
COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF JOURNALISTS IN COVERING NEWS AT CONFLICT AREAS

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

received
revised
accepted

Keywords:

Communication strategy;
conflict; journalists; news.

ABSTRACT

Violence often affects journalists in duty in conflict areas, ranging from intimidation, kidnapping, to murder. Conflicting parties often consider journalists as a threat. A journalist is compelled to fulfill the public's right to obtain accurate and actual information, yet still there are in fact various obstacles hampering a journalist to perform its duties, especially when covering news in areas of physical conflict such as war. The lack of understanding and knowledge of a journalist to cover the news in the conflict area becomes one of the factors making him vulnerable to be victims of violence. The study examines the operation of releasing hostages in Mapenduma Papua. It aims to find out the communication strategy of journalists in obtaining information and conveying them to the public by anticipating the unpleasant possibilities that may occur at any time in the conflict area. This research is a qualitative research with constructivist paradigm. The research method used is case study. The data were collected in two stages: the primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with selected speakers, while secondary data were obtained through literature study sourced from books and other publications. The results of the study show that among other things journalists need to pay attention to when covering conflict areas are: maintaining good relations with various parties, understanding the code of ethics, directing questions toward peace, quickly responding to an event, highlighting the vision of peaceful journalism, exploring information thoroughly, nurturing empathy according to context and condition, respecting off the record of information or source of information, being careful, responsible, and alert, as well as guided by code of ethics.

INTRODUCTION

News on conflicts receives largest attention from wide audience who want to keep up with current situations, especially if they are related to the threat of life, freedom, economy, and quality of life (Galtung, 2006). To fulfill public's right to obtain accurate and actual information, profession of journalist becomes the spearhead for the searching of the truth and reporting on the current situation in the conflict area (Kempf, 2007). Nevertheless, it is not an easy to cover news in conflict areas, since life is at stake. Violence often affects

journalists in duty in conflict areas, ranging from intimidation, kidnapping to murder. Conflicting parties often consider journalists as a threat (Hae, Marpaung, and Setiawan, 2000).

Armed conflict becomes one of the most dangerous conflict spaces. Reuter's news agency reported during 2013 there were 126 journalists killed in their particular tasks while covering in conflict areas (Avraham, 2017). Some of the countries listed as the most dangerous areas for journalists include Syria,

Iraq, Pakistan, the Philippines, and India (Manan, 2013).

The Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) notes that there were about 60 cases of violence can be proven related to the process of seeking, processing, disseminating, or resulting from news (Tarmizi, 2012). AJI affirms until now there are many perpetrators of violence against journalists who are not processed by law. The public has become accustomed to seeing cases of violence against journalists without legal consequences, hence promoting violence in turns of any unfavorable news for certain parties. Such practice of impunity or exemption of the perpetrators of crimes from punishment results in repeated violence (Cahn, 2005). It has become a means of the invisible great power to suppress freedom of the press. If freedom of the press is suppressed, then civil liberties will be suppressed as well; hence an indication of human rights violations, since the right of the people to convey thoughts and opinions through media is limited (Oetama, 2001).

This encourages the emergence of the questions: what are journalist communication strategies to obtain information in conflict areas and deliver it to the public. Accordingly, this study has two main objectives, namely to examine (1) the communication strategy of journalist in obtaining information while covering news in conflict area, and (2) the communication strategy of journalist in delivering information to public through media. This paper is divided into five parts. The first part is the introduction and background of the study. The second part is literature study. The third part is the methods of this study, including the limitation of the study. The fourth part is the result and discussion, and the fifth part is the closing.

THEORY

The study on "Communication Strategies of Journalists in News Coverage at Conflict Areas" is a novelty; up to the present there has been little researches conducted (Gilboa, 2005). Earlier study only discussed communication strategies of journalists covering crime scenes in which they examines

how the journalists dig information from the sources in accordance with journalistic code of ethics (Nurshanti & Yudi, 2012). Meanwhile Nehemia Tobing from University of Indonesia, in his study entitled "Exposure of War in Newspaper", merely looks at the object, and analyzes the exposure of war photos in *Kompas Daily*, particularly concerning the invasion of the United States and its coalitions, the British, Australia, and Spain against Iraq (Tobing, 2003).

