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Fajar.co.id Political Reporting: A Study on Editorial Policy Related to the Makassar Mayoral Election

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ABSTRACT

This research explore Fajar.co.id's editorial policies and editorial management process in political reporting, particularly concerning the 2020 Makassar Mayoral Election. This research uses an inductive qualitative analysis. Inductive analysis is an approach that begins with field facts, analyzes them based on relevant theories and arguments, and ultimately yields a conclusion. The results show that Fajar.co.id's editorial policy in reporting the 2020 Makassar Mayoral Election prioritizes newsworthiness by ensuring each published news piece is widely discussed, offers interesting perspectives, and uses language easily understood by a broad spectrum of society from various backgrounds. The applied editorial management demonstrates that content control occurs in the initial writing phase, with editors playing a crucial role in editing and gatekeeping functions. Although published news becomes public domain, the editorial team remains responsible for ensuring the accuracy and integrity of content by correcting writing errors without altering the news substance. Therefore, it is recommended that Fajar.co.id's editors and reporters continue honing their abilities in identifying and processing issues with high news value and social relevance while maintaining a balance between commercially appealing news and the importance of information for public interest. Fajar.co.id must keep its motto 'wisdom on the unbiased line'. Furthermore, the importance of ongoing training in language skills enhancement to communicate news effectively to a diverse reader while ensuring that every presented news piece adheres to ethical journalism principles is emphasized. Additionally, the already robust control and gatekeeping system should continue to be strengthened to ensure any factual or linguistic errors can be promptly corrected without altering the essence of the news, to uphold and enhance Fajar.co.id's credibility as a responsible and reliable news media.

Keywords: Editorial Policy; Election; News; Political Reporting.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is ranked the world's third-largest democracy, a prestigious position behind India and the United States. This global status signifies a governance system and reflects the complex and diverse social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics (Arafat et al., 2022). Independent journalism in democracies like Indonesia is a vital element of democracy's foundation, serving as the fourth pillar that upholds transparency and accountability in national life (Sulistiorini, 2018).

Journalism involves many media, including print, television, radio, and the internet, as a crucial channel for information, education, and entertainment (Hwan & Ung, 2018). In a democratic framework, journalism's responsibility is to provide the public with accurate, verified, and relevant information (Benson, 2018). Hence, all news must adhere to strict journalistic standards, ensuring reliability and usefulness to the readers.

Especially around and during election periods, news becomes more central in the national political landscape. Given the broad implications of political decisions on various life aspects, the public tends to focus more on political news. Here, the media acts as a bridge between citizens and the political world, ensuring information about the democratic process, candidates, policies, and election results is accessible to all (Russmann, 2021). In various forms and channels, media is crucial in educating and mobilizing public participation in democratic life (Moeller et al., 2018).

As a critical element in journalism, news is crucial in delivering open and current information to the readers. Print and digital newspapers act as a bridge between societal events and public understanding. The variety of news topics reflects the diversity of public interests and information needs. With all its variations, the evolution of media responds to the dynamics and complexities of modern society, where current information is indispensable (Mannell & Smith, 2022).

Mass media plays a critical role as a mass communication tool with a broad impact on societal life. Mass media is an inseparable part of daily life in the information era. Mass media is one of the most effective means of disseminating information and connecting communicators and audiences across various platforms (Pevac, 2022). Its ability to shape public opinion and influence perceptions makes it a significant social force (David, 2022).

The link between media and politics is a long-standing, evolving phenomenon. In this context, mass media plays a strategic role in a country's political landscape. Media reports political events and significantly influences political processes, raising politicians' profiles, shaping political narratives, and even affecting election outcomes, making it a crucial pillar in modern democracy (Stier et al., 2018).

Political reporting is particularly significant in the mass media ecosystem during local elections, such as the Makassar Mayoral Election. Fajar.co.id, a leading news corporation outside Java, has committed to diverse and in-depth political coverage, including the Makassar Mayoral Election. This site highlights the positive aspects of candidates and their campaigns and dares to illuminate the political dynamics, including potential biases or partiality in the election process.

