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From legacy to digital native media: How Indonesian journalists perceive these working structure differences?

Dari legacy ke digital native media: Bagaimana jurnalis Indonesia memandang perbedaan struktur kerjanya?

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Abstract: The rise of digital native media has transformed the news ecosystem in the last decades. However, actors involved in the deployment of these digital media organizations mostly come from traditional publishers with established routines, norms, and practices. In Indonesia, digital native media as a flourishing industry is distinguished sharply from the old media, once they are large as online, grassroots, and anti-establishment forms of media. Through ten ($n=10$) semi-structured interviews, this study analyzed the changes that professionals have faced when moving from legacy (broadcast and print) media organizations to digital native media. Results show that Indonesian digital native media organizations bring Western ideas to develop their business models, driven in particular by innovative, technology-focused, startup values. However, these outlets face challenges related to building a solid reputation and brand recognition in comparison to legacy publishers, which limits their reach to people in the higher echelons.

Abstrak: Munculnya *digital native media* telah mengubah ekosistem berita dalam beberapa dekade terakhir. Namun, para pelaku yang terlibat dalam pengembangan organisasi media digital ini sebagian besar berasal dari media konvensional yang memiliki rutinitas, norma, dan praktik yang telah mapan. Di Indonesia, *digital native media* sebagai industri yang berkembang pesat sangat berbeda dari media lama, karena mereka hadir dalam bentuk media daring, berbasis akar rumput, dan anti-kemapanan. Melalui sepuluh ($n=10$) wawancara semi-terstruktur, penelitian ini menganalisis perubahan yang dihadapi oleh para profesional ketika beralih dari organisasi *legacy media* (penyiaran dan cetak) ke *digital native media*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *digital native media* di Indonesia banyak mengadopsi gagasan Barat untuk mengembangkan model bisnis mereka, terutama didorong oleh nilai-nilai perusahaan rintisan yang inovatif dan berfokus pada teknologi. Namun, media ini kerap menghadapi tantangan dalam membangun reputasi yang kuat dan pengenalan merek dibandingkan dengan media-media konvensional, yang lantas membatasi jangkauan mereka ke kalangan elit.

INTRODUCTION

The rise of digital native media – media companies that were born and grown entirely online– has transformed the news consumption model in the last few years (Nicholls et al., 2016). Digital native media are characterized by early adoption of new technologies, experimentation with multimedia storytelling, diversified business models, and a distinct implementation of news values and reporting approaches (Salaverría, 2020). These new players have an essential role in the innovation, production and dissemination of news. In their race for profitability, pure digital players have explored various ways of producing and financing content. However, many of these professionals came from legacy news media with established norms and practices. The transformation from a highly competitive and hierarchical journalistic newsroom environment (Clayfield, 2012) to a ‘new model’ of sharing information in the organizations has affected how the profession is perceived in the industry. Bringing these startup ideas to newsrooms, digital native organizations are created with limited resources and under huge uncertainty. Professionals have to perform more than one activity, which alters the production of news (Usher, 2017).

Since the advent of the Internet, many traditional news organizations are facing revenue drops and newsroom downsizing, limiting their operations and diminishing their ability to continue to operate. Questioning how journalists can survive in the digital age, scholars have been concerned about the future of the profession (Curran, 2010; Franklin, 2014). Even with so much uncertainty and turmoil in the news industry, new actors have come into play to affect the dynamics over time.

In the early 2010s, new media companies entered the scene; these organizations are commonly referred to as “digital natives”, as they have grown up in the online environment. Unlike legacy news organizations that originated before the internet and primarily focused on traditional mediums like print, radio, and broadcast, digital native news outlets were established in the online era and cater predominantly to digital audiences (Nelson, 2020). Legacy media refers to traditional news organizations that operate both offline (print or broadcast) and online, maintaining a strong brand heritage built on quality journalism and consumer trust (Vara-Miguel, 2020).