Man cannot live without communication in his life. Any activity we do every day needs communication, both verbal and nonverbal. The profession of a journalist is one of those that treat communication as its main tool. Communication is used to obtain information in the field through resource persons (Kriyantono, 2006). Until the news aired on television, they still need communication to illustrate the events that have been covered. The process of direct communication between people is what is referred to as interpersonal communication (Kiecker & Cowles, 2002). Joseph A. DeVito in his book entitled *The Interpersonal Communication Book* defines interpersonal communication as the process of sending and receiving messages between two people or among a small group of people with multiple effects and some instantaneous feedback (DeVito, 1989, p. 4).

Martin-Anderson in Cangara (2003, p. 61) defines strategy as an art that involves the ability of the intelligence or the mind to bring all available resources in reaching the goal by gaining maximum and efficient profitability. Arifin (1984, p. 58) defines strategy as the overall conditional decision of the actions to be taken to accomplish the goals. Communication is the process of conveying a person's thoughts or feelings to others by using meaningful signs for both parties, in certain situations of communication, using certain media to change the attitude or behavior of a person or a number of people so that there is a certain expected effect (Effendy, 2007, p. 12).

Devito (1989, p. 14) defines interpersonal communication as sending messages from a person and received by others with direct

effects and feedback. DeVito defines mass communication by essentially explaining what is meant by the masses, and the media they use. There are two definitions: *first*, mass communication is a communication aimed at the masses, to a huge number of audiences. This does not mean that the audiences encompass the entire population or all those watching television; this seems to mean that the audience is large; though rather difficult to define. *Second*, mass communication is the communication channeled by the radio and/or visual transmitters.

From the overall understanding, it can be concluded that the communication strategy is essentially the planning and management to achieve one goal. To accomplish the goal, strategy does not only function as a road map that shows direction, but also demonstrate its operational tactics (Mulyana, 2008). Communication strategy is a combination of communication planning and communication management to achieve a goal (Effendy, 2003:301). Mitchel V. Charnley in Effendy (1992, p. 67) defines news as “the timely report of facts or opinion of either interest or importance, or both, to a considerable number of people.” Johan Galtung (1990) defines conflict as everything causing people to be obstructed to actualize their potentials naturally. The barrier in question is something that can actually be avoided. Law number 40 of 1999 article 1 paragraph 4 calls journalists as people who regularly carry out journalistic activities (Sembiring, 2005, p. 86).

METHOD

Based on the background and objectives to be achieved, this study is conducted to obtain a comprehensive picture and also analyze the communication strategy of journalists, so as to get the answer to the objectives; thus qualitative approach is the right choice (Moleong, 2010). This study uses constructivist paradigm, rejecting positivist view that separates subject and object of communication (Skelly, 2002). In addition, a case study can also be used in explanatory study, when theories and literature discussing the problems exist and are abundantly

available (Sarosa, 2012, p. 117). Thus, this study is descriptive, using qualitative approach.

Two issues become the object of the study, namely: (1) communication strategy of journalists in obtaining data and information when reporting in conflict area, and (2) communication strategy of journalists in delivering information to public through media (Kahl, 1998). To obtain comprehensive and accurate data, the data collection is conducted in two stages (Arikunto, 2006). The primary data are collected through in-depth interviews, while the secondary data through literature and document study such as from books and other publications.

In addition, to check on the data validity, the study uses: *first* source triangulation in which validity is obtained through confirmation of three related sources, i.e. journalists, journalist observers, hostages/security officers (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015); *second* technique triangulation, namely using three supporting techniques to get the necessary information or data i.e. in-depth interviews, observation, and document study. The time and location of the study are determined conditionally by directly interviewing informants beginning on January-February 2015. The informants are former TVRI senior journalist, Effendi Soen; former TVRI cameraman, Taufik DS; AJI member for Advocacy, Aryo Wisanggeni; Mapenduma hostage, Saleita M. Tanasale; and communication expert, Prof. Dr. Sunarto. Nevertheless, the key informant is Effendi Soen.

