

# The Role of Online Media Gatekeeper in the Era of Digital Media

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**Abstract**— In the era of digital media, information spreads so fast. Sometimes the information cannot be confirmed, which results in confusion. The mainstream media in this case online media with its characteristics can play a role in clarifying information confusion. But online media joined the confusion due to the pressure of the media industry competition. Even though people who work in the online media editor have professional ethics. In this paper, we will examine how online media journalists who act as gatekeepers interpret the role of the journalist profession that has an impact on society. The verification process as part of the journalistic routine process is believed to reduce information confusion. With reference to the element of journalism from Bill Kovach and professional ethics of journalists, this research will conduct interviews with online media journalists who act as gatekeepers.

**Keywords:** gatekeeper, digital media, online media, journalist ethic

## I. INTRODUCTION

The online media newsroom in Indonesia has experienced changes in its daily activities. By the 2000s, online media only presented what had been presented in print media such as newspapers and magazines. At that time online media tends to be static and rigid. In its development, online media editors in Indonesia found their character by providing fast and dynamic information.

Speed makes gatekeepers who decide whether a news is suitable or not for the public, work fast with their news judgment capabilities. Their experience in dealing with various situations sharpens their instincts in evaluating news. Therefore, those who become gatekeepers are those who have experienced at least five years as journalists.

Today's technology also makes information no longer only produced by the newsroom. Increasingly widespread social media makes news can be produced by anyone. Citizen journalism is aspired to be able to empower people in recovery and care for their environment, and reduce the news monopoly by certain business groups. But lately, information has become so much in every direction. Sometimes this information still needs to be verified and incorrect or often called a hoax. Moreover, the news produced by citizen journalism does not meet accepted journalistic standards or principles.

Algorithm innovation in the dissemination of news content on social media makes the role of gatekeeper marginalized. Because the algorithm can direct and recommend content to

the audience. This leads to robotic journalism which reduces the role of humans in journalism.

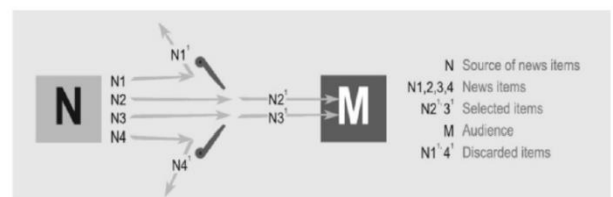
Therefore, this study will examine the role of gatekeepers in online media in Indonesia in the current digital era. This is expected to clarify how the gatekeepers should take a position so that it remains necessary and has principles in the flow of technological impact.

Many news rooms in online media use analytic data in determining editorial decisions. In recent years news organizations around the world have used analytics [1]. The purpose of using analytics by editors is to increase the amount of audience or traffic on their news sites [2].

## II. GATEKEEPER AND ANALYTICS

### A. Gatekeeper

The term gatekeeper was first discovered by social psychologist Kurt Lewin in his publication: Forces Behind Food Habits and Methods of Change. Then the term gatekeeper was taken by David Manning White for journalistic studies. White examines how an editor in a local newspaper press sorts and chooses which news is covered and which ones are not. White found that the news presentation in the newspaper media was greatly influenced by the editors' decision.

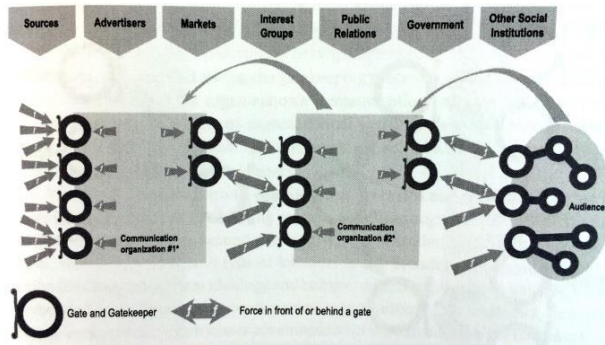


Source: McQuail and Windahl (1981, 100)

