

The Views of Online Media Journalists About Implementation of the Truth Principle in Covering Event of 212 Reunion

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Abstract—In journalistic practice, the meaning of the truth is debatable. It is something absurd because it can be interpreted differently depending on the needs. According to Harsono in the book of “Elements of Journalism” that is written by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, the meaning of the truth is in the functional level, not in the level of philosophical. For example, in the daily lives people need information about traffic jam, weather forecasts, currency rates or football match. This article explores the views of three online media journalists about the implementation of the first principle of the nine element of journalism which is “the first obligation of the journalist is to the truth” when they were covering the event of reunion of 212 on December 2nd, 2018. This research implements a qualitative method by interviewing the journalists from *republika.co.id*, *detik.com* and *liputan6.com*. They were journalists who were assigned by their offices to cover the event. The result shows that as journalists who were on the spot of event, they would only publish news articles based on the facts they gather from the place of coverage.

Keywords: *online media journalists, the truth principle, 212 reunion*

I. INTRODUCTION

The event of 212 reunion, similar to the event of 212, can drive Muslim in Indonesia to gather in the Monumen Nasional (Monas) Jakarta to convey their aspirations. The mass were Muslim from many cities and regions in Indonesia as well as from various background and age. The reunion of 212 then, became a battle symbol of Indonesian Muslim. According to ulama KH Abdullah Gymnastiar in the Indonesia Lawyer Club - ILC (a talk show in TVOne), the mass of 212 reunion express their feelings about injustice and heartache. It is because they are called as intolerant, anti-Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia/NKRI (The Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia), want to separate from Indonesia and other negative stigmas.

The action of reunion 212, in fact, went on peacefully but it got different responses from diverse parties and media. According to *Tirto.id*, the reunion of 212 event was published by 86 newspapers in 159 articles. From that number, 57 per cent of media published one article while the rest distributed

two or more articles. The media that published many articles about this case, according to *Tirto.id*, were *Rakyat Merdeka*, *Harian Terbit*, dan *Waspada*. In the online media, there are 773 articles about the reunion. The highest number of articles were published by *Detik.com* with 71 articles.

However, *Tirto.id* only collects the data of quantity while how the event of reunion is framed and positioned by the media has not been discovered yet. For instance, why *Kompas* daily newspaper preferred to put the news not in its headline of page 1. The biggest newspaper in Indonesia chose the issue of plastic garbage as its headline similar to *Koran Tempo* which promoted the content about digital ecosystem in its headline. On the other hand, *Republika* daily newspaper put the reunion of 212 as its headline on the first page.

A big event that become a democracy expression and has a big impact to the future judged differently by the media. One day after the event, only *Republika* daily newspaper that put the article of it in the headline and this is very odd. The reason is because the first aim of journalism is to provide information that is needed by the society so that they can manage themselves. As an ample event that happened in the public area, reunion of 212 is not considered as a needed-information by several media.

“The media has their own agenda setting” is a justification for not considering reunion of 212 as the headline of many newspapers in Indonesia. In fact, loyalty to the truth and society is the most important thing in journalism. Obligation to the truth and loyalty to society are two principles of the nine elements of journalism as written by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel [1].

As it known there are nine elements of journalism as follow. (1) Journalism’s first obligation is to tell the truth; (2) Its first loyalty is to the citizens; (3) Its essence is discipline of verification; (4) Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover; (5) It must serve as an independent monitor of power; (6) It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise; (7) It must strive to make the news significant, interesting, and relevant; (8) It must keep the news comprehensive and proportional and (9) Its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience [1].

The nine elements of journalism are the provisions of journalist in delivering news whatever the interest or strengths behind the media. According to Rodny-Gumede and Colin Chasi these elements serve as the groundwork of ethical road map and codes of conduct for journalists in working in the field [2]. Furthermore, according to Russial et al “news is socially constructed”, and journalists are the producer of news [3]. As it said by Kovach and Rosenstiel [1], journalists and their news stories stand for several elements including a commitment to the truth and a verification.

