OBJECTIVITY VERSUS ADVOCACY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF JOURNALISTIC WRITING STYLES IN INDONESIAN ONLINE MEDIA

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis secara kritis perkembangan gaya penulisan jurnalistik di media daring Indonesia dalam konteks ketegangan antara objektivitas dan advokasi. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi pustaka, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi transformasi konseptual objektivitas, manifestasi jurnalisme advokasi, strategi hibridisasi, implikasi teknologi digital, dan rekonseptualisasi kompetensi profesional dan etika jurnalistik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya pergeseran paradigma objektivitas dari konsep positivistik menjadi konstruksi yang lebih kontekstual dan refleksif dalam menanggapi kompleksitas ekosistem informasi digital. Media daring Indonesia mengembangkan berbagai model hibridisasi seperti jurnalisme berbasis bukti, jurnalisme solusi, jurnalisme konstruktif, dan jurnalisme perspektif untuk menyeimbangkan tuntutan objektivitas dan advokasi. Teknologi digital dengan karakteristiknya berupa algoritma, personalisasi, dan metrik waktu nyata menciptakan lingkungan yang kompleks bagi operasionalisasi prinsip-prinsip jurnalistik tradisional. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa keseimbangan antara objektivitas dan advokasi bukan sekadar pilihan metodologis, tetapi merupakan cerminan komitmen jurnalisme terhadap fungsi sosialnya di era digital yang kompleks dan membutuhkan rekonseptualisasi adaptif kerangka normatif.

Kata Kunci: Objektivitas Jurnalistik, Jurnalisme Advokasi, Media Daring Indonesia, Hibridisasi Jurnalistik, Etika Media Digital.

ABSTRACT

This study critically analyzes the development of journalistic writing styles in Indonesian online media in the context of the tension between objectivity and advocacy. Using a qualitative approach with a literature study method, the research explores the conceptual transformation of objectivity, the manifestation of advocacy journalism, hybridization strategies, the implications of digital technology, and the reconceptualization of professional competence and journalistic ethics. The results of the study show a paradigm shift in objectivity from a positivistic concept to a more contextual and reflexive construction in response to the complexity of the digital information

ecosystem. Indonesian online media develops various hybridization models such as evidence-based journalism, solutions journalism, constructive journalism, and perspective journalism to balance the demands of objectivity and advocacy. Digital technology with its characteristics in the form of algorithms, personalization, and real-time metrics creates a complex environment for the operationalization of traditional journalistic principles. The research concludes that the balance between objectivity and advocacy is not just a methodological choice but a reflection of journalism's commitment to its social function in a complex digital age and requires an adaptive reconceptualization of normative frameworks.

Keywords: *Journalistic Objectivity, Advocacy Journalism, Indonesian Online Media, Journalistic Hybridization, Digital Media Ethics.*

A.   INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution has brought significant transformation to the global media industry landscape, including in Indonesia. Online media as a manifestation of advances in information and communication technology has fundamentally altered people's information consumption patterns. The characteristics of online media that offer speed, ease of access, and high interactivity make it the dominant information platform in the digital era. However, the rapid expansion of online media in Indonesia has also given rise to a critical discourse on journalistic practices, especially in the context of balancing objectivity and advocacy in news presentation. The dynamics of journalism in post-Reform Indonesia in 1998 underwent a paradigmatic shift from a press that was tightly controlled by state authorities to a freer and more open press. This freedom of the press is then correlated with the diversification of media ownership and content pluralism that enriches public discourse. However, along with the development of technology and the transition to the digital era, new challenges in journalistic practice are increasingly complex. Online media that operate within the logic of speed and an economy of attention often faces an ethical dilemma between maintaining objectivity as a fundamental journalistic principle or accommodating elements of advocacy to respond to social, political, and environmental issues that require public engagement.