There are five levels of micro and macro influence on gatekeepers, arguing that gatekeepers no longer occur in one part of the gatekeeper process but in all parts. The first level focuses on individual communicator factors (for example, personal background, experience, attitudes, beliefs, etc.). The second level is media routines (for example, audience orientation, newsroom routines). The third level of organizational influence (for example, internal structure, ownership, goals, and policies). Extrinsic strengths or extra media factors for media organizations are the fourth level (eg

sources, advertisers, viewers, government control, market competition, technology). The last level is media ideology. [3]

In addition, the audience can directly give effect to the construction of news produced by the newsroom. Audience responses can be filters that shape the news, such as criticism or boycott threats that can "discipline" the media [4]. But indirectly the audience can also have an influence, such as when journalists are oriented to present what they think the audience wants, even though this estimate may not be in line with the audience's actual wishes. This orientation to the audience is an example of routine-level influence [5].



Source: Shoemaker and Vos (2009, 113).

Furthermore, with the presence of social media, gatekeepers in the online media newsroom are also affected by what is happening on social media. The media industry, which is currently under increasing competitive pressure, needs an audience engagement. Therefore, market-oriented news rooms cannot avoid responding to trends in social media. The faster they respond to what is happening on social media, the more likely they are to get an engagement from the audience. Vice versa, if they are slow to respond to what is happening on social media, then there will be less audience response to the media. [6]

**B. Analytic**

In recent years web analytics has become part of the online media newsroom, because with this the journalists have become more aware of how readers interact through computers or applications on their devices. This analytic process automatically records aspects of user behavior and then combines and converts behavior into data that can be analyzed.

There are two interrelated factors that drive the emergence of analytics as a form of audience understanding: (1) technological change that changes the dynamics of media consumption; and (2) technological changes that facilitate the collection of new forms of information about media audiences.

With regard to the first process, the contemporary media environment is characterized by audience fragmentation and autonomy. That is, currently there are various large content delivery platforms that are constantly evolving (inter-media fragmentation), resulting in content separation (intra-media fragmentation) and audience attention diffusion (audience fragmentation). In addition, the audience now has more control over when, where and how they consume the media and have greater capacity to produce their own content at

marginal costs (audience autonomy), so give them many choices.

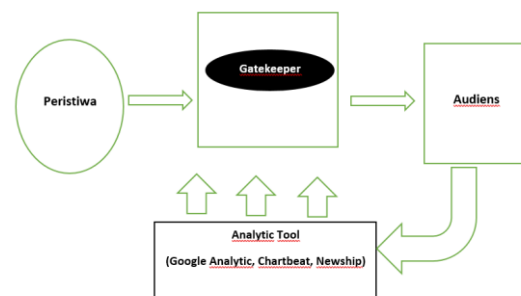
This shift in fragmentation and autonomy has created significant challenges for traditional audience information systems - that is, data collection and feedback mechanisms used by the media industry and advertisers not only to measure audience exposure to media content, but also to predict content preferences and consumption patterns, target content to specific audience segments, and gather information about audience reactions and behavioral responses to content[7].

Audience or public participation in determining important decisions has indeed developed in various fields. Not only in terms of determining the content, but also in strategic policies to build society. Because the measured and recorded community responses become an alternative reference for taking appropriate policies [8].

Online media in Indonesia make data analytics a reference for their newsroom policies. According to the chairman of the Siber Indonesia Media Association (AMSI), Rikardo Somba, there are several online media that are still trying to prepare a media agenda, but still refer to analytics.