This research explores the views of journalists in implementing two of elements of journalism namely the principle of the truth and their loyalty to the society when they covering news. In this case, the news is about reunion of 212. In the idea of Christians [4], journalism’s responsibility to the truth is a key of the ethical codes while according to Kamzin the rule character of journalism stories is truth [5]. This research is important because it will benefit especially the journalists in covering events in which they should stick firmly to the nine elements of journalism.

The research involves journalists from online media. In the technological era, online media is the media that very practical and is accessed by a lot of people. It is easy to access and cheap. Based on the data from Dewan Pers Indonesia (Press Council of Indonesia) in 2018 the number of media in Indonesia is around 43 thousands but the media that have been verified by the council is about 130 media (<https://dewanpers.or.id/berita/detail/978/Progam-Pendataan-Menjadi>). Several online media in Indonesia are affiliated to newspapers or television, such as *republika.co.id* that is affiliated with *Republika* daily newspaper and *liputan6.com* is associated with *SCTV* that produces *Liputan 6* current affairs.

The online media that is chosen for this research is based on the rank of Alexa. They have a high ranking of clickers. Since not all of top ten online media in Alexa have news channel so the online media is chosen based on two criteria, namely, it has many clickers based on Alexa’s rank and has a news channel that visited by netizen.

II. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method which implements a case study. Researchers conduct an in-depth exploration into the result of interview with the journalists who are being the source of the research. The interview is about the implementation of the nine elements of journalism in publishing news about 212 reunion.

The reason of choosing the method is because this issue needs to be scrutinized in detail using a various collecting data continuously. In addition, the issue about reunion of 212 is happening. Therefore, a case study is the most appropriate technique in a qualitative research. According to Creswell, a case study is a research that put an object of research as a case [6].

To obtain information from the sources which are journalists who enshrouding the event of 212 reunion, researchers interview them. Since all the informants are very busy with their jobs every day, researchers send emails to them

consisting written questions. One of them can be interviewed directly but others answer it by emails or WhatsApp messages. When conducting a direct interview, researchers using additional tools such as tape recorder, pictures and other materials that make the interview session running well [7]. Informants who were interviewed in this study are online media journalists which are among the top ten most clickers of Alexa, namely *detik.com*, *liputan6.com*, and *republika.co.id*.

In addition, researchers also used a method of documentation which is a method to get data from notes, books, newspapers, transcribes, documents, magazines that related to the covering of reunion of 212 from online media where the journalists of this study is working.

This study is based on six steps of research according to Creswell [6]. The first, identification of research problems which in this paper is how the view of online media journalist towards the implementation of nine element of journalism especially about the truth; the second is literature review. Theoretical framework showed several finding about nine element of journalism but in this research authors focus on the truth principle. The third is the aim of the research that is to answer the problems that come up in the identification of problems; The next step is collecting data; This data is collecting from three journalists who covering the event of 212 reunion. Data analysis and interpretation can be done when the result of interviews have been collected and synthesized with theories which become a part of theoretical framework that implemented in this research. The final stage is research reporting and evaluation.

The aim of this research is to explore the views of online media journalists in implementing the truth principle when they covering the event of 212 reunion in 2018. In addition, it is also explore the basic of writing news article about check and recheck principle before publishing news articles in their media.

III. RESULTS

There are four questions related to the truth principle of the nine elements of journalism that are asked to the journalists from *republika.co.id*, *detik.com* and *liputan6.com*. The questions are: (1) In accordance with the first point of the nine elements of journalism, the main obligation of journalism is to tell the truth, what types of the truth that you published in the news of reunion of 212? ;(2) How did you verify the truth of the event you covered in the 212 reunion? (3) If you fail to verify the truth of the event, will you publish the news directly from the spot of the event or postpone it while waiting for a source who can give a confirmation? ; (4) What is your opinion about the news that is published without verification on behalf of the speed of the news?

In regard to the first question about telling the truth, the journalist from *republika.co.id* said that he published the truth about the event as it is, “The truth is that this action is a form of conveying constitutional rights”. However, he realized that the presence of Prabowo Subianto (a presidential candidate number two in the 2019 Indonesian presidential election) in the event make “a political scent” cannot be denied even though it was not explicitly seen.

