

# INDEPENDENCE OF REPORTING ON PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES IN INDONESIAN MEDIA

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# INDEPENDENCE OF REPORTING ON PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES IN INDONESIAN MEDIA

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## Abstract

*The independence of the mass media in Indonesia, especially in reporting on political issues of power such as the General Election, has raised concerns that could threaten democratic life. Especially the mass media are considered to have significant power to construct the reader's mind about the ideal leader character for Indonesia. In this case, the news regarding the two pairs of presidential candidates in the Presidential debate which took place in 2019 and was held in five stages. The purpose of this study is to find out and understand how much the independence bias in Media Indonesia is on the reporting of the Presidential debate. This article uses qualitative research methods. The analytical approach in research uses the construction of the top with the text as its object namely Koran Media Indonesia. To see whether Media Indonesia is neutral or not, then the McQuail neutrality aspect is used based on the category of Personalization, sensationalism / emotionalism, stereotypes, juxtaposition/circle and accuracy. The result showed that the Media Indonesia newspaper is not yet objective in reporting the Presidential debate. The Indonesian Media was clearly at the forefront to defend the interests of the incumbent. Media Indonesia has become an influential discourse in leading public opinion to provide support candidate pairs of Jokowi-Amin. This is seen from a number of indicators used in research, namely personalization, sensationalism / emotionalism, stereotypes, juxtaposition / linkages and the last is accuracy. As a note that the linkages elements in this study were not found.*

**Key Words :** Independence, Mass Media, Presidential Candidates.

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## INTRODUCTION

Media dominates everyday life as a foreground that is always present to seduce attention. The media participate in educating to know how we should behave, because almost every aspect of human life is always related to mass communication activities. The mass media is the fourth pillar of democracy (fourth estate) after the executive, legislature and judiciary. Even the media is seen as having an equal position with God (lord), church (church), or the Lower Council (common) (Darmanto (2015). This confirms that the power of the mass media in disseminating public opinion to the wider community is very calculated.

The notion of mass media is referred to by scientists as a normative concept and also as a functionalist paradigm. Because they only see the mass media from the perspective of conveying information to the public without looking critically at the reality that occurs in editorial autonomy in which there is a conflict of interest.

In the context of disseminating information, the mass media is considered effective in campaigning for a candidate for president or member of the legislature. This is proven by research results, namely that there is a positive relationship between appearing in the mass media and citizens' political decisions in general elections. The research was conducted by the Institute for the Study of Information Flow (ISAI), TIFA, and the Media Development Loan Fund in the 2004 election which shows that the frequency of appearances of politicians in the media is directly proportional to the number of people's votes. Similarly, research by ISAI and TIFA five years later, namely in the 2009 election. The victory of the SBY-JK pair in 2004 and SBY-Boediono in 2009 was motivated by the activity of appearing in the media with the highest number of people. So it could be: political victory begins with victory over the media" Thaniago, Koran Tempo 2013 (Heychael and Dhona, 2014)

Micon (2017) states, one of the important roles of mass media for the community is to provide political education. This should be done because it is believed that the mass media is still the main reference for the community in making choices about potential leaders. Others, the mass media also plays an important role in countering hoax issues built by certain people, because the spread of disinformation on social media is one of the efforts to delegitimize journalism and the mass media itself. With this power, the media plays an important role in the democratization process and can actively participate in controlling the disinformation process that exists in social media and the political system in Indonesia. Therefore, the media as an information tool is indispensable to deliver informative and actual news about political issues, especially the presidential debates.

One of the delivery of information is the debate ahead of the general election for presidential and vice presidential candidates for the 2019 to 2024 term of office. The debate is very important so that the public can see and know the extent of the vision and mission of the two pairs of candidates. Through debate, the public can classify and compare candidates. The debate is also to see the contrast between the candidates with one another. With this scheme, the public knows who is better or more qualified to serve as a leader. According to Thomas

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Holbrook in Febriansyah (2019) conveying the debate will strengthen voter confidence in assessing candidates. Meanwhile, John Alvon (2012) explained that the candidate debate event can be a space for prospective leaders to convey political messages to the public.

However, the independence of the media in conveying information on the candidate debate needs attention. Generally, the independence or freedom of the press is associated with the presence or absence of intervention from outside—the state or other interested parties—media institutions. The independence of the press is the opposite of dependence, which means that it is related to the systemic, political, and hegemonic nature of the state power over the mass media institutions. Siregar et al (2014) stated that the problem of media independence and neutrality lies in the news. Independence and neutrality are actually inseparable because each of the two concepts can be defined. Independence means that in producing media news there is no pressure from any party. Independence means that the media newsroom has complete freedom in producing news. While neutrality is closely related to the results that arise from the process. This can be explained more clearly that neutrality relates to that the media is not impartial in reporting an event.