In Tribunnews online media in Indonesia, every assistant editor in charge who plays a role in selecting the news presented by his readers cannot be separated from what is in demand by the audience. The data available in Google Analytics shows what is becoming the target audience interest of Tribunnews. If the topic is less desirable, the editorial assistant will not choose the topic to be news. And vice versa, the assistant editor can make a topic into ongoing news. Because the topic is very popular with the public, the assistant editor can make the news of the topic in various angles which give birth to more than five to ten news. Not much different from detiknews who also always see google analytics, and chartbeat. The editorial assistant team along with the managing editor will see what the trend is to choose the topic to be made into the news. Tribunnews newsroom in the city of Solo in Central Java and Detiknews in Jakarta, it appears that the crew of tribunnews and detiknews seemed to be dependent on data presented by applications such as google analytics and beat charts. This raises the question, whether the editorial crew who journalists are do not have a subjective attitude and are too passive depending on the numbers on google analytics and chartbeat in presenting the news.

**Analytic Process in Online media**



Not only on online news sites that present 'hardnews'. On an online news site that does not have a different character from Detik and Tribunnews namely Brillio, who have a millennial generation target audience they present news content that is lightweight and interesting for millennials. To

support this effort, they also put forward editorial analytics, in determining the content to be presented. The editorial assistants even though they have a content plan to be presented, but all of that refers to data analytics. Every early week the editorial assistants who will upload content to the reader, must explain it to the editorial meeting about the planned topic of their writing. But the writing plan must still refer to what and how the topics that are attracting public attention, especially millennials. The chief editors at Brillio have complete data on who their readers are headed for, because tools such as analytics and chartbeat can find out the age at which they click on their news and share it on social media.[9].

### III. JOURNALISM ETHIC

As a professional, journalists have the ability to carry out their work well. He is bound to the rules in terms of journalistic ethics. In Indonesia there is a journalistic code of ethics which has also been regulating and maintaining journalists to remain professional. Ethical standards for journalists in Indonesia are in the journalistic code of ethics created by the Indonesian Press Council.

In their book *The Elements of Journalism*, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel identify the essential principles and practices of journalism. There are: 1) Journalism's first obligation is the truth; 2) Its first loyalty is to citizens; 3) Its essence is a 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 keep the significant interesting and relevant; 8) It must keep the news comprehensive and proportional; 9). Its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience; 10) Citizens, too, have rights and responsibilities when it comes to the news [9]. The journalism elements of Kovach and Rosenstiel seem to remind journalism how the role should be in society. Starting from the problem of media ownership that intervenes in the editorial room, to market pressure makes journalists lose their proper role.

Journalist autonomy is the power of journalists and journalistic organizations that allows them to present their interpretation of reality as accurate, correct and politically important. Autonomy was divided into three categories, namely; operational, allocative and administrative. Operational autonomy is operationalized as journalists' freedom in their work and do they feel themselves free to write or discuss whatever they feel right. Allocative autonomy is conceptualized as to what extent journalists are given the share to of a total amount in the development of their organization. Do they think they are playing any role in determining the strategic goals of their organizations? While administrative autonomy is related to the arrangements and work which is needed to control the operation of a plan or organization. Whether they need to follow any administrative instructions while planning coverage of any event [10].

Reich and Hanitzsch find autonomy to be restricted on two levels – one external and one internal. The external dimension is related to coercive forces restricting the political autonomy of the news organization, including policy, state censorship, legislation and regulation. Internal restrictions relate to journalists' freedom to make decisions free from management

pressures, commercial factors and forces inside the news environment. As individual and organizational autonomy are interrelated concepts, separating the two levels is no easy task. [11]

The increasingly fierce competition between the media in Indonesia has made journalists and their news spaces carried by market currents. The gatekeepers always make analytic references in determining the news to be presented to readers. As a result, gatekeepers have fewer and fewer areas of journalist autonomy.

It could be that journalists are not aware of the journalists' autonomy they have. Because the journalists who enter the media companies lately are also young people or fresh graduates from schools who do not know how traditional journalism works like the print media newsroom.

### IV. CONCLUSION

Nowadays the gatekeeper of online media who determines the news, is entering a transformation to face changes in existing technology. Nevertheless, the important gatekeeper war is still awaited because of the rampant information revised by the Gatekeeper online media which has an important role in shaping public opinion. But market appetite pressures are coming through analytic practices in the online media newsroom.

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