The data are analyzed through three activities, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1992, pp. 12-19). Data reduction is the process of selecting data, focusing on simplification, abstraction, and transformation arising from written records in the field. Data presentation is presenting data in the form of narrative text. The presentation includes matrix, graphs, networks, and charts. Conclusion or verification is exploring the meaning of objects; recording regularities and patterns; explaining configurations, causal

paths, and propositions. The meaning emerging from the data must be tested for its truth, solidity, and suitability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The operation of releasing Mapenduma hostages is a major event, drawing international attention (Ondawame, 2002; Elmslie & Webb-Gannon, 2014). The release was only successfully done within 4 months. Taufik DS became the second cameraman to replace Julie Elvano to cover the operation to completion. The conflict area is the most dangerous one because it involves serious, cruel, and dangerous business. Imagine, 2 of the 11 researchers, Navy W. Th. Panekenen and Matheis Yosias Lasembu, taken as hostages eventually were sadly killed by the Free Papua Movement (OPM) prior to the release. Therefore, journalists need to do proper preparation to carry out their duties well and return safely.

After deciding to be ready to cover the conflict area, the first preparation done by Effendi Soen was having a discussion with the cameraman regarding various issues ranging from the research on the understanding and knowledge of conflicts in Papua, the context of the problems, the geographical, historical, and social conditions of Papua, up to the equipment required to support the coverage while in Papua.

Important insights and knowledge related to the context and the parties involved in the conflict area must also be known by journalists, such as how to cover conflict areas safely, what kind of violence occurring there, how to make the coverage encourage people to immediately end the conflict, how can one connect with the relevant parties in the conflict area, up to the nature and character of the people in the conflict area (Lee & Maslog, 2005). The explanations of the informants indicate that there has been journalists' awareness of the importance of their safety when covering conflict areas by doing various preparations. Thus, journalists can calculate the level of danger that might occur at any time so as not to rely on the luck factor.

It is not easy to adapt to a new environment; it takes time and learning. Nevertheless, informant 1 (Effendi Soen) affirms that once a journalist is equipped with knowledge concerning the condition of society and have a qualified understanding then he shall no longer have a constraint. One of them is to feel their condition by giving empathy. In communicating with the inhabitants of Papua, Effendi always considers them at similar level; or else the journalists must even be under their level.

Informant 2 (Taufik DS) argues that flexibility in communication is indispensable, meaning that journalists as outsiders and the party needing information must adapt to their conditions, hence they feel comfortable in communicating. The proximity between Effendi and Taufik with the local community is established upon a simple way, yet touching their hearts for instance by helping them in farming and involving them in jokes, so that effective communication is by itself established. Unlike the case when journalists communicate with the parties involved in the conflict. Journalists should be careful and resourceful in choosing sources for news purposes. The questions put forward by journalists must lead to conflict resolution (Hafid, 2007).

Informant 4 (Aryo Wisanggeni) assesses that any information coming from the source of information should not be filtered. So far, however, the Author perceives that the conflicting parties always want mass media, especially journalists, to deliver the news profitable for the interests of those in conflict. Some of them even consider the presence of journalists as a threat, so that they recurrently do violence against journalists. Yet it is clear under Article 8 of Press Law No.40 of 1999 that in carrying out their profession, journalists get legal protection (Mondry, 2008).

At certain times, journalists will encounter a condition where it is difficult to extract information from parties involved in the conflict or even from civil society (Wahyudi, 1991). There are times when an informant significantly develops a story for giving more

meaning and profundity to an event. Journalists, nevertheless, are required to be careful in choosing informants. Informant 2 (Taufik DS) explains that one of the people who can be used as a source of information is local journalists, since they know a lot of things and have various experiences.

Based on the aforementioned findings, this research perceives that what has been done by Informant 2 (Taufik DS) is the right decision, i.e. to choose the source of information from local journalists who have a lot of understanding of the background of the occurring conflict. What journalists want to dig up and to know cannot be obtained if journalists leave the scene, without getting as much information from people on the scene.

