Institutionalizing Sponsored News in Legacy Media: Negotiating the Firewall and the Role of 'Roso' at Kompas Daily

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Abstract

Digital disruption has fundamentally eroded traditional media business models, forcing legacy outlets to seek alternative revenue streams. This study analyzes the institutionalization of sponsored news, internally termed "collaborative content", at Harian Kompas as a survival strategy. Adopting a constructivist qualitative case study approach, the research integrates semi-structured interviews with six key informants, newsroom observation, and internal document analysis to examine how the organization navigates the tension between commercial necessity and journalistic integrity. The findings reveal that Harian Kompas has formally institutionalized sponsored news by establishing a dedicated Collaborative Content Desk. This entity employs a "non-approval" mechanism to ensure editorial independence from partners, while editorial leadership utilizes "roso" (editorial intuition) as a critical ethical filter for partner and theme selection. Despite these safeguards, the study identifies persistent challenges, notably collaborators' resistance toward transparent content labeling and the emergence of subconscious bias among field journalists. The study demonstrates that Harian Kompas, as a hybrid media organization, actively negotiates the balance between market survival and the preservation of core journalistic values in the digital era. This finding highlights how legacy institutions institutionalize sponsored content while striving to maintain editorial integrity, thereby contributing to broader discussions on the transformation of media organizations under digital disruption.

Keywords: media institutionalization, sponsored news, media business models, Kompas Daily, journalistic integrity

INTRODUCTION

The digital era has not only altered the medium of message delivery but has fundamentally redefined the relationship between information producers, consumers, and financiers. The advent of the internet has dismantled the monopoly of mainstream media as the sole channel for information distribution. This shift toward 'information abundance' has fundamentally recalibrated the economic landscape; information is no longer a scarce commodity, and the new scarcity is audience attention (Wu, 2016). Global tech giants such as Google, Meta, and TikTok have usurped the role of public attention aggregators. Operating as ‘platform sovereigns’, they exert architectural power that transcends mere intermediation, controlling the digital advertising ecosystem through data precision (Srnicek, 2017; Van Dijck et al., 2018). Consequently, global advertising expenditure has migrated massively from traditional media to social media algorithms, leaving newsrooms in an acute financial crisis characterized by structural platform dependency (Nielsen & Ganter, 2022).

In Indonesia, the disruption has struck with extraordinary intensity. Once pillars of democracy and national intellectual discourse, legacy print media now confront an unprecedented crisis of relevance and survival. Data from the Newspaper Publishers Association (SPS) indicate a steady contraction in the number of print media outlets in Indonesia, underscoring the profound impact of digital disruption on legacy news institutions. Since 2015, hundreds of regional and national newspapers have ceased operations (Aranditio, 2025). The digital transformation undertaken by many press companies has proven to be neither seamless nor a guarantee of financial sustainability (Mutiara & Priyonggo, 2019).

The core issue lies in the imbalance of the digital ecosystem. Programmatic advertising, once hoped to be the saviour of digital newsrooms, offers very low economic value for producers of high-quality journalistic content. To generate adequate revenue, media outlets are forced to pursue millions of daily pageviews as survival strategy. This systematic pressure has fostered the rise of “clickbait journalism,” where accuracy and depth yield to speed and sensationalism. Conversely, the cost of producing quality journalism, such as investigative reports or in-depth coverage, remains high. This gap between production costs and digital ad revenue has created a deficit that has triggered waves of mass layoffs within the national press industry in recent years (Aranditio, 2025).

In an attempt to escape this crisis, media companies have begun aggressively diversifying their revenue streams. One of the most significant and widely debated strategies is the implementation of sponsored editorial content. Unlike intrusive display ads that are often ignored, sponsored news presents commercial messages or third-party interests wrapped in the writing style and aesthetic format identical to original journalistic content (Hardy, 2021). Globally, this practice has been adopted by prominent outlets such as The New York Times via T-Brand Studio or The Guardian through Guardian Labs. Sponsored news is viewed as a “middle ground” that allows media to secure high corporate revenue without compromising the audience’s reading experience (Wojdynski, 2016).

