

Political Elites in Disaster News: A Framing Analysis of the 2010 Mt. Merapi Eruption News in TVRI Yogyakarta

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Abstract. The paper focuses on how a local station of Indonesian public television, i.e., TVRI Yogyakarta, framed the news about the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption. Applying a textual analysis model developed by Zhongdang Pan and Gerald M. Kosicki, the paper analyses a news program of TVRI Yogyakarta called 'Berita Yogya' from 26th October to 14th November 2010. The study finds that TVRI Yogyakarta has emphasized news figures or the element of 'who' in the news, especially concerning governments and political parties' elites. Related to this framing, TVRI Yogyakarta has frequently highlighted the topic of disaster aid, especially from the government and political parties. TVRI has indeed accentuated the solidarity and care from government and political parties through the headlines and news about the ceremonies of handing over disaster aid from the political elites to the survivors. It shows that, instead of performing its role as a public media during the crisis of the Mt. Merapi eruption, TVRI Yogyakarta was imprisoned in the New Order ideology of TVRI as a state television.

Keywords: *Merapi eruption, public media, TVRI Yogyakarta, disaster news.*

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Introduction

On October 25, 2010, after analysing data showing a sharp increase in Mount Merapi's activity, including volcanic seismicity and deformation, as well as lava dome fallout, the Centre for Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation raised the status of Mount Merapi from ready (*siaga*) to top alert (*awas*). The eruption of Mt. Merapi in late October and early November 2010 caused extraordinary socio-economic impacts on people living on Merapi's slopes' southeast, south, and southwest sides. Hot clouds and rain of ash and gravel have displaced no less than 356.816 residents and killed 270 people (Kedaulatan Rakyat 2010).

During that period, almost all local and national media were very intensively reporting the current situations of the eruption and the emergency responses in large portions and over a long period reporting. Almost every day, people received updated information about the eruption.

From a constructivist perspective, news about the eruption is the result of media construction about the eruption itself. News about the eruption as a kind of media construction must be distinguished from the eruption event itself as an empirical reality. The media construction involves certain choices, consciously or not, taken by the media newsroom. These construction choices are affected by several factors, such as media ideology, pressure from owners or external parties, journalists' work routines, and the particular interests of the media (Eriyanto 2002). The media construction of reality can be observed from the emphasis on their news. In the complexity of disaster-induced situations, media may emphasize reporting only on specific issues, covering only certain affected areas, relying on certain news sources, and others.

This study discusses how the media reported the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption. Taking the case of the 'Berita Yogya' news program on TVRI Yogyakarta Station, this research aims to answer the following question: how did TVRI Yogyakarta frame and construct the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption?

The choice of TVRI Yogyakarta was based on certain considerations, namely proximity and media ideology. As a public broadcasting institution, TVRI Yogyakarta should voice public aspirations and discuss public issues, including the problems and handling of the 2010 eruption. In addition, TVRI Yogyakarta was selected due to its proximity to the eruption event, which destroyed several highest hamlets within Cangkringan District, Sleman Regency, Yogyakarta. Compared to several other affected districts, the worst impact of the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption occurred in Sleman District.

According to Bambang Satmoko, head of the news division of TVRI Yogyakarta, TVRI has applied what they call a full body contact reportage of the eruption, meaning that they deployed all existing human resources for reporting the eruption (Widodo 2011). In fact, not only TVRI Yogyakarta Station, but the National Station of TVRI had also mobilized their human resources to cover the Merapi eruption. The eruption coverage almost reached 80-90 percent of the news program portion at TVRI Yogyakarta. As a public media, TVRI Yogyakarta broadcasted the eruption's impact, especially within the Sleman Regency. TVRI had strict rules regarding reporting the eruption in order not to create new disasters, such as a mass panic after watching their news. In the post-disaster reconstruction phase, TVRI Yogyakarta continued to present reports about the current situation on the slopes of Mt. Merapi, especially the issue of cold lava during the rainy season. In addition, TVRI Yogyakarta has also informed the public that Yogyakarta was safe to visit (Widodo 2011).

Methods

This study was based on a constructivist perspective, assuming that news reality is not the reality itself, but a result of construction practice. Therefore, the analysis focuses on how media construct events or realities and how such an image of reality is constructed and formed (Eriyanto 2002).