The answer from the journalist of *liputan6.com* is different. He said that the truth is the situation in the field where he covered the event: everything that he saw at that time and an interview with the source. He also pays attention to accuracy and try to avoid using “a speculation language”. “Just like another journalism writing in general,” he said. Those explanations are quite similar to the answer from the journalist of *detik.com*. He suggests that “what is happening there, published... not making it up or giving opinion. All news stories come from facts.”

While responding to the second question about verifying the truth of the event in the 212 reunion, the journalist from *detik.com* said that he will come to location of incident, if any. If he could not do it straight away then he will confirm it to the police. He said that all events in Jakarta are within jurisdiction of Polda Metro Jaya. “Or I can ask directly to the parties that involved in the incident, for example the organizer or person in charge of the event,” he said. The firm answer comes from the journalist of *liputan6.com* who said that he will verify the incident based on eye sight, crosscheck, source’s interview and avoid speculation.

The reporter of *republika.co.id* said that he will verify the event by visiting the location or do the confirmation to related parties. For example, when he heard that there was a participant of the event who died, journalists directly check the information, who is he/she, visiting his/her house or family as well as ask the police for the confirmation. “I think; this is a basic (principle). we do a coordination about who will contact sources to verify the info. Of course, sometimes we share info with other journalists too,” he said.

In regard to the question about failure to seek a confirmation and verification of the truth, the journalist from *republika.co.id* said that he will not published information without confirmation. The journalist from *liputan6.com* said that he keeps digging the information and checking while he is waiting for the sources. This is similar to the journalist from *detik.com* who claims that he will wait for the confirmation from the authorities. Unless, he added, he could go to the scene immediately and asked the witness about what was happening even though they have not got confirmation from the authorities.

Related to their opinions about news stories that are published without verification on behalf of the speed of the news, all journalists agreed that news stories need to be verified before publishing. The reporter of *republika.co.id* said that a verification can be what they see, listen, feel or even ask to the sources. “It is rarely or (I) never met journalists that did not do a verification before they publish news stories,” he said. However, according to Meier” the complexity of a news story can be at the failure of clarity—and vice versa. He added that “journalist who sees it as their role to act as an investigative reporter will not always attach a high degree of balance [8].

The journalist of *detik.com* admits that the practice is not always in accordance with the rules. He said that he should wait for the confirmation. “Even though we have to send news rapidly but we have to do a confirmation to the authorities,” he claimed. In line with the two other journalists, the reporter of *liputan6.com* said that every online media has its “gatekeeper”

so that it will be difficult to publish news stories without confirmation. According to Carlson, as the gatekeeper, journalist doing the professional judgment in which decisions of newsworthiness are made on behalf of audiences but also made without direct audience involvement [9].

IV. DISCUSSION

The nine elements of journalism are a guidance for journalists to do their job when collecting and publishing news stories from the society. According to Kovach and Rosenstiel [1], the first obligation of journalist is to tell the truth. It means that journalist should publish news stories based on the truth, not a speculation or a fake information. Based the research of Muchtar et. al, in most of the Muslim-majority countries, journalists highly emphasized the ideas of reporting things “as they are” and acting as a detached observer [10].

Based on interviews with journalists from *liputan6.com*, *detik.com* and *republika.co.id*, it can be seen that they are realize that they should apply this element in every news story that they covered and published, including when they covered the event of 212 reunion in Monas, Jakarta. Even though they have different meaning about the truth in the event of 212 reunion.

The journalist of *detik.com* said that the truth of coverage is anything that happened in the 212 reunion. Therefore, he was not making it up and writing the news without any personal opinions. Is it accordance with the idea of Meier who said that there are three central tasks to create what is called as “qualified journalism” [8]. One of them stated that “*Journalism* should inform as truthfully, comprehensively, and diversely as possible in order to enable us to obtain an accurate picture of what is happening in society [8]”. The reporter of *republika.co.id* added that the action of 212 reunion is a constitutional rights even though he also recognizes that there is a “political scent” when Prabowo Subianto was there at that time. The view of this journalist can be accepted based on the idea of Muchtar et. al who said that in regards to objectivity, impartiality, and detachment norms it perhaps not always be fully enacted in practice since they probably clash with other professional norms or the reality in the field [10].