Referring to a number of opinions stated above, it can be concluded that what is meant by media independence is the condition of being free, without pressure from any party, owned by journalists/editors to produce media content according to their conscience and fully devoted to the public interest for the fulfillment of their rights as citizen. The greater the degree of freedom that journalists/editors have to produce media content according to their conscience to fulfill the public interest, the greater their independence. Vice versa, the lower the degree of freedom of journalists/editors in producing media content due to the environmental conditions of the media organization concerned and due to external environmental conditions such as the social, cultural and political environment, it means that the media concerned is not independent (Wicaksono et al., 2015).

Mass media is a method used to present a picture of the world that is as honest and accurate as possible within the limits of journalistic practice. Meanwhile objectivity in this context relates to news and information (Mranani (2014). Objectivity is one of the requirements for news quality (Juditha, 2013). Simply put, an information can be said to be objective if there can be very clear boundaries between facts and opinions. The element of objectivity will determine whether the news is relevant, so that in turn it can be disseminated to the general public. This is one of the elements or qualifications that a journalist must have and report an issue. Therefore, in order for news to be objective, a journalist must be independent, free from parties who are the sources of coverage (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research uses descriptive qualitative research, which means that there is an effort to elaborate, examine or analyze the bias of independence in reporting on the presidential debates in the Media Indonesia daily newspaper. According to Bogdan and Taylor, this kind of

method is in the form of a descriptive description of the results of the observed data (Moleong, 2010).

The object of this research is the daily news of the Media Indonesia daily newspaper about the presidential debate. The data from this study were obtained from the news on the presidential candidate debates in the Indonesian media daily newspapers, starting from January 16-18, February 16-18, March 16-18, March 29-31 and April 12-14. The focus of the research is on personalization, sensationalism, stereotypes, links/juxtapositions, and accuracy in reporting issues related to the presidential debate in Media Indonesia daily.

Research data were collected by means of documentation, namely records of events that have passed. In testing the credibility of the results, the data were examined in the literature and adjusted to the theories used in this study. Furthermore, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions are the methods used in analyzing the resulting data.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Personalization**

In general, although it has been said many times that the media should be independent, which means free from taking sides, in fact the media still side with one group through their reporting. There are excessive claims made by the media, both positive and negative. It is not uncommon for the media to highlight a person's personality more than the events they report. When we speak this means that we are already talking about one of the elements in the independence of a media institution. The element discussed here is personalization. McQuail is of the view that the personalization element causes a lack of diversity, truth and quality of information and has implications for limiting public knowledge about actual events (objective conditions) (Siregar et al, 2014). The process of personalization dimension in reporting on the presidential debate from one source often adorns the Media Indonesia daily newspaper. The personalization element is shown to the Jokowi-Amin pair with a tone of reporting in the form of praise and tends to be positive. Meanwhile, the personalization element concerning other political actors, in this case the presidential candidate pair number 01, Prabowo Subianto tends to be neutral and even negative.

The frequency of news appearances for pair number 01 (one) shows how the Media Indonesia daily newspaper is trying to raise Jokowi-Amin's popularity with a positive tone of news. On the other hand, it is used to drown the Prabowo-Sandi pair. The news is expected to increase the popularity of the Jokowi-Amin candidate pair, while Prabowo-Sandi is expected to experience degradation. This trend shows that media owners are trying to use the media in realizing their alignment with the interests of their political affiliations, as well as building the political image of the Jokowi-Amin pair. This shows the lack or even absence of the independence of journalists or journalists, which is actually related to the disruption of

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credibility. Declining credibility causes people to begin to lose trust in the media (Poentarie, 2015).

### **Sentionalism/Emotionalism**

Sensationalism is measured by the presence or absence of emotionalism. This element is defined as the prominence of emotional aspects (like, hate, sad, happy, angry, etc.) rather than the aspect of rationality in reporting an event. The element of sensationalism can 'turn on' a news story, but the aspects of neutrality and objectivity are also very important.

News in the newspapers Media Indonesia daily newspapers highlight more sensationalism. Reports related to sensationalism/ as much as 36%. The sensationalism/emotionalism indicator shows that the Media Indonesia daily newspaper tends to see the candidate pair number 01, Jokowi-Amin, with a protrusion in the form of an emotional aspect so that it can create a feeling of liking for the incumbent presidential candidate. News titles are sometimes only based on journalists' opinions so that they are evaluative, subjective, conclusive and not factual. As a result, sensational news does not have enough criticality in presenting a fact because it is stuck on interesting surface things, sensational news tends to forget the reality behind a fact (Rahayu, 2006). According to Rahayu (2006) quoted from McQuail that information should be objective in the sense of being accurate, honest, complete, about actual reality, reliable, and separating facts and opinions. McQuail argues that information should be balanced and fair (impartial) by reporting alternative perspectives in a way that is not sensational or biased. Using this point of view, it becomes clear that the objectivity of an information will be obtained by, one of them, separating fact from opinion, and news should not be presented in sensational ways.