In the first years, the news industry received digital native media with skepticism, blaming aggregation –the act of combining information from different sources and displaying it in a single story– and clickbait content on them (Bakker, 2012; Molyneux & Coddington, 2020). Yet, digital native media has served as a source of inspiration for other initiatives. For example, BuzzFeed, Vice, and Vox are global ‘pure’ digital players that offer free content to their audiences and thus provide a source of public good (González-Tosat, et al., 2022). Moreover, the arrival of these digital native media happened at the same time as the social media boom, thus enabling publishers to pursue audiences in these platforms. These digital native media organizations created a symbiotic relationship with big tech companies (Ekström & Westlund, 2019). Today known as FAANGs –an acronym for the market's five most popular and best-performing tech companies, namely Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Alphabet's Google–, they were important to the popularization and success of the digital native outlets. Digital natives drive social media

optimization in order to generate as much traffic volume as possible and, therefore, attract the interest of investors (ibid). As a result, these pure digital players have been able to grow in recent years by using Silicon Valley venture capital, resulting in an increasing trend in replicating startup models in newsrooms (Usher, 2017; Wu, 2016).

What these organizations have in common is that their undoubted success derives in large measure from innovation. These pure digital players have mastered how to exploit content and formats in the online environment by generating traffic from digital platforms and mobile applications. However, these organizations are also investing in established media practices, such as hard news reporting and documentaries, that demonstrate their efforts to become serious players in journalism (Wu, 2016). Before the digital era, the competitive advantage of news organizations was built on their size and possession of assets, but today the pattern favors knowledge and technological skills applied to innovation (Tidd & Bessant, 2009).

In media outlets, innovation is neither a strategy nor a goal but a series of changes, dynamics, and mechanisms to reach a particular aim (ibid). Instead of sudden change, it is more about incremental evolution of media forms over several years as a continuous process of adaptation to the changing digital ecosystem. Considering the changes over the last decades, news production has undergone a profound transformation such as digital convergence and use of data in the news production. In fact, the concept of innovation is not related to a new product or service, as many may think. The ability to enhance invention and exploitation is what drives innovation (Verganti, 2013). In

the news industry, innovation is exemplified when legacy news organizations explore the production of content in online outlets only. This is associated with high risks in a short time due to the lack of sustainable online media business models (Boczkowski, 2004). However, exploitation occurs when content is copied from the print format to new formats, such as listicles, quizzes, and interactive stories, just to name a few.

Innovation in the newsroom is hindered by a number of factors. Marked typically by “reactive, defensive and pragmatic traits” (Boczkowski, 2004, p. 51), innovation in journalism is hardly encouraged and often disrupted when new players appear in the market. The approach to new technologies is usually conservative, slow, and incremental (Kueng, 2016; Lischka, 2019). In the digital environment, news outlets have to face new competitors, audience fragmentation and decreasing revenues (Picard, 2014), which have prompted a need to reconceptualize the media business. While legacy media were focused on being the agenda-setters of journalism, digital-born publishers have adopted new forms and formats to produce easy-to-read and amusing content with visuals that entertain the audience (Li, 2019).

Hence, innovation management responds to external and internal opportunities to introduce new ideas, products and services. The combination of innovation management processes and changes in the industry is important. Innovation triggers and deploys a set of tools allowing high-level actors to manage the different stages of this evolutionary process (Tidd & Bessant, 2009). Conversely, innovation faces the challenge of economic viability as well as the ‘yes, but’ syndrome (YBS) that limits new digital

strategies through excuses reflecting an inability to cope with digital challenges, such as lack of money, culture clashes, and other factors (Paulussen, 2016). Disruptive innovation is not usually applied to the news industry because it relies on exploiting technologies to deliver new or existing products in radically different ways and involves a high level of risk and uncertainty. In contrast, legacy news outlets are slowly adapting in the short-term through cumulative transformations that do not affect the whole business structure and focus on making good products better for their existing audience (Christensen, 1997). Thus, incremental innovation was the norm in the media industry until the arrival of several players, such as BuzzFeed, Vice and Vox, that appropriated new technologies and practices to disrupt traditional forms of news reporting (Bell, 2017).