In Indonesia, this practice has gained popularity under various terms, such as collaborative content, paid content, or strategic partnerships. This includes Indonesia's most influential media outlet, Kompas Daily, which has implemented “collaborative content”. However, like other mainstream media affected by digital disruption and declining ad revenue, Kompas has been forced to renegotiate its fundamental values. Since its founding by Jakob Oetama and PK Ojong in 1965, Kompas has built its identity upon the motto "Amanat Hati Nurani Rakyat" (The Mandate of the People's Conscience). Its credibility was built over 60 years of consistency in maintaining distance from power and business interests that could interfere with editorial truth. Historically, Kompas was known for having a formidable “firewall” between its newsroom and business units (Dhakidae, 1991; Hill, 1994).

Through its long history as a legacy media institution, Kompas Daily continues to weather the storm of disruption, partly through revenue diversification efforts such as sponsored news. In collaborative content, partners gain credibility and trust from the media’s audience, while the media receives fresh capital to fund newsroom operations. However, beneath these financial opportunities lies a threat to the independence and journalistic ethics that serve as the moral compass of the press industry (Lehto, 2015; Poutanen et al., 2016). This makes Kompas, with its journey through various Indonesian eras, a unique and crucial subject of study.

The research gap addressed here lies in the fact that while many studies have discussed sponsored content as native advertising in digital-born media, very few have dissected the institutionalization process of producing sponsored news within a legacy newsroom—especially one with deep-rooted idealistic values like Kompas. This study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the institutionalization strategy of sponsored news at Kompas Daily. The primary focus is to understand how the Collaborative Content Desk was structured, how editorial control is maintained amidst revenue targets, and how ethical risks are mitigated to preserve media credibility.

Academically, this research contributes to the discourse on media business model transformation in the era of disruption, specifically regarding the concept of the “hybrid organization” that attempts to merge journalistic professional logic with market logic. Practically, this study is expected to provide recommendations for the national media industry regarding accountable operational standards for sponsored content. Amidst a crisis of public trust in the media, Kompas’s success or failure in managing sponsored news will serve as a vital precedent for the future of the Indonesian press.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on sponsored news has gained significant academic attention amidst the shifting paradigms of media business models. A primary focus of existing literature is its impact on public perception. Wellbrock & Schnittka (2015) conducted research on print media sponsorship and uncovered a paradoxical finding: the higher the reputational quality of a newspaper, the more negatively sponsorship affects audience perceptions of its journalistic quality. This suggests that legacy media outlets, such as *Kompas Daily*, carry a greater reputational risk when adopting this business model compared to outlets with lower quality standards.

In line with these findings, Wojdynski (2016), through quantitative research, revealed that audiences capable of recognizing an article as an advertisement (via labels or formatting) tend to perceive the content as less credible. This distrust not only affects the providing media house but also fosters negative attitudes toward the sponsoring brand. These findings underscore the critical importance of presentation strategies and transparency in the implementation of sponsored news to prevent it from backfiring on media institutions.

Ethical issues constitute the second pillar widely discussed in previous studies. Vargo & Amazeen (2021) demonstrated that sponsored content marked with explicit labels tends to suppress a media outlet's boldness in reporting critically on sponsoring companies. This phenomenon creates a “safe zone” for sponsors, which may ultimately emasculate the watchdog function of journalism. Concerns regarding the blurring of boundaries between information and persuasion were also raised by Eyada & Milla, (2020). They noted that native advertising masquerading as news often misleads readers due to its identical appearance to editorial rubrics. In Thailand, Kusawat (2021) found that the use of vague labels caused readers to realize content was an advertisement only after deep exposure to the information. This necessitates absolute transparency standards, as emphasized by *Forbes* through its *BrandVoice* product, where the sustainability of this model hinges on the clear disclosure of content authorship (Jeff & Tran, 2013).

From an organizational management perspective, these changing business models have incited complex new roles within journalism. Poutanen et al. (2016) highlighted the emergence of “hybrid editors” within newsrooms. These editors stand at the forefront of balancing journalistic integrity with corporate commercial targets. The institutionalization of these hybrid units, according to Poutanen, often triggers moral dilemmas in daily decision-making (Van Der Goot et al., 2021). Conversely, research by Harms et al. (2017) offers a more optimistic perspective, stating that sponsored news provides opportunities for media to enhance audience engagement while salvaging corporate revenue. This strategy is viewed as a necessary innovation to bridge the financial gap caused by the collapse of conventional display advertising. Data from International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) (2019) supports this argument, showing that sponsored news contributes approximately 28% of total digital media revenue globally.