The involvement of major political parties in the Makassar Mayoral Election underscores the event's significance in the local political arena (Alfarizi, 2020; Mirsan, 2020a). With a strong presence in Eastern Indonesia and a history dating back to 17 December 1996, Fajar.co.id has become a crucial information source, particularly for political news. Operating under PT Media Fajar Koran and headquartered in Makassar, South Sulawesi, this media has become the go-to source for accurate and current local political information.

Furthermore, Fajar.co.id (2022) has positioned itself as a responsive media platform to local political dynamics by dedicating a special section to political news. It includes comprehensive coverage of the Makassar Mayoral Election on 9 December 2020, covering various aspects, from the alleged partiality of the Governor of South Sulawesi to political party strategies and coalitions (Mirsan, 2020b; Nursam, 2020). Fajar.co.id's comprehensive and critical reporting not only enriches public discourse on local elections but also highlights the vital role of mass media in supporting a transparent and accountable democratic process.

Based on the description above, this research aims to explore Fajar.co.id's editorial policies and editorial management process in political reporting, particularly concerning the 2020 Makassar Mayoral Election. It seeks to understand how Fajar.co.id, a leading news media in Eastern Indonesia, manages its content in a dynamic local political context. The findings are expected to provide new insights into political journalism practices in Indonesia, especially during major political events like local elections, and contribute to developing media and communication studies in Indonesia.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach to understand groups of people, objects, situations, conditions, ongoing events, and even thought systems (Whitney, 1960). This research was conducted at the Media Fajar.co.id office in Makassar City. This research utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Data was collected through interviews with key informants, field observations, literature study techniques, and document analysis concerning the editorial policies related to political reporting. The acquired data was then analyzed using inductive qualitative analysis. Inductive analysis is an approach that begins with field facts, analyzes them based on relevant theories and arguments, and ultimately yields a conclusion (Neuman, 2003).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fajar.co.id's editorial policy for the 2020 Makassar Mayoral Election plays a crucial role in determining the content presented, aiming to ensure that the news reports events and addresses phenomena responsibly. Essentially, the editorial stance, reflected through editorials, illustrates how the media responds to various events (Ahmad et al., 2020). This reinforces Fajar.co.id's identity as part of Harian Fajar and distinguishes it from other media in handling the same issues.

In plurality, Fajar.co.id strives to present information encompassing multiple perspectives, aiming to respect and represent the interests of all societal layers. This effort reflects Fajar.co.id's commitment to maintaining the diversity of views and avoiding unnecessary bias or partisanship. This policy enriches the existing discourse and strengthens Fajar.co.id's credibility as a reliable information source.

Fajar.co.id ensures its reporting is informative and inclusive by adhering to its established editorial policy. This is vital, especially in the Makassar Mayoral Election, where the rapidly changing political dynamics require careful and balanced news handling. This editorial policy serves as the foundation for navigating the complexities of reporting, ensuring that each piece of news not only presents facts but also supports the creation of a more democratic and pluralistic society (Eldridge, 2020). In this regard, Edy Arsyad states:¹

¹Interview Results with the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Fajar.co.id, Edy Arsyad, on October 15, 2021.

“Editorial policy is indeed essential. We must remain independent. Our motto is ‘Wisdom on the Unbiased Line,’ so accepting envelopes is off-limits. We maintain plurality by ensuring independence and professional integrity. We also always verify to ensure that the news reaching our readers is credible and not a hoax. Thus, we strive for wisdom on the unbiased line.”

Endra Mardhani adds:²

“As a media outlet, we must maintain balance; we cannot show favoritism towards any party or individual. It is crucial to emphasize non-partisanship to maintain media independence.”

In Fajar.co.id’s organizational structure, the Executive Board plays a crucial role in shaping editorial policy. This board includes key players such as the Editor-in-Chief, Coordinator (Deputy Editor-in-Chief), and Editors. Each member has an equal vote in discussing and deciding on issues covered in the news (Mahar, 2017). This democratic mechanism ensures that every decision reflects a collective agreement rather than the dominance of any individual.