The media scene in Indonesia has faced countless changes in the last decade, due to a greater pluralism of voices. With the exception of LGBTQ+ communities, other minority groups enjoy greater freedom of expression in the media. In fact, Indonesia's online journalism history built on the relationship between the emergence of new media and democracy. The Internet was used to deepen democracy and to revitalize pluralism that ended the authoritarian new order regime of Soeharto (Hill & Sen, 2000). According to Margianto & Syaefullah (2014), during the second half of the '90s, news media began to explore the Internet, in which the initial players were Republika, Tempo, Bisnis Indonesia, Waspada, and Kompas. However, the online portals were simply the digitized versions of these newspapers. The exception was Tempo that used its online platform as the only place to publish news, but it was because their print media was closed down by the regime at the time for being too critical towards the

government. The game-changer in the Indonesian digital news ecosystem happened in 1998. Soeharto's Impeachment ended the era of media censorship while, at the same time, Detik.com was born. As the first digital native media company in Indonesia, Detik.com lacked any print and broadcast publisher as its parent media. Two of the four founders had previously worked in a tabloid called Detik, but it has no correlation whatsoever with Detik.com.

Detik.com is 'the legend' of digital native media in Indonesia. Its emergence has generated a new style of journalism known as "*ringkas to the point*" (concise to the point, in English) (ibid, p.18). According to a study conducted by Remotivi (Research Institute for Media Studies in South Jakarta) in 2019, Indonesian online journalists still consider Detik.com as their role model. After the popularization of Detik.com, there was a boom of digital media in Indonesia at the end of 1990s, mostly led by huge investments from media conglomerates. An example was Kopitime.com, which is the only media ever included in the Jakarta Stock Exchange. However, the heyday of digital native media was briefly stifled in 2002 due to many companies' failure to pay operational costs. Only the digital portals Kompas and Tempo survived, as both belong to legacy media groups with finances supported by print news. But the birth of Kapanlagi.com and Okezone in 2003 revived the digital news ecosystem in the country, which has undergone a period of expansion since then. As stated by Margianto & Syaefullah (2014), after 2003, digital media invested in new forms to become more attractive to, and interactive with, their audiences.

It is important to note that a decade after the New Order era ended, politicians who were also business owners began dominating various media outlets. As

explained by Nyarwi (2008), some of these politician-businessmen directly influenced the managerial aspects of the media, while others had a more limited role. Certain media owners carefully but clearly used their institutions as political tools, while others focused solely on business interests. This leads to a paradoxical development in Indonesia's media landscape. On one side, the country embraced a pluralistic media policy through regulations such as Broadcast Law No. 32 of 2002, which introduced public and community-based media alongside existing commercial outlets. Additionally, laws like the Public Information Openness Law (No. 14 of 2008) and the Information and Electronic Transaction Law (No. 19 of 2016) ensured internet freedom and access to public information. However, dominant commercial media owners resisted these changes. Backed by a coalition of media oligarchs and political elites, they successfully influenced policies that reinforced a Jakarta-centric, commercial-driven media landscape while sidelining regional and community-based media (Masduki & d'Haenens, 2022).

To understand how this phenomenon is changing journalistic norms, routines, and ideals, this study explores the way Indonesian journalists perceive the structural differences between legacy media and digital native newsrooms, particularly how they adapt to the shifting organizational demands. While previous studies have examined the transformation of journalism in Western contexts, often focusing on technological disruption, innovation cultures, and entrepreneurialism (Carlson & Usher, 2016; García-Orosa et al., 2020; Sixto-García et al., 2023; Vara-Miguel, 2020; Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2023), there remains limited empirical insight into how

these dynamics unfold in the Global South, particularly in Southeast Asia. Indonesia, with its booming digital media landscape, offers a unique context where digital native media described as "online, grassroots, and anti-establishment" (Tapsell, 2015, p.192), stand in contrast to media models in democratic societies (Hanitzsch et al., 2019).