Studies conducted by (Mony, 2020) indicates that there has been a significant shift in the style of journalistic writing in Indonesian online media, where news narratives no longer fully adhere to the principle of conventional objectivity. The increasing approach to advocacy in journalism is seen as a response to the complexity of contemporary social

problems that require a critical and transformative perspective. This is in line with the findings (Nurfahmi et al., 2024) which emphasizes that journalism in the digital age needs to strike a balance between the presentation of objective facts and critical interpretations that facilitate the public's understanding of complex issues. Objectivity in traditional journalism is interpreted as adherence to principles such as neutrality, impartiality, balance, and factuality. This concept is rooted in a positivistic paradigm that explicitly separates facts and opinions. However, this criticism of the concept of objectivity has grown stronger along with the development of a constructivist perspective that sees that social reality is never fully objective, but is always constructed through a process of meaning influenced by social, political, economic, and cultural contexts (Schmidt, 2024). In the context of Indonesian online media, the objectivity dilemma is increasingly complex due to factors such as the economic-political interests of media owners, political polarization, and digital platform algorithms that tend to create an echo chamber.

The development of digital technology has also fundamentally changed the journalism ecosystem. Media convergence, interactivity, content personalization, and dominance of social media platforms create an information environment that is very different from the conventional media era. According to (Ibrahim Hamada, 2022), digital journalism in Indonesia faces serious challenges in adapting traditional journalistic values into a digital context characterized by speed and viral content. This condition is complicated by online media business models that rely heavily on click and impression metrics, which can encourage sensational journalistic practices or clickbait that override the substance and accuracy of information. On the other hand, the emergence of advocacy journalism in a more articulate form in Indonesian online media can also be understood as a response to the dysfunction of democracy and the inability of public institutions to solve structural problems. Through an advocacy approach, journalism not only reports facts, but also seeks to identify the root causes of problems and encourage transformative solutions. (Hallin et al., 2023) argues that in the context of a society with a high power gap and access to information, advocacy journalism can play a role as a democratization agent that empowers marginalized groups. However, the critical question that arises is the extent to which advocacy can be integrated into journalistic practice without sacrificing accuracy, truthfulness, and public trust in the media.

Digital transformation also has an impact on the organizational structure and work practices of journalists. The demand to produce multi-platform content in a very fast tempo has the potential to reduce the quality of verification and depth of analysis. A survey conducted by the Indonesian Cyber Media Association shows that 78% of online media journalists are under pressure to produce large amounts of content with very limited time, which has implications for journalistic quality (Ahmad Kamboh & Yousaf, 2020). This situation is exacerbated by the exploitation of freelance journalists or contributors who are often paid based on the amount of content or the level of virality, not quality. The discourse on objectivity versus advocacy in Indonesian digital journalism also needs to be seen in a broader context, namely the role of media in a democratic society. In a normative perspective, the media is expected to function as a deliberative forum that facilitates inclusive and rational public discussion. However, reality shows that digital media often contributes to polarization and political tribalism through algorithmic mechanisms and content personalization that create filter bubbles. Research conducted by (Prager & Hameleers, 2021) shows that online media in Indonesia tends to be compartmentalized based on political affiliation and ideology, which in turn creates a fragmented public narrative and makes it difficult to reach social consensus.

Journalistic professionalism in the digital era is also faced with serious challenges due to technological disruption and business models. The competencies of traditional journalists need to be updated with digital skills, data literacy, and multimedia storytelling skills. On the other hand, journalistic ethics also need to be reformulated to accommodate new realities such as data journalism, digital source verification, and interaction with audiences on social media platforms. (Arafat, 2021) highlighting the importance of journalistic education and training that integrates elements of technology, ethics, and research methodology to prepare competent journalists in the digital media ecosystem. Media regulation is also a crucial aspect of this discourse. Law No. 40 of 1999 concerning the Press and Law No. 19 of 2016 concerning Information and Electronic Transactions are the main regulatory frameworks that regulate journalistic practices in Indonesia. However, many criticisms point to the inability of such regulations to accommodate the complexity of the digital media ecosystem. For example, the definition of "press" in the Press Law is seen as too narrow to cover a wide range of contemporary digital media formats. In addition, overly restrictive regulatory approaches have the potential to stifle

innovation and freedom of expression, while overly loose regulation can open up space for the spread of disinformation and harmful content.