Fajar.co.id conducts two editorial meetings: weekly and daily meetings specific to each channel. This process demonstrates Fajar.co.id’s systematic and structured approach to managing news dynamics. Before meetings, the audience development team plays a vital role by presenting trending issues on social media and Google. This illustrates the application of gatekeeping theory, where the editorial acts as a ‘gatekeeper’, selecting information before presenting it to the public (Jahng et al., 2020).

After prioritizing issues in meetings, reporters are tasked with further investigation. This approach exemplifies investigative journalism, emphasizing in-depth fact-finding to produce quality reporting (Cancela, 2021). Edy Arsyad comments:³

“It always starts with planning. Each channel presents the issues it plans to develop. The editor-in-chief and I also provide advice and consideration. Once agreed upon in the meeting, reporters are immediately assigned to execute. We also look at Google Analytics to see what issues are trending so we can develop them.”

In the news development process, Fajar.co.id reaffirms its commitment to solid journalistic principles by applying the 5W+1H elements (Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How). This approach is a fundamental journalism foundation, aiming to provide comprehensive and informative news to readers (Wölker & Powell, 2018). Applying these principles ensures that every presented news piece has undergone verification and editing to cover all essential aspects of an event.

Emailing news from reporters to the editorial team demonstrates an organized and efficient workflow. Once the news is received, the channel editor is responsible for editing and processing it to meet journalistic standards and Fajar.co.id’s editorial

²Interview Results with the Political Channel Editor of Fajar.co.id, Endra Mardhani, on October 15, 2021.

³Interview Results with the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Fajar.co.id, Edy Arsyad, on October 15, 2021.

policy. This process underscores the importance of editors in maintaining the quality of news presented to the public, avoiding disseminating incorrect or biased information (Tunney et al., 2021). Endra Mardhani explains:⁴

“Our news presentation and development strategy vary. Using language easily understood by readers from different backgrounds is one of them. We always follow up on every published piece of news. News obtained from the field is sent to Fajar.co.id’s email; then, it is sent to each channel editor for editing before publication. So, it is not clickbait, and it is not opinionated. Simply put, that is how it works.”

On the other hand, Ahmad Rif’an Muzaqi reveals:⁵

“There are indeed instructions from the editorial team, but they are flexible. Rarely are there instructions like ‘It has to be this way or that.’ Those in the field are also given room to innovate and create. If we find an interesting issue, we send it to the editorial team. If it is interesting, it will be published; otherwise, it will not. It is as simple as that.”

In Fajar.co.id’s Political channel reporting, the individual factors of those involved in the news editing process significantly impact the news content. Personal aspects such as age, gender, education, and experience contribute to the diversity of perspectives in the editorial process (Kibbe & Freischlag, 2021). This diversification is crucial as it enriches news content with various viewpoints, enhancing its appeal to broad readers. This diversity aligns with the social construction theory, which posits that media reality results from social interactions within the editorial environment, including the diverse backgrounds of its personnel.

Additionally, this diversity reflects the implementation of inclusive journalism practices, where diversity within the editorial team is an asset in telling richer and more in-depth stories. It allows Fajar.co.id to present news that is not only balanced but also encompasses various perspectives that might not emerge in more homogenous narratives. Furthermore, this approach strengthens Fajar.co.id’s legitimacy and credibility as a political information source. By recognizing and leveraging internal diversity, Fajar.co.id can navigate the complexities of political reporting more effectively, especially in dynamic political contexts like the Makassar Mayoral Election. In this context, Ahmad Rif’an Muzaqi states:⁶

“The backgrounds of our personnel certainly influence; it is inevitable. For instance, personal experiences and education shape our mindset and view of issues.”

Regarding the role of individuals, Endra Mardhani explains:⁷

⁴Interview Results with the Political Channel Editor of Fajar.co.id, Endra Mardhani, on October 15, 2021.

⁵Interview Results with the Political Channel Reporter of Fajar.co.id, Ahmad Rif’an Muzaqi, on October 16, 2021.

⁶Interview Results with the Political Channel Reporter of Fajar.co.id, Ahmad Rif’an Muzaqi, on October 16, 2021.

