The Influence of Organizational Factors

As I stated earlier, newsmaking is a collective process rather than activities done by a single journalist. This will imply that the process is more influenced by the uncritically accepted routines working in a news organization than by the attitudes of a journalist. Cook even states in an extreme way that a journalist is just a mere cog in a huge news-producing machine (Cook, 1998:71). Then, is a journalist not independent at all?

Well, in some way a journalist exercises “freedom”. But as stated by Cook, the autonomy of journalists will simply mean that

“journalists have internalized the demands on them from superiors, sources, audiences, and obtain satisfaction by creatively crafting a commissioned product—deciding what is the lead, whom to quote, the arrangements of the prose, etc” (Ibid, 72). As also stated by Manning:

“Journalist may make their own news, but they do not make it just as they please under conditions chosen by themselves but under circumstances directly encountered, given and determined by the rhythm of news organization” (Manning, 2001:54).

In other words, among journalists and their superiors within organizational boundary, there is a basic shared assumption of what should be called news. If editors and reporters are not to share a basic common conception of news, what is its form, or where it is likely to happen, there will be a difficulty to generate news in a recurring basis under the deadline pressure. Under that context, I would say, a news organization develops a number of techniques and practices to accommodate such a need. And eventually, there will be an unavoidable organizational standardization and routinisation of the procedures.

For example, as stated by McNair (1994), the common organizational features that really determine the nature of news are space and time. Both print and broadcast journalists must present news within certain rules of space and layout—an unavoidable convention standardized by news organization. These constraints, as McNair elaborates, determine “the rough system of priorities which will be allocated to the description of events; decide the proportion that these reports will occupy in the total presentation; and limit the entire volume of events...” (McNair, 1994: 50). Such an availability of space, McNair continues, is a basic organizational factor which may explain why certain newsworthy pieces are often absent from news-program or newspaper—better than any other presumption of news bias.

While time, too, is deemed an essential organizational factor that shapes the output of newsmaking process. Galtung and Ruge (1973) point out that events are far more likely to make it onto the news agenda if their time frame suitable to the rhythm of the news organization concerned. So, events which are considered to be fit with organization time frame is more newsworthy than those which are not. This especially happens in a daily newspaper, which is unable to go-live reporting certain events for their audiences. For TV and radio, the live-broadcast called breaking news can likely be the cure to this problem. For online media, this in fact no problem at all—however, it is worth noting that the speed of presenting the up-to-the-minute news pieces can often neglect the profession’s traditions of fairness, completeness, balance and accuracy (Lasica, J.D., 2001).

Alternatively, for print and broadcast media, more fluid and indeterminate stories will be reported in the context of weekly current affairs programs, documentaries, or special report, but “tend to be absent from regular, daily news, until they ‘explode’ in such away to be unavoidable” (Manning, 1994:51). To exemplify this, during the ambush by Counter Terrorism Squad (Densus 88) at a suspected house of most wanted terror suspect Noordin M. Top in Pemalang, Central Java, some television stations in Indonesia gave more time frames and space to broadcast lively the tragically and contacted their local correspondents to report the events. But once again, this only happens in a very extra ordinary event. So, journalists, therefore, must construct their news in accordance with the scheduling and space requirements of the organization within which they work.

While the discussion of the influence of organizational approach to the nature of news above merely focus on the organization’s dynamic and time pressure, one could not put aside other notion: the organizational structure. As we know that media organization is located in two entities, as a news organization and—in most of countries—as a

business organization. This implies to the fact that there is a hierarchical structure that some how carries values, rules, assumptions which influence the whole process in the media organization. To be more critical, there are other powerful actors outside the boundary of editorial division: media owners or investors. Responding the matter, it is wise to critically propose questions: do proprietors exert their power to influence output in ways favorable to themselves? Do owners use their economic power as an ideological weapon?

There are already some evidences on how proprietors have been able to exert control, intervening the newsmaking process and shaping the nature of news output. Curran exemplifies that in 1994, Rupert Murdoch removed the critically independent BBC World News Service from his Asian Star satellite system, and later vetoed HarperCollins’ publication of ex-Hong Kong Governor Chris Patten’s memoirs, in order to avoid offending the Chinese government because he was about to expand into Chinese broadcasting market (Curran, 2000:123). Another example, Argentine media tycoon, Eduardo Eurnekian, axed a critical TV report on the building of an expensive airstrip on President Menem’s private property since at that time he was bidding for a major stake in Argentine’s privatized airports. (Ibid, 123-4).

Journalists and editors may attempt to resist such an intervention but as reminded by Manning “the economic interests and political preferences of the proprietors continue to be the most important determinant” of news organization’s editorial line (Manning, 1996:47). After all, the main mechanism by which proprietors can exert control is their power to appoint key personnel, particularly senior editors, who become the proprietor’s voice within the newsroom. So in such a case, it is likely true that newsworthiness should be fit with the interests of the powerful actor within the internal organization, in term of business, political, or ideological. This further will surely shape the nature of news produced.