### **Stereotype**

The third indicator to measure neutrality in reporting on presidential candidate debates is stereotypes. This one element is the giving of certain attributes to certain individuals, groups or nations in the presentation of a news. Stereotypes can make certain individuals, groups, or nations in the news often perceived and treated according to the attributes they have. These attributes may have positive or negative associations, but which is clearly never neutral in accordance with the actual reality. The use of stereotypes in presenting a news story can cause a journalist to be accused of siding with groups or individuals in society. According to Rahayu (2006), commonplace stereotypes occur in the news, but that does not mean they are allowed. Usually, stereotypes occur when journalists ignore the socio-cultural conditions of society.

News related to the 2019 presidential candidate debate, in the Media Indonesia daily newspaper which showed stereotyped elements as much as 11 of the 28 news which, if presented, was 39%. In reporting on the presidential debate in the Media Indonesia daily newspaper, it was found that stereotyped elements tend to view the Prabowo-Sandi pair by giving attributes that have negative associations. The daily newspaper Media Indonesia as a whole in constructing its coverage gave a negative tone to the pair of potential challengers, namely Prabowo-Sandiaga. According to Rahayu (2006), it is stated that often, journalists are



not aware of using stereotyped words because these types of words are present as common sense in a society. Stereotypes in news come in various forms, namely through words or caricature images.

In the case of presidential debate news, stereotypes are usually used to represent the candidate pair number 2 (two), Prabowo-Sandi with all kinds of shortcomings. Stereotype is present in its negative meaning which can lead to misperceptions for readers. Even the tone of news reporting with stereotyped elements tends to draw conclusions implicitly and in a judgmental tone. For example, the media coverage of the daily newspaper Media Indonesia illustrates that Prabowo-Sandi is unable to elaborate on the existing problems. In addition, the daily newspaper Media Indonesia still sees Prabowo as a violation of human rights. Giving these negative attributes is intended to explain that the Prabowo-Sandi pair failed to describe the problem and have a bad track record related to their past, especially regarding human rights.

#### **Juxtaposition/linkages.**

Juxtaposition is the juxtaposition of two different things. Journalists use this element to juxtapose two different facts. Its purpose is to create a contrast effect, which in the end is the appearance of a dramatic effect on the news presented. For example, journalists report on certain political figures by exalting their goodness, wealth, intelligence and so on. While linkages is juxtaposing two different facts with the intention of causing an associative effect.

The common thread that can be seen in the elements of juxtaposition/linkages is one of the editorial efforts of the Media Indonesia daily newspaper to manipulate the minds of readers. This is because the tone of the media coverage of the daily newspaper Media Indonesia provides evidence of the incumbent's success. So that the reader can conclude that the incumbent is better and more powerful when compared to the pair of potential challengers, Prabowo-Sandi. This can be seen from the use of language written through journalists, in a tone that tends to be excessive, for example the word "concrete" in the news on January 18, 2019 which shows that there are significant differences in the debate both in terms of ideas and performance in the ongoing debate.

The first accuracy was found in the report entitled "Prabowo's Rhetoric Has Been Executed by Jokowi" which stated that Prabowo was considered too rhetorical without much substance. That accuracy is seen from the balance in reporting the placement of portions for candidate pair number 02, Prabowo-Sandi. Excerpts from the statement were taken by Golkar Party politician Muhamad Zainul Madji (TGB) as the central figure who commented on Prabowo's ideas or ideas. That according to him the national speech tends to be rhetorical. Although the report also places some statements from the spokesman for the pair number two, this statement is only in the context of Prabowo-Sandiaga who is increasingly confident in facing the first debate and does not answer statements from the Jokowi-Amin campaigner.

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## CONCLUSION

The daily newspaper Media Indonesia has not been completely objective in reporting on the 2019 presidential candidate debate. Its coverage indicates the attitude of the Media Indonesia daily newspaper to the presidential candidate pair number 01, Jokowi-Amin. This can be seen from several things that are highlighted in the reconstruction of the news. Indonesian media lead public opinion to support the Jokowi-Amin pair in the 2019 presidential debate.

Personally, the daily newspaper coverage sided with one of the candidate pairs with a positive tone of reporting and excessive praise. Judging from the element of sensationalism/emotionalism, Media Indonesia tends to see the candidate pair number 01, Jokowi-Amin, with a prominence in the form of an emotional aspect so that it can create a feeling of liking for the incumbent presidential candidate. From the Stereotype element, Media Indonesia tends to see the Prabowo-Sandi pair in negative associations. Meanwhile, from the juxtaposition/lingkages element, it can be seen that Media Indonesia coverage tends to be conclusive to juxtapose two facts so that the contrast is seen. The common thread that can be seen in the juxtaposition/lingkages element is one of the editorial efforts of the Media Indonesia daily newspaper to manipulate the minds of readers. Because by providing evidence about the success of the incumbent. So that the reader can conclude that the incumbent is better and more powerful when compared to the pair of potential challengers, Prabowo-Sandi, in this study the element of links related to the news on the presidential debate in the Media Indonesia daily newspaper was not found. Meanwhile, from the element of accuracy, Media Indonesia's reporting looks inaccurate. This can be seen from the tendency in the selection of sources who are used as statements in writing the news. The informants, especially several expert sources, have stated to provide support for the Jokowi-Amin pair.

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