The method used in this research was framing analysis, especially the Zhongdang Pan and Gerald M. Kosicki model (Eriyanto 2002). This model includes several elements of analysis, namely: 1. syntactic structure, related to how journalists arrange events into the general structure of the news; 2. script structure, related to how journalists narrate events, especially the placement of the 5W+1H elements; 3. thematic structure, relates to how journalists express their views on events into propositions, sentences or relationships between sentences that form the text as a whole; 4. rhetorical structure, relates to how journalists emphasize certain aspects or meanings in the news.

The unit of analysis was the news in the 'Berita Yogya' program from 26 October to 14 November 2010, or during the emergency responses to the 2010 eruption. Due to a large amount of news about the eruption during that period, the research has limited the specific news topic, namely Merapi disaster relief. With this 'relief' keyword, the study found 20 news as the unit of analysis.

Empirical Results

The study has observed the news leads of the Berita Yogya and found that most of them were the ceremony of giving aid from various parties, namely companies, government agencies, or political parties. For example, the news entitled 'Help Flows – Bantuan

Mengalir' (October 31, 2010) had a lead: "Aid for the survivors of Merapi continues to arrive, both from the government, political parties, businessmen or students."

TVRI Yogyakarta would clearly state by name if the one providing assistance were the government or political parties. An example was the news entitled 'Ministry of BUMN Submits Aid to Merapi Survivors - Menteri BUMN Serahkan Bantuan Korban Merapi' (October 27, 2010). This news had a lead: "Minister of BUMN Mustofa Abubakar this morning handed over five hundred-million-rupiah aid for the survivors of the Mt. Merapi disaster." When this research was conducted, TVRI Yogyakarta was already a public broadcasting institution. Still, its reporting focused more on the solidarity of the government and political parties towards the Mt. Merapi eruption survivors. This is reminiscent of the old paradigm that TVRI is state television which plays a central role in the government's political communication processes (Sudibyo 2004: 280).

From the background information in the news, this study found that TVRI Yogyakarta wanted to provide more information to the audience about the condition of the survivors by explaining the assistance provided and the state of the evacuations, which still lacked facilities. Most background information presented only reported aid from the government, organizations, and political parties. This shows that TVRI Yogyakarta did not have the perspective that survivors are able to survive without depending on outside assistance. On the other hand, TVRI emphasized the image that survivors were powerless and depended on gifts from other parties. For example, in a news article entitled 'Assistance to Refugees' (October 30, 2010), TVRI Yogyakarta reported that assistance was provided by a group of wives of the senators from the Golkar Party without adequate background information on whether the help met the survivors' needs or not.

At the end of the news, TVRI Yogyakarta often added additional information, such as conditions in evacuation. However, most of this information has no relation to news leads or primary information. In the news entitled 'Merapi Survivors' Assistance Continues to Flow' (October 29, 2010), the primary information described the ceremony of giving aid from the wife of senators of the PAN Party to the Sleman Regional Chairman of the PAN Party. In contrast, the news ending explained the statement from the Deputy Regent of Sleman Regency about the situation in the evacuation shelters.

The most prominent 5W+1H elements in the news were the 'who', especially the 'who' who provided the aid. Out of 20 news shows, the element of 'who' appeared the most in 15 news. The who element again highlights those who give assistance, namely government agencies, political parties, or companies. This strategy of emphasis, for example, appeared in the news entitled 'Assistance to Refugees' (October 30, 2010), where the who element dominated the news content, particularly emphasizing the aid provider, namely the wife of

senators from the Golkar Party. In this short news, the aid provider was mentioned three times. This finding confirms that TVRI has still not moved from the old perspective that they are a state broadcasting institution, where the elite of government or political parties have high news value; thereby, the activities they carry out deserve a significant portion of the news. The mention of names in full and in detail was reminiscent of the old style of TVRI during the New Order era, which always mentioned the names of government officials in full.

From the thematic aspect, TVRI Yogyakarta seemed to like reporting with the theme of assistance and concern from the government or political parties. Help from other parties, such as fellow citizens, is not enough to get a place. Another theme that emerged in the news was the regret of the Governor of Yogyakarta because residents did not listen and comply with the local government's warnings; because of that, many victims died due to the eruption. This thematic choice shows two critical issues. First, TVRI was still very shackled in its past as a government broadcasting institution. The mindset that they have to cover the activities of government officials and agencies was still very firmly entrenched in the minds of TVRI reporters. Second, TVRI Yogyakarta views survivors as weak and relying on aid to survive.