This study fills a gap by examining how former legacy journalists navigate their transition into digital native environments. Specifically, it investigates how digital native media organizations integrate new business models, technological innovations, and startup-driven values while contending with issues of credibility and audience reach. Through interviews with journalists who have made this transition, this study provides fresh insight into how media practitioners in Indonesia are redefining their roles within a rapidly evolving media ecosystem and contributes to the broader discussion on the future of journalism in digital environments, particularly from the Global South perspectives.

METHOD

This study relies on a qualitative method to understand how journalists' perceptions and experiences of the change from legacy to digital native media has affected their work. Firstly, a literature review from business and media scholarship reveals insights about how professionals in the media industry have adapted to the digital media ecosystem.

Secondly, an initial search of professionals was made through the social network LinkedIn. The authors began by searching for professionals who are currently working in digital native media. This study focused on online media companies employing several journalists

who produce news articles on a daily basis and take responsibility for their news content. The authors also considered the previous jobs of the professionals particularly those previously employed by big legacy media organizations in Indonesia, such as Jawa Pos, Tempo, KompasTV, CNN, Trans TV and so on. To ensure that those journalists had sufficient experiences in both types of media organizations, the authors required that the professionals should at least have worked for one year in both legacy and digital native media. The final list included more than 20 names.

The listed journalists were contacted through LinkedIn, then continued through email and WhatsApp.

Following the snowball sampling method, the interviewees were asked to recommend journalists who also had experience in legacy media and are now working in digital native media organizations. The result was a total of ten ($n=10$) interviews. Eight face-to-face interviews took place in the informants' offices or public cafes between October and December 2019. Two additional interviews were carried out through phone calls and video conferencing between April and May 2020. All interviews were conducted in Indonesian. The authors tried to include informants with diverse backgrounds, by covering informants that have worked in different types of legacy media (newspaper, radio, and television).

Table 1

Informants' data about their current position, digital native media that they are working for, and the duration of their work experiences in both types of media

Code	Current Position	Digital Native Media	Work Experience in Legacy Media	Work Experience in Digital Native Media
I1	Editor	Jatimnow: https://jatimnow.com/	>6 years	1-3 years
I2	News Editor	IDN Times: https://www.idntimes.com/	4-6 years	1-3 years
I3	News Editor	IDN Times: https://www.idntimes.com/	4-6 years	1-3 years
I4	Reporter	Tirto ID: https://tirto.id/	4-6 years	1-3 years
I5	CEO & Editor	Jatimnet: https://jatimnet.com/	>6 years	1-3 years
I6	Editor	Mainmain: https://www.mainmain.id/	1-3 years	1-3 years
I7	Data Journalist	Lokadata (former Beritagar): https://lokadata.id/	1-3 years	1-3 years
I8	CEO	DNK: https://dnk.id/	4-6 years	1-3 years
I9	Senior Video Editor	Brilio: https://www.brilio.net/	>6 years	1-3 years
I10	Editor	Suara.com: https://www.suara.com/	1-3 years	1-3 years

Notes: Throughout this article, the authors use these codes when referring to the journalists' responses and direct quotes from their interviews

Our interviewees worked in nine different digital native media organizations, as summarised in Table 1.

By conducting the majority of the interviews in their offices, we could also use this observation to understand their work

structures and cultures. Half of the media organizations are “popular” digital native media listed in the Top 50 sites in Indonesia according to the Alexa Rank, namely IDN Times, Brilio, Tirto ID, and Suara.com, while the rest are smaller local media organizations. The selection enabled us to examine the changes taking place across diverse news media organizations.