⁷Interview Results with the Political Channel Editor of Fajar.co.id, Endra Mardhani, on October 15, 2021.

"It is more about understanding an issue. For example, law graduates can more easily grasp legal technicalities. We strive to ensure that each published news piece is scholarly and focused on facts."

Managing political news, especially concerning the 2020 Makassar Mayoral Election by Fajar.co.id, follows the same standard stages as other news, from issue proposals by reporters to editors' writing and editing stages (Marua, 2021). This initial phase emphasizes the importance of reporters' initiative in determining the relevance of issues to be covered, which will then be discussed with editors to formulate coverage plans. This step reflects the application of gatekeeping theory, where editors act as gatekeepers, ensuring that only news that meets specific criteria passes the selection process for publication.

In the data collection phase, reporters gather information from the field, a crucial step in ensuring news accuracy and depth. This effort aligns with investigative journalism principles, where deep data and fact searches are conducted to produce credible and informative news (Jolley, 2017). Once data is collected, the news is written and sent to editors responsible for further editing and gatekeeping, ensuring the published news is accurate, high-quality, and complies with Fajar.co.id's editorial policy.

The context of political reporting, especially during the Makassar Mayoral Election, shows a high potential for controversy and societal division (Arsyad, 2020). This situation is complicated by the presence of candidates' campaign teams and political party support, often mobilizing their structures and resources to back their candidates. In this context, Fajar.co.id distinguishes itself from other media through an editorial policy committed to comprehensive and objective reporting and reporters' creativity in covering news from various perspectives. Supported by using photos and videos, this approach enhances the informative and aesthetic value of the presented news. It demonstrates Fajar.co.id's commitment to delivering news that educates and enriches public understanding of local political dynamics. In this regard, Edy Arsyad states:⁸

"The work process here might be similar to other media, but Fajar's editorial policy distinguishes it. We are committed to independence and wisdom in every step of reporting. We verify every piece of incoming data rigorously to ensure information accuracy. We always strive to provide our readers with the latest and most accurate information. We do not side with any group or political party, with the primary goal of championing and safeguarding public interests. Once the news is published, it becomes public property, emphasizing our responsibility in presenting news."

In presenting news about the 2020 Makassar Mayoral Election by Fajar.co.id, reporters face challenges, one of which is the difference in perspective between reporters and editors on what is considered necessary in a news piece. This difference

⁸Interview Results with the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Fajar.co.id, Edy Arsyad, on October 15, 2021.

reflects internal dynamics within the editorial team that can affect the quality and focus of the presented news. The approach of social constructionism theory can be applied in this context, where reality is formed through social interactions, including between reporters and editors (Ivask, 2019). It shows that news-making is not merely about conveying facts but also involves negotiations and interpretations of what is deemed relevant and essential to the readers (Muzakkir, 2015).

Another challenge is the difficulty in interviewing sources, a significant hurdle in journalism, especially in sensitive political contexts like the Makassar Mayoral Election. This difficulty can result from various factors, such as limited access, sources' reticence, or tense political situations (Lecheler & Vreese, 2017). In this regard, Ahmad Rif'an Muzaqi says:⁹

"As journalists, sometimes what we consider essential is deemed not so by editors. Another challenge I face is the difficulty in interviewing sources editors believe we must interview. Those are the main challenges."

In political reporting, understanding the target reader receives special attention. Generally, the Makassar community, the electorate in this election, and the political parties and campaign teams of various candidates are the main groups targeted by the reporting. This approach emphasizes the need for relevant information to those directly involved and affected by the election results. However, Endra Mardhani states:¹⁰

"We target all segments of Indonesian society. Thus, this reporting is not only for the Makassar community."

The Political Channel Editor at Fajar.co.id extends its target readers' reach to encompass all Indonesian citizens, given that elections are events with broad relevance and impact on the public interest. This approach aligns with democratic principles, where local elections are essential for residents and the nation as a whole, as they can reflect broader political and social trends in society (Romdani, 2021). It demonstrates that Fajar.co.id adopts a more inclusive and holistic view in defining its reader, reflecting a commitment to responsible and insightful reporting.