The Influence of News Sources

It can be seen from the discussion above that organizational factors have turned out to be very influential toward the nature of news produced by journalists, now it is time to discuss how the news sources can also have impacts on shaping news. The scrutiny on the relationship between media organization and news sources is essential to describe the work of journalists and the processes involved in the making of news.

As stated earlier, news organization needs a steady, reliable flow of information to fulfill the routine task of producing news. They have a routine constant news demand and news schedule that they must meet. It is surely impossible for a news organization to have reporters, cameras in all of the places where important news may appear. So, here for the sake of economic reason and easy of access on raw material of news, reporters as the main resources are concentrated to certain places “where news often occurs, where important rumors leaks abound, and where regular press conferences are held” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988:18-9). While for the sources, they are prescribed with the necessity to deliver information for their advantages. They need to provide information that promotes their interests, to publicize their ideas, or in some cases, just to get their names and faces into the news (Gans, 1999: 239). In short, there is a symbiotic relationship between journalists and sources. Gans in a rather satirical way even describes such intimacy of journalists and sources as something that resembles dance, for sources seek access to journalists, and journalists seeks access to sources. As Gans states: “Although it takes two tango, either sources or journalist can lead, but more often than not, sources do the leading” (ibid).

However, it needs to be noted that one cannot assume that journalists will take for granted any news sources to meet their routine demand of producing the news. Still, the newsworthiness of sources, as stated by Gans, depends on certain “interrelated factors”. Those are (i) incentives; (ii) power; (iii) the ability to supply suitable information; and (iv)

geographic and social proximity to the journalists (ibid). From those four criteria alone provided by Gans, it seems valid to look at the fact on why places like presidential palace, courts, parliament, city hall, big cooperations and trade groups are ideal for journalists as their beats.

Such places are certainly powerful sources that can provide media organizations with incentives in the form of press conferences, press releases, and other ease—usually organized and managed by well-skilled spin-doctors, for sure. What’s more, their high status and prestige lead journalists to always turn to them. Cook states that journalists, certainly, have to be concerned with who or what is authoritative enough to appear on the news that lead to the idea of gravitating toward “person in position to know” (Cook, 1998:91-2). It is said that relying on such official (and powerful) sources will mean increasing the credibility and objectivity of the mass media. As Herman and Chomsky state:

“Partly to maintain the image of objectivity, but also to protect themselves from criticism of bias and threat of libel suits, they need material that can be portrayed as presumptively accurate...” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 19)

Herman and Chomsky continue, relying on sources that may be presumed credible reduces the investigative costs, whereas material that are not primarily credible, or that will incite criticism and threats, requires careful checking and costly research. Heeding to that notion, I would say that news materials are basically—but surely not totally—the voices of those official sources whose powers to earn access to the media are greater than any other “less powerful” sources. After all, if the “less powerful” (or even powerless) sources are recorded by journalist as news materials, it is likely that they are in the position whenever “their activities produce social or moral disorders” (Gans, 1999: 238).

From the sources perspective, one should realize that they also do not take for granted of providing information to the mass

media. McManus argues that sources too can judge the access to the journalist in three ways: character and quantity of audience, character and quantity of contents, and prestige of editorial environment (McManus, 1994:29). For example, a politician—through spin-doctors—won’t for surely use media whose audience share is very small, nor whose characters of contents are distinctive and whose reputation is low. On the contrary, a newspaper like Kompas Daily will be presumed to be the best for them to get their messages across to their constituents.

As I elaborated above, it is now clear that news sources play important roles in news making process that eventually will shape the news-organization’s end product called news. To sum up, the necessity of relying on news sources—with its incentives—to get raw materials is unavoidable not only because the routines forced them to do so; but further, it is also due to economic reasons (efficiency) and also the journalism values of being objective and credible (especially when addressing official sources). Under such context the newsworthiness is determined and further it shapes the nature of news.

Conclusion

Deciding who is more determinant—the organizations or the sources—in shaping the nature of news surely is not easy. If we look back at the elaborations I made, both organizations and news sources play crucial roles in determining the nature of news. Is there one factor that sets the condition of the other?

I would say that one factor is not more determinant than the other. In short they are both equally determinant. To support my argument, I would put forward a theory proposed by McManus: Exchange (McManus, 1994: 21). In a chapter “The Nature of News Reconsidered”, McManus proposes the “exchange theory” to replace the earlier “resource dependence” model of Joseph Turow. Unlike resource dependence which focuses on the idea “that parties seek to avoid depending on the other actors while increasing others’ reli-

ance upon themselves”; McManus uses the exchange theory to better describe the relationships between the media with other actors (outside and inside the organization) (ibid).