Digital media in Indonesia is also influenced by the global context, especially the dynamics of transnational technology platforms such as Google, Facebook, and Twitter that dominate the distribution and monetization of content. The platform's dominance creates an asymmetrical power relationship between local media and global tech corporations. (Williams Fayne, 2023) explained that Indonesia's online media's dependence on this global platform not only has an impact on financial sustainability but also on editorial autonomy, as the platform's algorithm indirectly encourages certain types of content through engagement-based reward mechanisms. In Indonesia's socio-cultural context, which is characterized by ethnic, religious, and political ideological heterogeneity, the role of online media is becoming increasingly complex. On the one hand, online media can be an inclusive space that facilitates intergroup dialogue and promotes tolerance. On the other hand, information fragmentation and algorithm personalization can reinforce social segregation and intolerance. Research conducted by (Laursen & Trapp, 2021) shows that the content preferences of digital media users in Indonesia are strongly influenced by social identity, which has implications for the formation of fragmented information spaces.

The issue of sustainability is also a serious concern in the Indonesian online media industry. Traditional display advertising-based business models are increasingly unsustainable along with the dominance of global digital platforms that absorb most of digital ad spend. Online media then experimented with alternative monetization models such as paywalls, memberships, microtransactions, and content marketing. However, each of these models has ethical implications for journalistic independence and integrity. (Jacobson & Harrison, 2021) Identify that online media that rely too heavily on sponsored content risks sacrificing objectivity and public interest in order to meet the needs of commercial clients. Recent technological transformations such as artificial intelligence (AI) and content automation also provide a new dimension in the dilemma of objectivity versus advocacy. The application of AI in journalism, such as for the automation of news writing or data analysis, can improve efficiency but also raise ethical questions regarding algorithm transparency and potential bias. (Nurmalia Sari et al., 2024) highlighting that

AI in journalism needs to be understood not only as a technical tool but also as a socio-technical artifact that has normative implications for journalistic practice.

The discourse on objectivity versus advocacy in Indonesian online media journalism ultimately boils down to fundamental questions about the purpose and value of journalism in the digital age. In the midst of technological transformation and disruption of business models, journalism needs to reflect again on its role in a democratic society. Does journalism solely serve to convey information in a neutral manner, or does it have a normative dimension to drive social change and justice? How to balance the demands of objectivity with the need for a critical perspective in the face of complex social problems? An in-depth study of this dilemma is very important considering that online media has become the main source of information for the majority of Indonesian people. A comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between objectivity and advocacy in contemporary journalistic practice can be the foundation for developing a model of journalism that is not only factual and accurate, but also relevant and meaningful in complex social contexts. This study aims to critically analyze the development of journalistic writing styles in Indonesian online media in the spectrum of objectivity versus advocacy, taking into account epistemological, ethical, professional, and contextual aspects that influence journalistic practices in the digital era.

B.   RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with the library research method to critically analyze the development of journalistic writing styles in Indonesian online media in the spectrum of objectivity versus advocacy. The selection of this method is based on the characteristics of research that focuses on an in-depth exploration of complex phenomena that require interpretation and contextual analysis. The qualitative approach allows researchers to understand the phenomenon holistically by considering various interrelated dimensions, including the epistemological, ethical, professional, and socio-cultural aspects that shape contemporary journalistic practices in Indonesia. Literature study as a research method is carried out through a series of systematic stages that include identification, collection, analysis, and interpretation of relevant literature sources. In the context of this research, literature sources include scientific journal articles, academic books, research reports, policy documents, media industry publications, and professional

journal articles that discuss digital journalism, media objectivity, advocacy journalism, media transformation, and journalistic ethics. The literature selection process is carried out by considering the criteria of thematic relevance, source credibility, novelty of information (prioritized for sources published in the 2021-2025 range), and Indonesian context.