In Indonesia, research on sponsored news remains limited but provides highly relevant findings. Pasandaran & Mutmainnah (2020) revealed significant challenges regarding young audience literacy in Indonesia, who struggle to distinguish between political advertisements and organic news. This inability to identify content origins potentially creates space for misinformation if media outlets do not apply rigorous labelling. Furthermore, Prawira et al. (2024) highlighted a systemic risk in Indonesia where native advertising may encourage unhealthy proximity between media owners and political actors, risking the structural erosion of editorial independence. Finally, Priyonggo (2022) noted that digital innovation in major media like *Kompas* often faces internal resistance due to a print-oriented mindset and a lack of human resources adaptive to digital business logic.

Based on this review of prior research, a consensus exists that sponsored news is an economic necessity fraught with ethical risks. While the majority of global studies focus on audience impact or macro-ethics, there remains a dearth of research dissecting the structural institutionalization processes within Indonesian legacy newsrooms. This study positions itself to fill this gap by examining how *Kompas Daily*, as a representative of mainstream media with a strong tradition of idealism, manages its operational unit, the Collaborative Content Desk, to balance these two opposing poles. By referencing internet monetization models by Perell (2016) and sponsored news categories by Hardy (2021), this research will offer new contributions regarding how “non-approval” strategies and local organizational wisdom can serve as solutions to the dilemma of sponsored journalism in the digital era.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach within a constructivist paradigm. This paradigm was selected to understand how actors at *Kompas Daily* construct social meaning and reality regarding the institutionalization of sponsored news amidst the tension between journalistic idealism and economic demands. The research method used is an intrinsic case study (Stake, 2010), which allows for an in-depth exploration of a specific unit of analysis, the Collaborative Content Desk at *Kompas Daily* as a representation of the institutionalization of a new business model.

The research was conducted within the internal environment of the *Kompas Daily* headquarters in Jakarta. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure that data were obtained from informants with the authority and direct involvement in the institutionalization process of sponsored news (Stake, 2010). The key informants consisted of six people whose positions ranged from corporate management officers, desk editors, quality control editor, to reporter. This diversity of informants aims to provide a comprehensive perspective, bridging the viewpoints of decision-makers, editorial management, and field practitioners.

Data were gathered through three primary techniques to achieve depth of information (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). First, semi-structured interviews were conducted to delve into the informants’ subjective understanding of the formation of the Collaborative Content Desk, its workflow mechanisms, and the ethical dilemmas encountered. Second, observation was carried out, with the researcher acting as the key instrument by directly observing the newsroom workflow and coordination between the business and editorial units, allowing the researcher to capture the dynamics of “hybridity” in practice. Third, a document study was conducted by analysing internal records such as the *Kompas* Ombudsman reports, editorial policies, partnership proposals, and samples of published sponsored content across both print and digital platforms (Kompas.id).

Data analysis was performed using thematic analysis. Collected data were transcribed verbatim and subsequently coded to identify emerging primary categories. The researcher utilized NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software to facilitate data organization, visualize relationships between categories, and draw systematic conclusions based on themes of institutionalization, organizational integration, and ethical mitigation.

To ensure the rigor and validity of the findings, the researcher applied four data trustworthiness criteria as established by Guba & Lincoln (1994). First, credibility was achieved through source triangulation (comparing data across informants) and technique triangulation (confirming interview results with field observations and documents). The researcher also practiced prolonged engagement in the field to fully grasp the organizational context. Second, transferability was ensured by providing a thick description of the organizational context and the institutionalization mechanisms of sponsored news, allowing the findings to be contextualized for other legacy media facing similar challenges. Third, dependability was maintained by auditing and cross-checking the entire research process, from data collection to analysis, to ensure consistency. Fourth, confirmability was established to ensure that the findings were derived strictly from field data rather than the researcher's personal biases or preferences, a process facilitated by transparently documenting every analytical step.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The validity of the findings in this qualitative study rests upon the credibility and depth of experience of the informants who were directly involved in the business model transformation process at *Kompas Daily*. Six key informants were interviewed in this research, representing both the hierarchical and functional structures of the organization, ranging from strategic management to technical practitioners in the field.

