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Cendera Rizky Anugrah Bangun

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The Evolving Role of Social Media as News Outlet: Opportunities and Threats
Case study of *Media Indonesia* and *Kompas*

Cendera Rizky Anugrah Bangun
London School of Public Relations
Email: cendera.r@lspr.edu

ABSTRACT

As new media emerge and replace the popularity of conventional media, people use social media not only as medium to socialize, but also increase its role as news source or news outlet. A generational divide has always existed within news. The older people tend to choose TV and newspaper as their primary news source meanwhile research conducted by Reuters in 2015 showed that younger audiences that grown up in digital era, exhibiting very different behaviors and increasingly expect the news to come to them through online channels and in new formats. This makes social media become the opportunities and also threats to some news companies. What should the media do in order to survive? Does the generation gap influence the media to use both traditional and digital or social media? Some online media even put their headlines and link in Facebook and Twitter as news outlet, so people can just click the link and go to their websites. Methodology used in this research is qualitative with data gathered from focus group discussion and interview. The result of the study expected to show how the generation gap creates different media consumption and the need for news corporation to change their pattern in order to survive.

Keywords: Social media, news outlet, new media

Preface

Today, the numbers of internet and social media users in Indonesia increase. This escalation coincides with the country's transition to democracy in 1998. Before 1998, the media were regularly watched by the government. But after the emergence of the Freedom of the Press, which was marked by the launching of Press Law (UU Pers No. 40/1999) that stated press is independent and government would no longer intervene the press, the number of all types of media (television, newspaper, and digital media) keeps on increasing. The growth of the media is a good thing in the democracy era. It indicates the freedom of speech, where people finally have their own public sphere without the fear of getting captured or imprisoned. Public sphere needs to be independent. It cannot rely on the conventional media, because each media has

its own agenda setting, depending on its policy, ideology, and political economy condition.

Nowadays, the media evolution has been accelerated and combined with real daily life. The existence of smartphone overcomes time constraints because the user can access it whenever needed, whereas social networking service creates various social media and space, which overcome limitations of space. The new media creates a new public sphere. People realize the media space as a social activities space. Moreover, the media affects awareness of public time as working time, and private time as leisure time. Therefore, the new media creates a "mass" message. To paraphrase McLuhan, "the medium is the (mass) age." (Kweon, p.25)

Since 1999 until now, the technology has developed from the very simple one to the most sophisticated one. The high number of media and digital media, both local and international, was among other influenced by the globalization and the country's openness to new culture from outside. Based on the latest data from national research conducted by The Indonesian Association of Internet Service Providers (APJII) and Communication Research Center of the University of Indonesia in 2014, there are 88.1 million internet and social media users among the 252.4 millions citizens. This means the internet penetration is 34,9% as shown by the picture below.

Figure 1

Source: Media Sosial untuk Advokasi Publik, 2016, p.6

As we can see for the time being, social media are being used selectively by younger people. It seems to be a useful source for breaking news but not reliable enough in terms of accuracy. According to McLuhan, it's not technological abnormality that demands our attention, since it's hard not to notice the new and different technology. Instead, we need to focus on our everyday experience of technology. We can't avoid the technology itself, but we have to adapt and live with it.

Seven people were interviewed as informants for this research. This research uses qualitative approach. Two informants were from media, Try Harjono from *Kompas* and Usman Kansong from *Media Indonesia*. Five young people involved

in the focus group discussion: Nindyo, Ferizal, Shannen, Kartika, and Andi. This research uses qualitative data which were collected from interviews and focus group discussion.