While the discussion of this essay are mostly related to actors within the boundaries of organization (reporters, editors, proprietors, or investors) and sources (be it individual, organization, power elite, etc); one could not forget that there are also another group of actors: audiences and advertisers—remembering that somehow, media are also business organizations. It would be too naïve to forget that those two actors in news making process since they often incite business interests that force the proprietors to intervene the editorial line.

It is true that the organizational factors—with its routine procedures, rules, and hierarchical structures will shape the nature of news. It is also wise to say that journalists rely so much on sources for steady flow of materials that shape their news outcome. But in a nowadays commercialism of media, journalists rely on audiences and advertisers to survive. So, the audience is not indeed just an information recipient, but also—as pointed by Gans—“a source of income for the news firm” and so insofar as its loyalty must be maintained, its viewing and reading behaviors, even affect, to some extent, the news production process (Gans, 1999: 237). In short they shape the nature of news too.

Heeding to such fact, McManus pragmatically argues with his exchange theory that the relationship between those actors are more cooperative than the resource dependence implies. Next, since so much news is actually commercially produced, there must be an underlying economic logic to its production.

In simpler words, all actors (with their values, ideas, or assumption) involved in the news process indeed coexist within a system that eventually can shape, determine, or influence the newsworthiness. However, as Gans (1999: 239) suggests, their existences are closer to being “a tug of war” rather than func-

tionally interrelated organism. "Tugs of war, however, are resolved by power; and news is, among other things, the exercise of power over the interpretation of reality" (Ibid). Do all the participants exercise the power?

Indeed, they do. To be able to win the "tug of war", all actors (or participants) exercise the power that eventually shapes the nature of news produced by media organization. Such tug of war is in evidence among all participants inside the organization (with its journalistic routines, procedures, values and assumption), and outside organization, such as from sources and audiences. Since the tug of war is never be won by one dominating actor, I would then say that the nature of news is determined by all of the complex elements within the news production.

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MEDIA KOMUNIKASI DAN DAMPAKNYA TERHADAP KEBUDAYAAN: Analisis Pandangan Herbert Marshall McLuhan

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Abstract:

According McLuhan, technology in communication has a tremendous impact on human and their culture. Technologies have revolutionary influenced for man to perceive realities in a big scale. New technologies have been demanding new way of human perceiving. The changing of modes of perceiving brings a kind of crisis identity, and the phenomenon of a severe crises of identity appears in the late of the age of 20,th where electronic technology is in their very fast development. McLuhan foresaw a huge technological turbulence is going to happen and he warned people to listen to the message of technology as media. For McLuhan media is the message. His controversial aforism stings us and forces us to reflect the message of media. We are indeed living in the technological turbulence, and it is really happened people living a world with a big technological gap. We thank McLuhan for his warning, and we can discern our life so that we can survive and continue our daily life in a new way. Edification is one of the skills needed to continue living together with others, world, and artifacts of Information Technology.

Keywords: penciptaan, arus pusing teknologis, autoamputasi, media adalah pesan, media komunikasi, ruang akustik, ruang visual dan ruang dengar-lihat-raba, media panas dan dingin, teknologi sebagai perluasan diri manusia, teknologisasi tuturan dan aksara, kampung global, manusia diskarnasi, pencinta gadget, modus informasi, modus produksi, dan sinestesia.

Pengantar

Menjelang akhir abad ke-20, manusia secara bertahap sedang mengamputasi sistem syaraf pusatnya dan menyerahkan kepada teknologi elektronis sebagai perluasan dirinya. Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) meramalkan, ketika memasuki abad ke-21, manusia telah selesai menyerahkan seluruh tubuhnya kepada teknologi. Jika demikian yang terjadi, maka dunia akan gembos menciut (implosion), dan manusia beserta kebudayaannya pun tenggelam di dalam arus pusing teknologis yang luar biasa dahsyat (McLuhan, 1964:45-51). Untuk menghindari dari malapetaka teknologis, McLuhan mewanti-wanti manusia agar mendengarkan pesan teknologi, karena teknologi adalah media, dan media adalah

pesan (McLuhan, 1964: 23-35;63-67).

Pendapat tersebut dilontarkannya di tengah kekaguman terhadap perkembangan teknologi komunikasi elektronis. Orang sedang terpesona dengan kehadiran berbagai hasil temuan teknologi berbasis digital dan berbagai bentuk media komunikasi, mulai dari TV, komputer, internet, sampai ke berbagai ragam gadget (gadget). Di tengah keterpesonaan semacam itu, pandangan McLuhan terasa menyengat, seperti sengatan listrik, dan menimbulkan berbagai tegangan perbedaan (kontroversial). Pandangannya pun dapat dikatakan sebagai tonggak penanda (landmark) sejarah pemikiran dalam ilmu-ilmu humaniora, terutama komunikasi (Marchand, 1989;