No	Code	Title	Competence
1.	**Informant 1**	*Deputy Chief Executive of Kompas Daily*	*Informant provided a macro-perspective on corporate policies, the strategic direction of revenue diversification, and the foundational philosophy underlying the business model shift in legacy media.*
2.	**Informant 2**	*Editor-in-Chief of Kompas Daily*	*Informant was crucial in explaining how journalistic standards are maintained amidst the influx of commercial interests and how the "firewall" is being reconstructed.*
3.	**Informant 3**	*Head of the Editing and Language Harmonization Department*	*Informant provided insights into the curation, editing, and quality control processes to ensure that language and content remain aligned with Kompas's identity.*
4.	**Informant 4**	*Head of the Collaborative Content Desk*	*Informant dissected operational mechanisms, negotiations with partners, and how the unit functions as a bridge between business and editorial interests.*
5.	**Informant 5**	*Head of the Economics Desk*	*Informant provided a sectoral perspective on how sponsored content interacts with sensitive economic issues and the dynamics involving large corporations.*

6.	**Informant 6** *Kompas Daily*	*Journalist at*	*Informant offered a "grassroots" perspective on the ethical dilemmas, psychological pressures, and technical challenges faced by journalists when tasked with covering sponsored content. The journalist's name has been anonymized upon request.*

Crisis and Revenues Diversification

The research findings confirm that the institutionalization of sponsored news at *Kompas* Daily is not merely a creative innovation but rather a response to an existential crisis in the news industry. Traditional newspaper business models, historically reliant on circulation and print advertising, have been severely disrupted by digitalization, leading to a sharp decline in both revenue streams. Studies show that print advertising revenue dropped dramatically, with some newspapers experiencing declines of more than 50 percent within a few years (Sridhar & Sriram, 2015).

Other research also indicates that advertising revenue for print newspapers decreased by over 60 percent between 2008 and 2018 due to the shift of audiences and advertisers to digital platforms (Kumari & Choubey, 2024). At the same time, advertising expenditure has increasingly migrated to global digital platforms such as Google and Meta, which dominate the digital advertising market due to their data-driven targeting capabilities and vast user bases (Chin-Rothmann, 2022).

This condition has compelled *Kompas* to seek new revenue streams to sustain its business pillars. Informant 1 illustrated these new revenue sources using the "new legs" analogy. Media can no longer rely on one or two traditional revenue pillars. Informant 1 also mentioned these "new legs" or *Kompas*'s revenue diversification efforts, include sponsored news, research services, events, and talent management through the *Kompas Institute*.

The media business, well, I call it business, doesn't just mean making money. Media businesses that rely on editorial and business aspects are no longer adequate. Therefore, Kompas must keep up with developments. Kompas can no longer rely on companies advertising with Kompas before the second or first disruption. That's impossible. We have to find new ways to generate revenue that isn't solely advertising-based. (Informant 1, interview, September 30, 2025)

Sponsored news, internally referred to as "collaborative content" has emerged as one of the new legs expected to provide financial breathing room for the company. This aligns with global trends where sponsored content accounts for an average of 28% of media revenue, according to the ICFJ report.

The global phenomenon of increasing revenue from sponsored content also applies to *Kompas Daily*. Collaborative content practices have now become one of the six vital revenue pillars for *Kompas Daily*, alongside declining Non-Advertising Revenue (NAR). Informant 1 said that the other five pillars include event organizing, *Penerbit Buku Kompas* (book publishing), digital subscriptions, research services, and *Kompas Institute* talent management.

Collaborative content is starting to make an impact. I mentioned it as one of Kompas's six largest revenue sources: advertising, events, subscriptions, books [Penerbit Buku Kompas], research services, and collaborative content. Today, advertising revenue, which used to account for more than 80%, is declining. It could be replaced by NAR (Non-Advertising Revenue). (Informant 1, interview, September 30, 2025)

Informant 1 revealed that in the past, advertising contributions to revenue could exceed 80 percent. He acknowledged that both the percentage and the total amount have steadily declined, necessitating replacement through NAR-based revenue efforts.