Figure 2

Source: Newman, 2015, p. 10
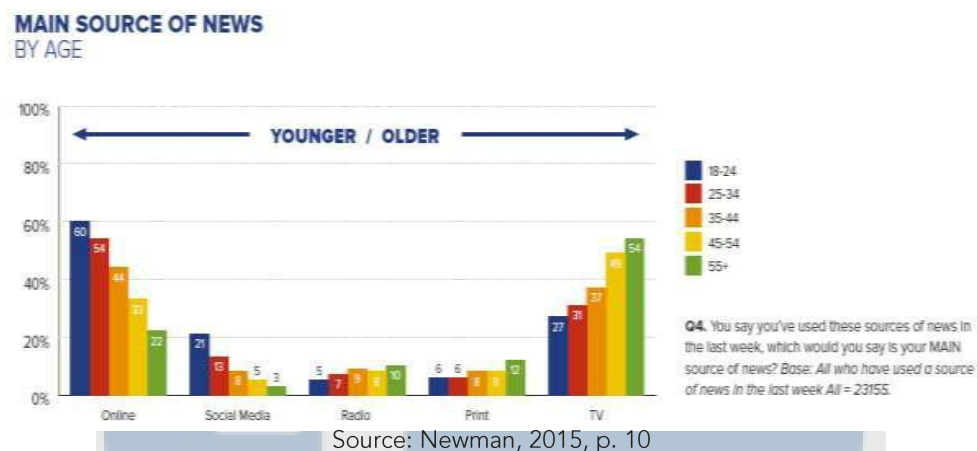
Data gathered by Reuters Digital News Report shows that sales of printed newspapers have continued to fall in most countries. This data also supported by the informant from *Kompas*, Harjono, who stated the sales for *Kompas* daily newspaper had been falling. Kansong from from *Media Indonesia* also stated the same. Figure 2 above shows that television and online media are on the top of main source for news. At the same time, newspapers have declined significantly while social media are growing rapidly. Based on age, those whose age is between 45 – 55+ tend to choose TV over social media. Some of them choose print and radio, but not as much as TV. In contrary, those whose age is between 18-24 tend to choose online media as their source to get news and information rather than print media. Harjono said *Kompas* realizes the existence of social media and how it affects the sales. The market comprises not only older people, but also young people.

Participants of the focus group discussion said they were aware of the existence of newsfeed in their social media. They said that social media is not only as the medium to socialize or reunite with their old friends, but also to get information or to read news. Two of the five people joining FGD claimed they still read newspaper. The other three said they did not read newspaper anymore. It leads to the question of where do young people get information?

One of the respondents said that:

> "I always get my information or news preferences integrated into every social media that I have. I really don't visit the news portal and or TV as

much, because I know the ones that I subscribe to are ones that I need, and I don't need to worry about the bigger ones, because they will surface on its own via trending topics etc." (Andi, 20)

The other respondent stated:

"To get information, I usually use online news like *Kompas.com* or *Detik.com* or I can go to Twitter and follow the news account such as *Kompas* and *Detik* and see the news within the link. But sometimes I watch TV and read newspaper." (Shannen, 19)

"I get my information from Twitter or Instagram, and if I'm curious, I'll just go to youtube. Usually, when the topic is hot there's always the video, either from *Beritasatu* or *Kompas* or *TVOne*. For conventional media, I only buy *Marketeers SWA* and *Rollingstone Magazine*, for TV I only watch *Beritasatu*." (Nindyo, 21)

"I usually get my information through newspaper like *Kompas* or *Warta Kota*. Also I go to *Kompas.com* or *Detik.com*. Other than that, I visit the link from social media as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram." (Kartika, 22)

"I go to *Detik.com*, news from TV, and also social media from what people post. If I'm curious, I'll google it for more accurate news." (Feri, 19)

Almost all of the respondents who were born in the late 1990's said they got information from the digital media. Even though some of them still read newspaper, but digital media is inevitable. We can't blame the technology and we can't blame the younger audiences, because they grow up with the digital technology. They exhibit very different behaviors and increasingly expect the news to come to them through online channels and in new formats.

In figure 3, we can see that top three active social media platforms in Indonesia in 2014 were Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. That is why these three social media become very popular even compared to *Detik.com* or *Kompas.com* as *news outlet*. With the new features from Facebook, people can share the news in their status by posting the link. Basically, we can read news even by opening social media. This graphic also supports the statement from the participants saying they got their information mostly from social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram.