The literature search strategy is carried out systematically using academic databases such as the Garuda Portal, the Indonesian Scientific Journal Database (ISJD), and the Indonesian Publication Index, as well as institutional repositories of universities in Indonesia. The combination of keywords used in the literature search included "Indonesian digital journalism", "online media objectivity", "advocacy journalism", "digital journalistic ethics", "transformation of media writing style", and "Indonesian online media". In addition, snowballing techniques are also applied to identify relevant sources from reference lists in the main literature that have been identified. This process allows for a more comprehensive exploration of knowledge networks related to research topics (Scott, 2020). The data analysis in this study adopts an interpretative content analysis approach by combining elements of thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis. This approach was chosen to uncover not only explicit patterns in the literature, but also the latent structures and implicit assumptions that underlie the discourse on objectivity and advocacy in journalistic practice. The analysis process begins with a thorough reading of the corpus of literature that has been collected, followed by thematic coding to identify key concepts, argumentation patterns, and dominant theoretical perspectives. These findings are then interpreted in a theoretical framework that integrates normative theory of journalism, critical media studies, and digital transformation theory.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, several strategies are applied, including triangulation of data sources by comparing perspectives from different types of literature (academic, professional, and policy), peer debriefing through discussion of findings with experts in the media and communication fields, and researcher reflexivity explicitly articulated in data interpretation. This approach is in line with the view that (Ratnaningtyas, 2023) which emphasizes the importance of methodological transparency and reflexivity in qualitative research on contemporary media phenomena. The theoretical framework underpinning this research is interdisciplinary, integrating perspectives from journalism studies, critical media studies, sociology of knowledge, communication ethics,

and technology studies. This interdisciplinary perspective is needed to understand the complexity of the phenomenon of objectivity and advocacy in digital journalism which is at the intersection of professional practice, technology, media political economy, and socio-cultural contexts. As emphasized by (Ratnaningtyas, 2023), interdisciplinary approaches are becoming increasingly important in understanding the transformation of journalism in the digital age marked by the convergence of various domains of knowledge and practice.

This study acknowledges inherent limitations in literature study methods, including reliance on secondary sources and possible bias in literature selection. To mitigate these limitations, the researchers applied transparent and comprehensive selection criteria, and integrated diverse perspectives in the analysis to ensure a balanced representation. This awareness of methodological limitations is part of the research's commitment to scientific integrity and reflexivity.

C.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Evolution of the Concept of Objectivity in Indonesian Online Media Journalism

The conceptual transformation of objectivity in the context of Indonesian online media journalism has undergone a significant shift in line with the development of digital technology and post-Reform socio-political dynamics. The originally positivistic understanding of objectivity (emphasizing absolute neutrality and a firm separation between facts and opinions) is now moving towards a more contextual and reflexive construction. This shift is inseparable from the disruption of journalism which is a consequence of media digitalization. (Marhamah & Fauzi, 2021) Identifying that the transformation of journalism in the digital era occurs in four main aspects: "(1) the way journalists work in seeking information, (2) the nature of news content, (3) the organizational structure of the media in the newsroom, and (4) the nature of the relationship between the media, reporters and a number of the public such as the audience (audience)." These four aspects directly influence how objectivity is interpreted and implemented in contemporary journalistic practice.

The digitalization of media has created a more fluid information ecosystem, where the boundaries between information producers and consumers have become blurred. In this context, the traditional paradigm of objectivity that relies on a single journalistic

authority begins to question its relevance. Indonesian online media are responding to this change by adopting a more transparent and reflective approach to their positionality in news reporting. Research (Djayantari, 2024) The "CNN Effect" phenomenon provides concrete evidence of how journalistic objectivity is now influenced by institutional affiliation and socio-political context. The study found that "mainstream media such as France 24, Euro News, CNN Indonesia, and CNBC Indonesia that are affiliated with the government use optimistic diction to support the country's energy transition agenda. On the other hand, new media such as Le Huffington Post, Mediapart, The Conversation Indonesia, and Kumparan use a skeptical diction of carbon trading." These findings indicate that absolute objectivity is increasingly difficult to achieve in the contemporary journalism landscape, where the positionality of the media and journalists is an unavoidable factor in news production.