The interviews were analyzed using grounded theory proposed by Charmaz (2024) to clarify the research questions. Charmaz’s method involves collecting and analyzing data simultaneously in order to extract categories without hypotheses. It follows a systematic approach, such as writing analytical summaries, and examines data acquired through in-depth interviews, observation, reporting, statistical analysis, and diaries (Charmaz, 2024; Lim, 2019). This method begins with inductive data, relies on comparative analysis, involves simultaneous data collection and analysis, and includes strategies for refining the emerging analytic categories (Charmaz, 2024; Glaser & Strauss, 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our findings indicate that professionals formerly employed in traditional media organizations transition to digital native media by breaking existing rules and adapting new ones from the business sector, more precisely by integrating startups’ values into their journalism practices. Most of the interviews mentioned new values, such as flat structure and informal work culture, that are also presented in studies of digital native media in Western countries. Although studies have shown that, in some regions, journalists are coping with realities in different ways to develop democracies (Hanitzsch et al., 2019), our

study shows that Indonesia’s media inspiration still mostly came from Western contexts.

At the same time, as innovation challenges the underlying doxa of journalism, it also repositions journalistic actors by offering new values that coalesce in their news production (Usher, 2017). Our analysis suggests three main areas that journalists perceived in their transition from legacy to digital native media: startups’ value in the newsroom, branding recognition, and the transformation of journalistic practices.

Startups’ Values Taken to Newsroom

Informants called attention to the blurred boundary between journalism and digital culture. Indonesia is becoming a dynamic region for digital native news organizations. Changes occurred mainly since 2010, with the rise of affordable smartphone devices with Internet access followed by a decrease in print media readership (Eriyanto & Mutmainnah, 2020; Nugroho et al., 2013).

Our informants came from diverse digital native media organizations. For instance, IDN Media is the leading multi-platform media company for millennials and Generation Z in the country. Their business comprises four digital media outlets, a creative digital agency and an event agency. Established in 2015, Brilio.net similarly targets the young generation. The company formed as the subsidiary of one of the oldest Indonesian digital native media, Kapanlagi.com, that has flourished and been rebranded as KLY KapanLagi Youniverse, which currently owns 11 digital-born news media outlets.

Meanwhile, Tirto ID and Lokadata are currently two out of the three digital native media organizations in Indonesia that have described themselves as data-

driven journalism outlets (Muthmainnah et al., 2022). Tirto ID relies on data and in-depth news, but also produces news according to current events. Born in 2015 as Beritagar, Lokadata has slowly tried to build data-driven journalism as well as performing a role as news aggregator through the use of artificial intelligence and robot journalism. Suara.com, on the other hand, is the first digital media platform under the umbrella of PT Arkadia Digital Media and is currently expanding to a regional format.

Another unique case is Mainmain, a subsidiary of a basketball company, PT DBL Indonesia. This company promotes the activities and events held by the parent company. Yet as most of the people in the company used to work for Zetizen Jawa Pos –the first and biggest newspaper youth column in Indonesia– their content also addresses other issues, particularly those related to Generation Z. DNK also targets younger audiences, for example, through sarcastic reporting that has drawn comparisons to Vice. Different from the other outlets, Jatimnow and Jatimnet specifically target their news publication to East Java, one of the biggest provinces in Indonesia.

Through an analysis of the interviews, we identified five characteristics present in these organizations that are similar to startups: (1) informal work cultures; (2) innovation; (3) hybrid profiles; (4) tech-driven approaches; and (5) a young spirit. A startup is a young, technology-driven company focused on developing scalable and monetizable products through a lean strategic approach (Blank, 2010). Characterized by efficiency, open communication, and a flat hierarchy, startups emphasize flexibility, creativity, and rapid iteration, using experimentation and user feedback to refine their products. Our findings support previous research by

(Chew & Tandoc, 2024), which found that news media are increasingly adopting tech startup principles, emphasizing agility, experimentation, and adaptability. Additionally, news media follow startup's iterative development process, allowing rapid adjustments based on audience feedback and performance metrics. This fosters a dynamic, entrepreneurial mindset, where journalists must "hustle" to secure funding, engage audiences, and drive revenue.