Figure 3
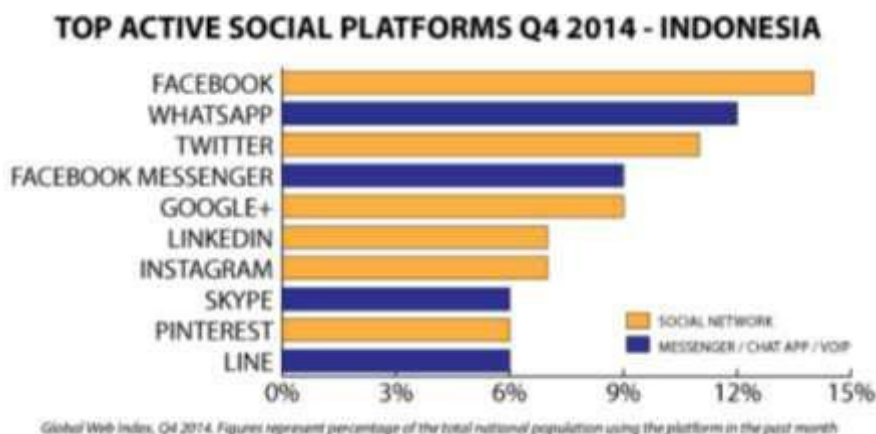
Source: Global Web Index

When the pre-research was conducted, the respondent supported the data that shows how the younger generation use social media as their news outlet. Figure 2 also shows the generation gap makes which becomes one the reasons why news corporation has to adapt in order to survive.

Social media can be seen as opportunities but also threats to some news companies. What should the media do in order to survive? The shift from analog to digital technology allows communication containing dense and rich information. The information can be combined, converted, and presented in various forms (Wuryanta, p.7).

Newman stated that:

> "The challenge for traditional media brands is how to manage this growing divergence in behavior, along with the intense business pressures being thrown up by the second wave of disruption from mobile and social. Print revenues are declining fast while only a minority is prepared to pay for news online. Mobile advertising is generating less than via desktop, video advertising is promising but nascent, while sponsorship and native options are throwing up new questions around trust and journalistic integrity. Meanwhile Facebook and Google continue to build some of the world's most profitable companies based on targeted advertising wrapped around relevant and interesting content. News companies face another year of intense pressure and will have to be more inventive than ever with editorial and business strategies if they are to survive." (2015, p.19)

Just as the assumption from Uses and Gratification Theory, people need motivation to consume their media, related to how it satisfy and useful for them. Uses and Gratifications Theory is an extension of needs and motivation theory (Maslow, 1970). In needs and motivation theory, Maslow posited that people actively seek to satisfy a hierarchy of needs. Once they have achieved the goals they seek on one level of the hierarchy, they are able to move to the next level (Figure 23.1). This picture of humans as active seekers, out to satisfy specific needs, fits well with the ideas Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch brought to their studies of how people consume mass communication. (West and Turner, p.394)

Figure 4

Source: West and Turner, 2010

The assumption of Uses and Gratification Theory is that media compete with other sources for need satisfaction—meaning that the media and their audiences do not exist in a vacuum. Both are part of the larger society, and the relationship between media and audiences is influenced by that society. On a first date, for example, going out to watch movie is preferable than renting a video and watching it at home.

Someone who is an infrequent consumer of media— who, for example, finds more gratification in conversations with friends and family—may turn to the media with greater frequency when seeking information during a national election. Theorists in Uses and Gratifications argue that because it is individual audience members who decide to use certain content for certain ends, the value of media content can be assessed only by the audience. (West and Turner, p.398)

In support of the statement, Levy and Windahl (1985) in West and Turner claims:

> "As commonly understood by gratifications researchers, the term "audience activity" postulates a voluntaristic and selective orientation by audiences toward the communication process. In brief, it suggests that media use is motivated by needs and goals that are defined by audience members themselves, and that active participation in the communication process may facilitate, limit, or otherwise influence the gratifications and effects associated with exposure. Current thinking also suggests that audience activity is best conceptualized as a variable construct, with audiences exhibiting varying kinds and degrees of activity." (p.400)

Just like in figure 3, when they asked what kind of social media they have, their answers were Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, plus Snapchat. Afterward, when asked what do you use your social media for?, the responses are as follow:

> "Mainly for control, as in knowing what's happening around me. Then for finding the things I like. Posting is based on circumstances." (Andi)

> "Social media for sharing the work, like posting about articles and events, and also for news information. Sometimes to complaining to customer service, as it's more effective through social media than via phone." (Kartika)

> "I use social media to stay in touch with friends, or to get entertained, and also to get information. (Shannen)

> "I use social media to create community with same interest or hobbies, and to get update among friends." (Nindyo)

> "(I use) Social media to socialize with my friends, mostly for knowing about what's the update on world nowadays and them nowadays." (Feri)

John Dimmick, Yan Chen, and Zhan Li (2004) observe that although the internet is a relatively new medium, it overlaps the traditional media in terms of uses and gratifications. People use the internet to search for news in the same way they previously used other forms of media for similar need. This finding has significance for possible displacement of older media by the Internet, but it shows that Uses and Gratifications Theory is still useful and is applicable to new media.

Younger audiences are turning away from TV news bulletins and towards mobile and increasingly, online video and new visual formats. Emily Bell stated that as journalism becomes ever more dependent on these new distribution platforms to find audiences, news publishers are forced to examine their business models and strategies for the future. If a news company wishes to reach a large audience

on the web it has little choice but to develop relationships with third-party platforms, but this puts revenue models and decisions over the ultimate shape of journalism even further into the hands of software companies. (Reuters, 2015, p.90).

Along with that thought, society is determinant. Media moves in accordance with the market demands. When it comes to digital media, how many hits that the media get in a day or for one article? What should the media do in order to survive?

The competition in the media to survive is similar to how mankind associate with its environment. They need their life support in order to survive. *Media Indonesia* is one of the examples. Media actually compete with each other, like between the online news and television, between newspaper and television, or online with newspaper. However, when we talk about the real competitor, it has to be apple-to-apple competition, such as online versus online media.

Media Indonesia is one of the biggest daily newspapers in Indonesia. They realized that the competition nowadays is not only how they face other newspaper, but also how they compete with digital media. So they decided to expand the niche of their audience. They expanded the niche by for example establishing other business, such as event organizer and providing journalism training to some companies or schools. They also integrate with their Media Group to gain more money. For example, when the *Metro TV* marketing want to sell the spots in *Metro TV*, they would offer the spots in *Media Indonesia*, so the clients would receive bundling advertising in both media, and vice versa.

Kompas understands that younger generation is not really into reading newspapers. They get their information mostly from online media or social media. Assessing the tendency of younger generation who prefer obtaining information from online media, *Kompas* provides online media *Kompas.com* and print.kompas.com that can be accessed worldwide.

Kompas considers media competition as a positive condition to encourage media to improve their quality and give the best service for their readers. When the media improve the quality, they would try to provide complete information and deliver the best ones to the reader. The target market for *Kompas* is almost the same with several media, but specifically targeting class A and B+. This target market is in accordance with the result that states 18% of *Kompas* reader has postgraduate and doctoral education background. With this specific target market, in order to survive, *Kompas* has to provide the news to meet the readers' needs. The credibility and the accuracy of the news should be upheld high.

For survival and also regeneration of its readers, *Kompas* also aims for high school and college students as its target market. For that reason, *Kompas* routinely provides Kompas Muda and Kompas Kampus containing articles that

are spefically created for these young people or related to them. *Kompas* also looks up to reach the communities. In its Sunday and Tuesday edition, *Kompas* provides the column for communities.

McLuhan insisted that electronic media were re-tribalizing the human race. Instant communication has returned us to a pre-alphabetic oral tradition where sound and touch are more important than sight. We've gone "back to the future" to become a village unlike any other previous village. We're now a Global village. Constant contact with the world becomes a daily reality. All-at-once-ness is our state of being. Closed human systems no longer exist.

There is no distance or separation between the medium and the message: it is the one case where we can say that the medium and the message are fully one and the same. For McLuhan, the medium is the message, and technology is an extension of human hand. McLuhan said that new media do not replace prior media but modify or obscure them. In this perception, the social media has replaced the conventional media or print media as news outlet. New media do not replace the existing media but modify or obscure them. The printing press does not replace handwriting, but alters the way it is used. The question is not whether books on the iPad or e-books will replace printed, bound books, but how it will change our perception of them. This is often ignored.