The concept of the public sphere is a theoretical approach to discussing this issue. The public sphere is an area within social life where individuals can come together and collectively discuss societal issues, thereby influencing public opinion and public policy (Habermas, 2006). In this context, Fajar.co.id contributes to forming a healthy public sphere by ensuring that political reporting is focused on local voters and reaches a broader reader, allowing for more involvement in democratic discussions.

On the other hand, each piece of news creates an impact based on its priorities and focus in presentation. The main goal of reporting is not to achieve company

⁹Interview Results with the Political Channel Reporter of Fajar.co.id, Ahmad Rif'an Muzaqi, on October 16, 2021.

¹⁰Interview Results with the Political Channel Editor of Fajar.co.id, Endra Mardhani, on October 15, 2021.

earnings from published news. In this regard, Edy Arsyad states:¹¹

“Indeed, the impact is significant, as this is a democratic event. However, we work for the public. We are not overly concerned with how much revenue it generates. We focus on the extent to which the issue is of public importance. As much as possible, we provide balance in reporting. Of course, there are opinions from the advertising perspective, but our primary focus is on maintaining public interest and plurality. As I have mentioned before, Fajar is here for the public.”

The emphasis is on creating balance in reporting and ensuring the issues raised are relevant and significant to the public (Rahmalia & Muzakkir, 2022). This approach reaffirms Fajar.co.id’s commitment to responsible journalism principles, where news integrity and objectivity are prioritized over financial gains. Regarding the aspects of ideology, politics, and business in editorial policy, Ahmad Rif’an Muzaqi states:¹²

“From an ideological aspect, election-related political reporting aims for social justice. There is no political aspect. As for the business aspect, journalists do not handle that. In the field, we focus solely on delivering quality news.”

Reporters emphasize that their focus is primarily on producing high-quality news that prioritizes aspects of ideology, politics, and business in the context of editorial policy (Hidayah et al., 2022). Reporters are oriented towards work that produces informative news and contributes to social justice, especially in elections-related political reporting. This approach reflects the reporters’ dedication to journalism values, prioritizing in-depth reporting that positively impacts society.

This difference in focus between editors and reporters creates an exciting dynamic in Fajar.co.id’s reporting process, where both strive to present news that is not only commercially appealing but also significant from social and political viewpoints. The editors’ approach prioritizes balance and public relevance, along with reporters’ focus on news quality and social impact, collectively demonstrates Fajar.co.id’s commitment to ethical and responsible reporting, especially in the sensitive and impactful context of election reporting.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that Fajar.co.id’s editorial policy in reporting the 2020 Makassar Mayoral Election prioritizes newsworthiness by ensuring each published news piece is widely discussed, offers interesting perspectives, and uses language easily understood by a broad spectrum of society from various backgrounds. This approach is consistent across all news channels, affirming Fajar.co.id’s commitment to presenting factual, credible, relevant news and accommodating public interests. The applied editorial management demonstrates that content control occurs in the initial writing phase, with editors playing a crucial

¹¹Interview Results with the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Fajar.co.id, Edy Arsyad, on October 15, 2021.

¹²Interview Results with the Political Channel Reporter of Fajar.co.id, Ahmad Rif’an Muzaqi, on October 16, 2021.

role in editing and gatekeeping functions. Although published news becomes public domain, the editorial team remains responsible for ensuring the accuracy and integrity of content by correcting writing errors without altering the news substance, maintaining the media's credibility and capacity to adapt and compete.

Based on the above conclusions, it is recommended that Fajar.co.id's editors and reporters continue honing their abilities in identifying and processing issues with high news value and social relevance while maintaining a balance between commercially appealing news and the importance of information for public interest. Fajar.co.id must keep its motto 'wisdom on the unbiased line'. Furthermore, the importance of ongoing training in language skills enhancement to communicate news effectively to a diverse reader while ensuring that every presented news piece adheres to ethical journalism principles is emphasized. Additionally, the already robust control and gatekeeping system should continue to be strengthened to ensure any factual or linguistic errors can be promptly corrected without altering the essence of the news, to uphold and enhance Fajar.co.id's credibility as a responsible and reliable news media.

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