During the coverage of hostage release operations in Mapenduma, Papua, informant 1 (Effendi Soen) was always responsive to occurring events. Effendi Soen's ability to get acquainted with information brought him to Timika to be able to cover the news of actual chaos. It also shows how a journalist responds to relatively important news or facts because he knows that hostage-taking operations will not finish as fast as people expect. Hence, he decided to cover the conflict of Timika riots first before continuing the coverage of hostage release operations in Mapenduma.

Subsequent to the collection of adequate information or data for delivering news to the public, journalists began preparing a communication strategy to release the news, whether it is a direct or indirect report using the media as a tool for distributing information. This is what is called mass communication. Mass communication is a message communicated through mass media to a number of people (IFJ, 2002, p. 13).

Based on the information obtained from a number of informants, journalists need to consider the following things in the process of delivering information: *First*, prioritizing the vision of peaceful journalism; for instance, when conducting direct reports, Effendi Soen always has a vision not to enlarge the existing conflict through the news he conveys to the

public. *Second*, the deepening of information. The explanation from the informants indicates that broad knowledge and understanding on the context of information to be delivered to the public are important to produce quality news. *Third*, keep the sense of empathy in accordance with the context and condition. Informant 1 (Effendi Soen) explains that in conveying information to the public through the media, journalists need to empathize with the heartbreaking condition of society while at the same time not dissolved in it. *Fourth*, keep off the records when required. In covering news, informant 1 (Effendi Soen) always make observations in the field; when important information is received conditionally from a partial party or *off the record*, however, the identity of the source must be concealed; he must obey the agreement. *Fifth*, keep meticulous and responsible. Informant 2 said that a journalist must have integrity, does not easily disclose information. What is common according to informant 2 (Taufik DS), however, after the Reform Era, circulating information has been very difficult to cover up, even putting aside the security factor, neglecting how the news may impact and endangers the parties concerned. *Sixth*, guided by code of ethics. Informant 5 (Prof. Dr. Sunarto) affirms that journalists need to have the code of ethics since currently in the communication process, a journalist no longer just delivers the message but also reconstructs it. *Seventh*, vigilance. Informant 2 (Taufik DS) states that when he covered the operation of releasing Mapenduma hostages, there were a lot of information not for public consumption and not to be aired. Taufik truly understands that journalists must have ethics and concern about security and confidentiality that need not be conveyed to the public. Based on that explanation, the Author perceives all forms of information conveyed will be very influential for a journalist and others. For that, it is crucial for journalists to pay attention to the factor of vigilance in conveying information.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion related to "Communication Strategy of Journalists in Covering News at Conflict Areas", it can be

concluded that the lack of understanding regarding how to cover conflict areas and the lack of knowledge can trigger a journalist to fall into the conflict until eventually exacerbate it, hence threatening themselves.

For that, a journalist needs to understand various things including adequate knowledge not only regarding the conflicting areas but also the issues occurring around. A journalist need to: (1) maintain good relations with various parties, (2) understand the code of ethics, (3) direct the questions toward peace, and (4) be responsive to an event occurring.

In the meanwhile, a journalist must also undertake a communication strategy in delivering information to the public, so that the information conveyed can be understood and does not promote negative things effect. Several things to note are journalists must (1) promote the vision of peaceful journalism, (2) deepen the information, (3) maintain empathy according to context and condition, (4) respect *off the record* agreement of information or sources of information, (5) be meticulous and responsible, (6) be guided by the code of ethics, and (7) be vigilant.

Recommendation

Based on the findings and discussion, some recommendations can be given for journalists covering conflict areas, namely they should not only rely on the physical preparation but also carefully prepare various information regarding the conflicting regions, the issues of occurring conflict, the condition of the society, and the journalist code of ethics in order to communicate well with relevant parties in conflict areas.

The author also hopes that media owners can support journalists to work more professionally by involving them in embedded journalist training. According to the Independent Journalists Association (AJI) embedded journalism in Indonesia is currently not developed due to all limitations.

Various parties are also expected to support the performance of the freedom of the Press that has been stipulated in the law. In the

meanwhile, the number of cases of violence against journalists while performing duties is increasing; the Author hopes the government can take decisive action for the perpetrators and thoroughly investigate legal cases to provide a deterrent effect for them.

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