Will social media replace the conventional media?

> "Disagree. Because the economy is still uneven, hence the ability to acquire those "luxury" is still quite far from their crosshairs. The way conventional media integrates them to online platform is simply an effort to adapt and reach a wider audience. And the links and contents they have still (somehow) redirects to their conventional selves. Will it be removed? Maybe. Will it be removed completely? The margin of possibility is smaller, but one thing that I'm sure of is that they are trying to stay relevant." (Andi)

> "I agree. Because of the technology development and people nowadays are more to online media. But the conventional media can't be replaced completely, because there's still older generation that can't operate technology nowadays." (Shannen)

> "(social media to conventional media) will replace I agree, but not completely. Social media is related to gadget, age, and lifestyle. Even though a lot of people using gadget, but still there are people who will still use conventional media, because they can't use the new media." (Nindyo)

"Will replace but not in anytime soon. Digital platform is way much cheaper than the conventional media." (Kartika)

These younger generation participants believe that the conventional media will be replaced by the new media or social media completely, but not in any time soon, perhaps in 5-10 years. New media or digital platform is more efficient and low cost or some time no cost, compare to the conventional ones.

These are the keys from *Media Indonesia* to survive in this digital age:

1. Establish the value of journalism by doing verification
2. Be responsive to the development of digital technology
3. See today and tomorrow news
4. Response creatively
5. Regeneration the reader: one of the examples is *Media Indonesia* make a junior reporter program for primary school students.
6. Invite readers to be citizen journalism
7. Spread the desire to read news
8. Involved in content production
9. Introduce the media literacy

For digital platform, *Media Indonesia* has social Media like Facebook, Facebook Fan page, Twitter. So they are not only use print media, but also digital media.

While for *Kompas*, they understand that younger generation that is born after 2000, is having the tendency to read less newspaper. Newspaper is more to generation x (1965-1979). For younger generation, *Kompas* knows that they get their information most of the time from online and social media.

To manage this, *Kompas* takes two steps. First *Kompas* provides special column for students so they can develop their desire to read and to write. In these columns, high school students or college students are invited to write or report their activities in the school or college. Besides that, *Kompas* also gives journalism training so they can learn to be photographer or reporter in *Kompas* daily newspaper. Their work pieces will be evaluated so they can improve their quality.

Other than that, knowing the tendency from younger generation that get their information mostly from online and social media, *Kompas* also provides online platform in *Kompas.com* and print.kompas.com. In these digital platforms, the information is enriched with additional information like photos or videos. This new platform is not only for younger generations, but also for the reader of *Kompas* who are living abroad. This platform is effective in the cities, but not in some rural or urban areas with poor and limited internet connection. That is why aside from social media, *Kompas* also gives information in running text or live report in *Sonora Radio* and *Kompas TV*. *Kompas* have multi-platform media to

share their information to the public. *Media Indonesia* also converged with *Metro TV* to share their news.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the interview, it can be concluded that print media is falling along with the growth of technology and the rise of new media. It is inevitable. This makes social media become the threats. Some big media corporations even went bankrupt and they had to close their company because they could not survive in the competition. To prevent this, *Kompas* and *Media Indonesia* created some ways to survive. One of them is media convergence as whether they like it or not, their future existence is in the digital platform. They still run their print media, but the existence of their digital media is deemed important. Establishing integration or multi-platform is the best way in order to survive. However, this can lead to a new problem of gatekeeping, which is not as strict as in conventional media. In conventional media, they have reporter and editor. In social media there's no gatekeeper aside the administrator. This is because social media is known as a media for user generated content. So the readers need to be literate and educate themselves. Digital media agenda is how fast they can deliver the news to their readers, and some still ignore the accuracy or sometimes the journalism ethics. As the Uses and Gratification Theory stated, people seek motivation to consume the media, they need to satisfy their needs when they consume the media, and online (social) media provides it all.

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