In the rhetorical aspect, the shooting technique that TVRI Yogyakarta often uses is the medium close-up, especially during the interviews with the news sources. This technique allowed the audience to clearly look at the source's face. An example was the news entitled 'Social Assistance for Merapi' (October 26, 2010) which took a medium close-up image of an interview with the Ministry of Social Affairs. The facial expressions shown by the interviewees were their seriousness in handling the aid distribution of aid. On the one hand, pictures highlighting subjects providing assistance were important as evidence of service, so the audience may know who was giving help. However, on the other hand, this also shows that TVRI Yogyakarta indeed emphasized the importance of the aid providers, most of whom were government agencies. In this case, survivors or residents were mere backgrounds that were not considered important by TVRI Yogyakarta.

In addition, long shots were also often used to highlight situations and conditions in evacuation shelters. For example, the news 'City Government Will Establish Public Kitchen' (November 11, 2010) highlighted the shelter situation, where survivors are relaxing. This image confirms the image built by TVRI that survivors rely on assistance to survive in shelters.

Theoretical Discussion

This study found that TVRI Yogyakarta framed the 2010 Merapi eruption as a momentum showing the responsibility and concern of the government and political parties. On the other hand, TVRI framed survivors as weak party that relies on disaster assistance.

The findings of this study confirm that TVRI Yogyakarta has not yet carried out its role as a public television, especially in crises caused by disasters. This may be concluded from the partiality of reporting on the government or political parties. TVRI Yogyakarta still prioritizes reporting on the ceremony of providing aid by the government and political parties rather than the public interest during the emergency responses to the 2010 eruption. This reinforces a study conducted by Agus Sudibyo (2004) which has shown that TVRI had many obstacles in its transformation into public television. During the Old Order and the New Order, TVRI played more of its role as an ideological, propaganda, and public relations tool for the ruling regime. This long period has created a very ingrained organizational culture of TVRI that they must report government activities to the audience. This historical fact became a severe obstacle when a wish was to transform TVRI into a 'public broadcasting institution' that should serve the public interests.

This research also reinforces the conclusion that in reporting disasters, the media still relies on official news sources (Nazaruddin 2008). This is closely related to the general practice of journalism in Indonesia, which is very used to relying on official news sources. The habit of journalists who 'hang out' in government, military, police, or corporate offices to wait for news to be released continues to be practiced when they have to report the uncertain conditions during a disaster (Nazaruddin 2008). In some instances, the reliance on official sources is even more complicated when there is a special relationship between the newsroom, the media owners, and the issues being reported. This can be seen, for example, from the reporting on the Aceh tsunami in the Media Indonesia Daily (Siregar 2006), where Surya Paloh, the media owner, played a significant role in reporting on the Aceh tsunami with his directions for the newsroom.

Muzayin Nazaruddin (2007), in his article on disaster journalism, mentioned four principles of disaster coverage, namely accuracy, humanity or alignment with survivors, commitment to rehabilitation, and control and advocacy. This research shows that TVRI Yogyakarta did not adhere to at least two principles of disaster journalism, namely humanist and advocacy principles. According to Nazaruddin (2011), if solidarity and empathy for survivors are the main motivation, the media should place survivors as the primary news sources. This research shows that instead of focusing on survivors, TVRI Yogyakarta enjoyed covering the ceremony of providing disaster relief with a focus on the aid providers,

especially government and political elites. Survivors were only a background that did not appear in the news.

This is further related to one of the media's primary functions as a mediator, connecting one place to another, one event to another, or one person to another (Sumadiria 2005: 34-35). In the context of a disaster, one of the essential functions of mediation is to link aid providers, aid distributors, and survivors as aid recipients. TVRI Yogyakarta has not been able to run such a function as they only focused on one side, namely the aid providers and the ceremonies of aid giving. TVRI never highlighted whether the assistance provided was right on target or not. Brian Houston et al. (2019: 591) from their semi-structured interviews with 24 journalists in the United States has warned that "disaster journalism done poorly can result in harm, but done well, it can be an essential instrument with respect to public disaster planning, management, response, and recovery". We may say that doing one-side reports, especially from the government's side, is actually very harmful for the survivors as their needs and voices are neglected.

TVRI should be able to report what kind of assistance was still needed by survivors, evacuation sites with the specific need of aid, types of assistance that are abundant and excessive, and others. With this comprehensive perspective, TVRI would be able to connect survivors with aid providers, so the donors may decide what assistance is appropriate and to whom it should be given. Takahashi et al. (2022) has proposed a set of interpersonal touch for disaster news, which is very useful for TVRI and other Indonesian media for the future disaster reports, including empathy and caring, easing tension, engagement and participation with the sources, especially the local residents.