Institutionalization of Collaborative Content

The most decisive step taken by *Kompas* in diversifying its revenue sources was the institutionalization of this practice into a formal organizational structure through the establishment of the Collaborative Content Desk in early 2025. Before becoming a definitive desk, the Collaborative Content Desk existed in 2023 as a non-definitive entity handling partnership content projects. As stated by Informant 2:

So, actually, [collaborative content] is not a new thing, in my opinion. It’s just that in the past, it wasn’t declared; it took the form of a project team. Then, under Mas Sutta [Sutta Dharmasaputra, the previous Editor in Chief], it was made into a desk. In my time, the organization was simply expanded. (Informant 2, interview, 15 September 2025).

When collaborative content was still managed by project teams, this non-definitive entity often had to request assistance from various other desks to produce content according to the issues being collaborated on. However, as the number of projects grew and the demand to maintain the quality of collaborative products increased, the *Kompas* editorial team established a definitive Collaborative Content Desk. The institutionalization of this desk marks a paradigm shift where sponsored content is now regarded as a journalistic product that must involve editorial standards.

This desk functions as a “hybrid” entity. On one hand, collaborative content has revenue targets (acting as a new revenue stream), while on the other, the operations and decisions of the Collaborative Content Desk must remain under the control of the Editor-in-Chief. This institutionalization aims to create a systematic workflow with a clear separation of roles between the business unit team, which seeks collaborators, and the editorial team, which produces the content.

One of the core findings that allows *Kompas* to maintain that its sponsored news is conducted journalistically is the application of the non-approval principle. In partnerships with stakeholders (corporations, government agencies, or civil society organizations), *Kompas* allows partners to determine the broad themes, issues, or publication timing at the upstream or planning stage. However, once the process moves to the reporting, writing, and production stages, full control rests with the editorial team.

Informant 4 explained that collaborators are prohibited from intervening in the final manuscript. There is no obligation—and indeed, it is strictly forbidden—for the editorial team to send manuscripts to collaborators for approval prior to publication. This practice is a firm effort to preserve journalistic dignity and prevent it from being degraded into a mere public relations tool. This independence serves as *Kompas*'s unique selling point; partners pay for the credibility and storytelling that constitute *Kompas*'s strength, not to dictate content.

Culture Mechanism: *Roso*

This research found that behind formal procedures, there is a powerful informal mechanism known as "roso" (the Javanese word for "feeling" or "intuition"). The study emphasizes that ethical control in this newsroom is primarily anchored in the leadership's intuition rather than formal guidelines. Because this media outlet has a long history built by figures like Jakob Oetama, ethical values have been internalized within senior editors. "Roso" also is used to filter potential partners or collaboration themes.

Wijayanto (2019) dissertation posits that *"roso"* serves as the foundation for both self-censorship and the journalistic style at *Kompas*. Wijayanto examines the practice of self-censorship within the organization, elucidating how *roso*, as a key Javanese cultural value, underpins these practices. He argues that *roso* has been internalized into the *habitus* of *Kompas* journalists, thereby shaping their modes of cognition and action in daily news production.

Within the corporate culture of the institution, the principle of roso functions as a crucial moral compass. As Informant 1 explained, "The judgement then more often comes from what I call *roso*. [...] it is *roso* in the context of Kompas' values that determines [the decision]". It is employed to discern whether sponsored content remains within appropriate boundaries or has transgressed ethical journalistic standards. This practice transcends mere adherence to written regulations; rather, it manifests as an intuitive sensibility intended to uphold the institution's dignity and reputation.

Furthermore, the principle of *roso* is utilized to harmonize commercial interests with journalistic idealism through the implementation of a "non-approval" mechanism. In this scheme, sponsor partners are involved only at the upstream stage (thematic planning) and possess no right to intervene in the downstream processes (drafting and final editing). This strategy represents a form of harmonization designed to secure revenue while preventing the total surrender of editorial control to third parties.

Collaborative content or sponsored news is conceptualized through the lens of *roso* as a bridge or a middle-ground solution. This approach aims to ensure the media outlet's financial sustainability while simultaneously striving to preserve, at least to some extent, the integrity of its journalism.