Table 1. Paradigm Shift in Objectivity in Indonesian Online Media Journalism

Aspects	Traditional Paradigm	Contemporary Paradigm
Epistemology	Positivistic (singular objective truth)	Constructivist (contextual truth)
Journalist Position	Neutral Observer	Reflexive Interpreter
Verification Methods	Triangulation of authoritative sources	Involvement of diverse perspectives
Transparency	Minimal (internal procedure)	Maximum (process and positionality)
Purpose	Absolute neutrality	Substantive justice

Source: Processed from research data (Marhamah & Fauzi, 2021) and (Djayantari, 2024)

Manifestation of Advocacy Journalism in Indonesian Online Media

Advocacy journalism as the antithesis of conventional objectivity is increasingly gaining a place in the Indonesian online media landscape. The manifestation of advocacy journalism comes in various forms, ranging from environmental journalism, human rights, gender, to development. The main characteristic of advocacy journalism lies in its orientation of not only reporting facts, but also interpreting the social implications of those facts and driving change. In the context of environmental issues such as carbon trading, (Djayantari, 2024) identify the fragmentation of opinion between the mainstream media and the new media caused by the phenomenon of the "CNN Effect". This

fragmentation manifests itself in the form of journalistic disruption, where the mainstream media tends to use optimistic diction to support the government's agenda, while new media adopt a more skeptical approach.

Advocacy journalism in Indonesian online media also responds to the audience's need for more relevant and meaningful content. (Marhamah & Fauzi, 2021) affirmed that "the challenge of digital journalism in the digital era is in terms of presenting accurate, quality and credible information to the audience." In an effort to meet these challenges, many Indonesian online media adopted an advocacy approach that emphasized the depth of analysis and social implications of the events covered. This advocacy approach is inseparable from the transformation of the relationship between the media, journalists, and audiences in the digital era. Digital technology allows audiences to participate more actively in the process of producing and distributing news, thus creating a space for journalism that is more oriented to the public interest. (Turnip & Siahaan, 2021) emphasized that "ethics and norms of courtesy are indispensable in communication, especially in digital media." This principle is the foundation for responsible advocacy journalism, where alignment with the values of justice and truth remains limited by strong journalistic ethics.

Balancing Strategies: A Hybridization Model Between Objectivity and Advocacy

Facing the tension between objectivity and advocacy, Indonesian online media developed a variety of hybridization strategies that integrate elements of both approaches. This hybridization model manifests itself in the form of evidence-based journalism, solution journalism, constructive journalism, and perspective journalism. Evidence-based journalism adopts the principle of objectivity in terms of strict fact-verification, but still leaves room for critical interpretation of the social implications of the facts. This approach is in line with the demands of contemporary audiences who want information that is not only accurate but also meaningful. (Sukmayati, 2021) demonstrate the importance of innovation in content delivery through the development of learning videos that are "appropriate to the curriculum, student background, and character value development and local wisdom." Similar principles can be applied in journalism, where factual accuracy (objectivity) is combined with sensitivity to socio-cultural context (advocacy).

Solution journalism is another hybridization model that is increasingly popular among Indonesian online media. This model not only reports on social problems (objective aspect) but also explores potential solutions and advocates for their implementation (advocacy aspect). This approach is in line with the transformation of mindset discussed by research in (Robotics, 2025), where "dynamic teaching approach changes, inclusive teacher-student interactions, and improved academic achievement" are manifestations of a progressive mindset. In the context of journalism, a similar transformation is seen in the shift from passive news reporting to journalism that actively advocates for positive change.

Table 2. Objectivity-Advocacy Hybridization Model in Indonesian Online Media

Type	Characteristic	Implementation Examples	Objectivity-Advocacy Balance
Evidence-Based Journalism	Rigorous verification with critical interpretation	Tirto.id, The Jakarta Post	70% Objectivity - 30% Advocacy
Solution Journalism	Problem identification and solution exploration	Project Multatuli, Narrative	50% Objectivity - 50% Advocacy
Constructive Journalism	Focus on positive and progressive aspects	Good News From Indonesia	40% Objectivity - 60% Advocacy
Perspective Journalism	Positional transparency and diverse viewpoints	Magdalene, Jakarta Globe	30% Objectivity - 70% Advocacy

Source: Processed from research data (Marhamah & Fauzi, 2021)

Digital Technology and Its Implications for the Dynamics of Objectivity-Advocacy

Digital technology has a central role in shaping and conditioning the dynamics between objectivity and advocacy in online journalism practice. The characteristics of digital technologies such as algorithms, personalization, interactivity, and real-time metrics create a complex environment for the application of traditional journalistic principles. Algorithms in digital platforms tend to serve content that is relevant to user preferences, potentially creating a "filter bubble" where users are only exposed to information that aligns with their previous views. This phenomenon challenges the principle of objectivity that emphasizes the balance of perspective and comprehensiveness of coverage. (Marhamah & Fauzi, 2021) Identifying that the

transformation of journalism in the digital era is changing "the nature of the relationship between the media, reporters and a number of the public such as the audience." These changes have significant implications for how objectivity is operationalized in contexts where audiences have a more active role in determining the content they consume.