In addition, TVRI Yogyakarta also did not pay attention to the aspect of balance in the news, especially between the government's and survivors' interests. Fundamentally, this is contrary to the principle of professionalism, which requires several conditions, especially objectivity. In this case, objectivity is formulated in two directions: factuality and impartiality (Yusuf 2006). Concerning this principle, this research has shown that TVRI Yogyakarta was not serious enough to adhere to the principle of impartiality, as evidenced by the one-sided news, namely from the side of the aid providers.

Furthermore, this is inconsistent with the principle of control (Nazaruddin 2011), that the press needs to monitor and criticize the steps taken by the government in handling disasters. TVRI Yogyakarta did not carry out its role as a controller of aid distribution. Instead of controlling the transparency of disaster aid, TVRI Yogyakarta focused on the assistance-giving ceremonies, which were dominated by government agencies and political parties. TVRI Yogyakarta was still very far from performing its role as a watchdog for disaster aid distribution (Nazaruddin 2011, Masduki 2007).

In terms of news value, TVRI Yogyakarta's news on the 2010 Merapi eruption shows several important points about how this public broadcasting institution perceives, categorizes, and ranks news value. According to Suhandang (2004:144-145), for news to have high values, there are four main factors: timeliness, proximity, magnitude, and importance.

In the aspect of magnitude, TVRI Yogyakarta perceived that the ritual of giving aid by the government or political parties has a greater magnitude value than the news about the help from volunteers or fellow citizens. Events involving assistance from volunteers and communities did not get a balanced portion in the report compared to information about aid from the government and political parties. In fact, during the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption crisis, volunteers, communities, and fellow citizens were always at the forefront to help the survivors, popularly called 'people help people' (Nazaruddin 2010).

Another crucial aspect of news value is its importance. The audience will be satisfied if their information needs can be met, especially regarding the progress of handling the Merapi eruption, the condition of the survivors, and others. However, what happened was that TVRI Yogyakarta preferred to fulfil the interests of certain parties, particularly the government and political parties. TVRI Yogyakarta should also prioritize reporting on the government's handling of emergency response and post-disaster recovery, for example, the issue of building shelters and permanent housing, psychological healing, or replacement of livestock.

Conclusion

This study found that news on disaster relief during the emergency response to the 2010 Mt. Merapi eruption on TVRI Yogyakarta focused on the ceremonies of giving aid, especially assistance from the government and political parties. The emphasis on aid-giving rituals can be observed from several aspects, namely the high intensity in reporting on this kind of ceremony, the focus on the element of who (provider of assistance), the mention of the party providing aid in a clear, detailed and complete manner, especially in the lead, and taking the aid provider images in the medium close-up technique. TVRI Yogyakarta framed the 2010 eruption as a momentum showing the government's and political parties' responsibility and concern. On the other hand, TVRI framed survivors as weak people that rely on disaster assistance.

This emphasis on the ceremony of assisting shows several important issues. TVRI Yogyakarta was still unable to carry out its role as a public broadcasting institution, especially in crises caused by disasters. This broadcasting institution was still shackled by the old paradigm of TVRI as a government broadcasting institution, as observed from their

preference for broadcasting aid-giving activities by the elites of government or political parties.

From the journalism aspect, this TVRI's news habit shows several important things. First, the general pattern of journalistic practice in Indonesia that used to rely on official news sources has greatly influenced TVRI Yogyakarta's reporting style in disaster crises. This is an essential note because, in an uncertain situation due to a disaster, the media must prioritize the voices of survivors (humanist principles), not just rely on official information from the government. This research found that TVRI did not have the commitment to speak up for survivors' voices and report on the problems they have to deal with.

From the angle of news value, TVRI Yogyakarta regarded government activities as events with high news value, compared to the dynamics and problems encountered by survivors. This tendency towards official sources undermines journalistic professionalism, especially the principles of balance and impartiality. Another critical issue is the absence of media in carrying out the role of mediation and control. TVRI Yogyakarta, with its tendency to report on the aid-giving ceremonies, neglected to mediate between aid providers, distributors, and recipients. In addition, TVRI Yogyakarta was also unable to carry out its watchdog role in the aid distribution processes.

Notes on contributor

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