The implementation of sponsored news is thus viewed as an economically significant, adaptive strategy, balanced by the journalists' internal sensitivity (their *roso*) to mitigate potential subconscious biases. This narrative illustrates that objectivity and ethics are not maintained solely through formal procedural mandates, but also through the depth of a journalist's *"sense"* in weighing every decision amidst the shifting pressures of the media industry.

If a collaboration proposal is deemed potentially harmful to the public interest or contrary to the media's political line, the editorial team holds a veto right. This is not a matter of administrative checking, but a deep intuitive filter. As Informant 1 posed: “If, for example, Bir Bintang offered a collaboration, do you think we could do it? Cigarettes, could we?”. In this sense, “roso” functions as an unwritten Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that ensures business institutionalization does not collide with ethical boundaries.

Ethical Challenges

Although this internal institutionalization is robust, the research identified a weakness in the aspect of public transparency. There is a tension between the editorial idealism of including labels such as “in collaboration with”, “sponsored content”, or other markers, and the desires of collaborators who often request that such labels be obscured or removed.

This issue has occasionally generated debate within the editorial team. Some members argue that every collaborative content article should include a clear label or marker accompanied by the name of the collaborating partner. Others within the newsroom suggest that such labelling can be implemented without necessarily mentioning the collaborator’s name. The primary objective of these markers is to inform readers that the article constitutes collaborative content or has been produced through cooperation with an external party.

This finding directly contradicts the fundamental ethical principle of transparency and audience disclosure, which dictates that any content produced through a financial agreement must be clearly identifiable to the public. In the context of media ethics, ethical practice is defined as the explicit and consistent marking of sponsored content to protect the audience's right to know the source of information. Conversely, unethical practice involves deliberately obscuring or omitting such markers to leverage the newsroom’s credibility for commercial gain, which ultimately results in a breach of trust (Ikonen et al. (2017). Wojdynski emphasizes that readers who do not recognize an article as an advertisement will feel deceived if they later realize it.

Furthermore, research by Pasandaran & Mutmainnah (2020) in Indonesia shows that without clear labels, audiences tend to activate a news-based schema rather than an advertising schema. This means readers process the information in *Kompas*’s collaborative content as objective fact, even though the content originated from a business agreement. Wojdynski (2016) underscores this by emphasizing that the absence of transparency constitutes a form of deception; readers who do not recognize an article as an advertisement will feel deceived if they later realize its commercial nature. In Indonesia, the risk of such unethical deception is heightened, as research by Pasandaran & Mutmainnah (2020) shows that without clear labels, audiences tend to activate a 'news-based schema' rather than an 'advertising schema.' Consequently, by accommodating a partner's resistance to labeling, the newsroom allows readers to process commercial narratives as objective facts, thereby failing its ethical obligation to prevent cognitive misleading of the public.

Partners or collaborators tend to want their content to look like organic news to be more trusted by readers. This resistance to labelling poses a serious challenge to

Kompas's credibility in maintaining transparency with its audience.

Additionally, the phenomenon of subconscious bias has emerged at the journalist level. Field reporters often feel hesitant to write critically if the subject of their coverage is a partner currently engaged in a financial collaboration with the company. This creates a risk of self-censorship that is subtle yet real.

Organizational Adaptation and Recommendation

The research results indicate that *Kompas Daily* is transforming into an "ambidextrous organization", reflecting the company's ability to balance two things simultaneously. On one hand, *Kompas* maintains its pure journalistic core business (idealism), and on the other, it develops businesses that exploit the economic value of content (pragmatism). In terms of political economy, this is a form of adaptation to platform capitalism. The media no longer merely sells information; it sells the "affection" and "trust" it has built over decades.

The use of sponsored content is a strategy to reclaim lost economic value. However, this discourse confirms that legacy media is at a crossroads: whether it will maintain a perpendicular "firewall" or allow it to become a glass wall that is transparent yet still restrictive. This strategy is driven by the reality that the media can no longer rely on conventional advertising models. As emphasized by Informant 1:

"It [Kompas] can no longer rely on how it was in the past... where companies would place ads in Kompas. It's no longer possible; we must find ways to obtain new revenue streams that are not just advertising-based" (Informant 1, interview, September 30, 2025).