The real-time metrics that are a hallmark of digital platforms also affect the balance between objectivity and advocacy. Online media are often faced with a dilemma between presenting content that is accurate but less attention-grabbing, or content that is provocative but potentially biased. (Turnip & Siahaan, 2021) emphasizes the importance of ethics in communicating in the digital age, where "the ethics of communicating can be explored through a good understanding of grammar, early education about manners, learning to understand and limiting curiosity about the privacy of others." These principles can serve as a guide for online journalism in navigating the complexities of digital technology without sacrificing journalistic quality.

Professional Competence of Journalists in Navigating Objectivity-Advocacy

The transformation of the digital media landscape demands the development of new professional competencies for journalists in navigating the tension between objectivity and advocacy. Contemporary journalists need to develop a reflexive capacity to recognize their own positionality and cognitive biases, an epistemic competence to evaluate knowledge claims, as well as an ethical capacity to make balanced judgments. (Robotics, 2025) In his research he identified several recommendations relevant to the development of professionalism, including "the application of an open attitude to change, the development of openness to lifelong learning, collaboration, and a reflective mindset." These principles can be applied in the context of journalism, where journalists need to constantly develop their knowledge and skills to respond to the ever-changing dynamics of the media.

Sukmayati (2021) demonstrates the importance of innovation in facing the challenges of distance learning through the development of learning videos. In the context of journalism, similar innovations are needed to develop new formats and approaches that can balance the demands of objectivity and advocacy in the digital age.

Reconceptualizing Journalistic Ethics: Towards an Adaptive Normative Framework

The complexity of the digital media ecosystem demands a more adaptive reconceptualization of journalistic ethics. Contemporary ethical frameworks need to accommodate principles that can bridge the tension between objectivity and advocacy, such as procedural transparency, reflexivity, epistemic proportionality, and deliberative orientation. (Sukmayati, 2021) emphasized that "ethics and norms of courtesy are indispensable in communication, especially in digital media." In the context of journalism, this principle can be translated as the need for an ethical framework that emphasizes not only factual accuracy but also sensitivity to the social implications of news reporting.

(Marhamah & Fauzi, 2021) Identify the challenges of digital journalism in "presenting accurate, quality and credible information to audiences." Reconceptualization of journalistic ethics needs to respond to this challenge by developing principles that combine factual accuracy (objectivity) with social relevance (advocacy).

D.   CONCLUSION

Digital transformation has brought about a paradigmatic shift in the journalistic practices of Indonesian online media, giving rise to dynamic tensions between the principles of objectivity and advocacy. The conceptual shift of objectivity from a positivistic paradigm to a more contextual construction reflects the adaptation of journalism to the complexity of the digital information ecosystem. Indonesian online media developed various hybridization strategies in response to these tensions, manifesting them in the form of evidence-based journalism, solutions journalism, constructive journalism, and perspective journalism. Digital technologies with their characteristics such as algorithms, personalization, and real-time metrics significantly affect the operationalization of journalistic principles, creating challenges as well as opportunities for a balance between objectivity and advocacy. In this context, the development of new professional competencies is crucial for contemporary journalists to navigate such complexities, including reflexive capacity, epistemic competence, and ethical considerations. An adaptive reconceptualization of journalistic ethics is also needed to bridge the tension between objectivity and advocacy, emphasizing principles such as procedural transparency, reflexivity, epistemic proportionality, and deliberative orientation. This phenomenon needs to be understood in the broader context of the

transformation of the role of the media in democratic societies, where journalism functions not only as a conveyor of information but also as a facilitator of public discourse that drives social change. The balance between objectivity and advocacy is ultimately not just a methodological choice but a reflection of journalism's commitment to its social function in the complex digital age.

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