The journalist from *liputan6.com* stressed the situation in the field as the way to portray the truth. After observation of the event, he then conducted the interviews and checked the accuracy of the information. He said that the portray of the truth means it does not use a speculation language. This is in accordance with Russial who said that without accuracy and clarity, the report is a waste of time [3].

While based on the idea of Budiardjo, to implement the values of democracy there are five pillars of democracy [11], namely (1) the responsible government; (2) legislative that become a representation of people in the society; (3) organization that involved one or more political parties; (4) press and mass media that free to express opinions; (5) The autonomous justice system that ensure the rights of people. As a part of the democracy pillars, journalists have responsibilities to run the values of democracy. Even though the journalists have different views about the urgency of the event of 212

reunion, they try to display the truly portray of the truth in their news stories about the event.

In the idea of Sumadiria, objectivity is ethics and morality value that must be held fast by newspaper or media in attempting its journalism profession [12]. Various ways of displaying the truth has been done by the journalists. The journalist of *detik.com* emphasizes that there is no opinion in his news stories. That is what he understands about the truth. In addition, scholars accept that reporting news is not the same as expressing an opinion since the primary of news is to inform while the main aim of opinion writers to persuade [13].

One of the functions of the media is educate people about meaning and fact's significance. According to Mc Nair, the function of education is to protect the objectivity of journalist. In their role as an educator, journalists are assumed to be neutral from the problems that be analyzed related to the event of 212 reunion [14].

Based on the idea of Kovach and Rosenstiel the truth is difficult to be explained which to some extent is confusing [1]. They underline that rather than rushing to add context and interpretation, journalists should focus on a synthesis and a verification [1]. "Verification and synthesis become a backbone of a new duty of gatekeeper that is played by the journalists who is a 'messenger of something that make sense' [1].

The journalist of *republika.co.id* believes that a portray of the truth in the event of 212 reunion is a constitutional rights. A democratic country should open to the freedom of expression. The reunion of 212 is one of types of openness in voicing opinion in Indonesia. In Indonesia, the meaning of constitutional rights is the rights that is protected by the nation. While according to Bisariyadi human rights that is listed in the constitution is called as constitutional rights and one of the function of constitution is as "guardian of fundamental rights [15]. Therefore, inclusion of the human rights in the constitution of a country has an important meaning to create a balance between the power of the state and the rights of the people [15].

In addition, Palguna said that constitutional rights has a domestic scope that applies a positive law in a country [15]. In Indonesia, there is a law that protect the freedom of delivering opinions in public: Laws of Republic of Indonesia number 9 of 1998. Furthermore, in the 1945 constitution in article of 28E, it says that everyone has a right to freedom of association, assembly and expression.

On the other hand, the reporter of *liputan6.com* pays a special attention to the situation in the scene where the event is happening. He said that what is seen and happened in the venue is what must be reported. This is agreed with the idea of Sumadiria who said that a good newspaper (or media) must be able to present what is factually appropriate as it is [12]. The journalist said that reporter cannot make a speculation or an assumption.

However, in the idea of Russial, readers of the news have to forget about objectivity and need to focus on the fairness, clarity and accuracy in news reporting. "Fairness means

treating credible opposing viewpoints with respect. Without fairness, the news simply is propaganda [3].

V. CONCLUSION

The journalists from three online media believe that reunion of 212 is the event that has news values so that they published it on their media. Even though their personal opinions are different but they uphold journalistic principles when they are working and reporting news articles. They see that the truth is the action that is happening in the field. They also tried to avoid speculation in gathering and collecting information for the news article. It means that all of the journalists agreed that the truth is very important to be delivered to their audiences. This belief push them to do a confirmation when they heard an information for the first time. They tried their best to gain a confirmation and verification.

Based on this research, journalists of three online media in Indonesia believe that they should publish news articles based on the fact in the area of coverage. They are also implements the basic of writing news articles about check and re-check before publishing news articles in their media.

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