Another significant finding is the emergence of the "hybrid editors" phenomenon at the Collaborative Content Desk. Editors in this unit are required to understand marketing logic and the target audiences of collaborators while simultaneously adhering strictly to journalistic rules and codes of ethics (Poutanen et al., 2016). This role tension is physically manifested in the thinning of the firewall between editorial and business units, which are now unified on the 5th floor of the Menara Kompas office.

"Now, [editorial and business] are even on the same floor. So, the firewall is getting thinner... Previously, Kompas's business was in the other Building... it moved closer, and finally to the current building... Now, it's even on one floor" (Informant 2, interview, September 15, 2025).

Despite the physical proximity, the editorial team creates symbolic "rituals of separation" to safeguard integrity. This is evident when the editorial team withdraws from the room when negotiations with potential collaborators shift toward monetary figures. Informant 4 explained this mechanism: *"When we meet with collaborators for content, as soon as it comes to money, we are not in the room; we leave, and only the business team remains"*.

This institutionalization shifts the firewall boundary from being physical and organizational to being procedural. Integrity is no longer maintained by the distance between buildings but by the "non-approval" principle. This principle is formally documented in internal company proposals, which state that any cooperation must:

"The content of the article is a soft sell; it will be discussed in more depth with the newsroom, provided there are no legal violations, there is public benefit, there is no conflict of interest, and it is non-approval."(Collaborative Content Proposal, document)

As long as this principle is upheld, Kompas believes its integrity remains intact, even if the funding for the journalistic work comes directly from a third party.

The reliance on the "roso" (feeling/intuition) instrument shows that ethical decision-making at Kompas is still heavily influenced by organizational culture and the values of its founders. Informant 1 noted that the primary judgment in selecting partners is an intuition rooted in the institution's dignity:

"The judgement then more often comes from what I call roso. Roso, yes. [...] it is roso in the context of Kompas' values that determines [the decision]" (Informant 1, interview, September 30, 2025).

While the internal system is robust, the research identified weaknesses in public transparency due to partner resistance to explicit labeling. Furthermore, there is a risk of "subconscious bias" at the journalist level. Informant 6 (a journalist) admitted to the psychological burden when covering a collaborative partner:

"If I portray the person collaborating with us in a negative light, the results could be a mess... in the subconscious, we as writers interpret it as: Oh, if possible, let's not have any criticism here" (Informant 6, interview, September 15, 2025).

Consequently, several recommendations can be made. *Kompas* must maintain its credibility and honesty regarding revenue sources through clear labeling. In this era of hoaxes and biased information, mainstream and legacy media must not fear losing partners simply for maintaining "sponsored content" labels. Sponsored news is just one way to obtain new revenue streams. Media must continue to explore other business models, such as subscriptions or memberships, to reduce dependency on corporate funds that carry potential conflicts of interest.

Furthermore, there needs to be a clear organizational mechanism ensuring that journalists assigned to collaborative content are not subject to sanctions, subtle pressure, or career disadvantages if they maintain a critical stance toward sponsoring partners. Such a safeguard is essential to prevent self-censorship and to uphold the watchdog function of journalism. By guaranteeing editorial autonomy at the individual level, the institution can reinforce its credibility and demonstrate that commercial collaboration does not equate to compromised reporting. In practice, this could take the form of explicit editorial policies, ombudsman oversight, or internal codes of conduct that protect journalists' independence while allowing the business model to evolve.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that *Kompas Daily* has institutionalized sponsored news through the Collaborative Content Desk, employing a non-approval mechanism and the cultural principle of *roso* to safeguard editorial independence. These practices illustrate how legacy media negotiate survival strategies by embedding ethical sensibilities into organizational routines, ensuring that commercial collaborations do not fully compromise journalistic standards. Yet persistent challenges remain, including partner resistance to transparent labeling and subtle self-censorship among journalists, underscoring the fragility of editorial independence under market pressures.

Overall, the institutionalization of sponsored news at *Kompas Daily* is a high-risk experiment that must be conducted with extreme caution. Its long-term success will not be measured by revenue alone, but by the durability of public trust within this increasingly hybrid business model. The phenomenon at Kompas Daily proves that journalistic integrity in the digital era is no longer absolute; it must be constantly fought for and negotiated through strong organizational structures, strict control mechanisms, and loyalty to the institution's core values.

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