Previous study on the media startups in Spain indicate that digital native media tend to be more adaptable, often operating with multidisciplinary teams, an attribute closely linked to the entrepreneurial spirit driving many of these initiatives (Valero-Pastor & González-Alba, 2018). Interestingly, The Reuters Institute's 2016 report which examined 12 digital-native news organizations across France, Germany, Spain, and the UK, that these outlets are typically founded by experienced journalists rather than technologists or entrepreneurs, emphasizing quality journalism and social impact over technological innovation or rapid business growth (Nicholls & Shabbir, 2016). Notably, digital-born media are more prominent in countries like Spain and France, where legacy media are comparatively weaker, highlighting how gaps in traditional media landscapes can foster the growth of digital-native outlets.

Our informants agreed that one of the main differences between digital native and legacy media organizations is the informal work culture. While traditional newsrooms have a strong hierarchy and well-defined routines, digital native structures involve a mixture of formal and informal rules and a flat structure, inspired by startup values. They spoke of the positive and negative sides of this open and informal startup culture. I3 "loves the fact

that he could wear anything in the office” and was able to do remote work and easily collaborate with anyone from any department. Less bureaucracy is also mentioned by I4; however, the informant admitted that the standard operating mode established by legacy media is still important. I4’s experiences in the digital native media have shown that, without a clear procedure, it is difficult to identify the roots of a problem.

Another topic that appeared in the interviews was the continuous effort to bring a young spirit to newsrooms. For instance, I6 mentioned that in Mainmain, it is common to hire only people under 30 years old. I2 and I3 are under 30 years old, but they feel old compared to their colleagues. Most of the companies rely on newly graduated journalists to become part of their team. The idea is to combine the energy of young writers and techies with veteran experience. Informants also mentioned that a young spirit promotes continuous improvement and innovation. However, this drive towards innovation can be also explained by the lower salaries younger employees receive in comparison to experienced journalists. Especially considering that journalists’ insufficient salaries have been a long-standing issue in Indonesia. The Alliance of Independent Journalists in Indonesia (AJI Indonesia) has repeatedly advocating decent amount for journalists’ salaries, as they had done a survey on journalists in Jakarta (Indonesia’s capital city) and found that there are still journalists who even get paid lower than the minimum wage standard created by the government (Al Hasan, 2024). This salary issue has also been correlated to the low quality of news in Indonesia (Waluyo, 2018).

An innovative mindset seems to be crucial at these organizations. This reflects

the difference that they faced when compared to legacy news media. Traditional outlets and, in particular, print publishers tend to innovate merely in terms of content, with lots of boundaries. In comparison, digital natives have to innovate in forms and formats but also in their organizational structures. Some interviewees mentioned that their organizations are inspired by successful Western digital native media groups, such as BuzzFeed (I9) and Vice (I8). An office visited by the authors was inspired by Google, where one of the founders had worked.

The tech-driven mindset was mentioned by the respondents as important to understanding how newsroom’s digitalization could help them make the most of technologies and easily adapt to new advances in the industry. Through their experiences at Google, IDN Times’s CEOs have an intrinsic tech-driven mindset and use Google apps in the newsroom. “Even to schedule a meeting with a colleague, we should use the apps. We were not allowed to do it conventionally” (I2).

As a result, hybrid profiles are essential in these newsrooms, according to the informants. As, in general, these organizations are still in their growing phase, they are not capable of hiring many employees. According to the interviewees, different skills are required and each worker has a higher workload. Besides performing the job responsibilities of a typical editor, I2 and I3 must also build media partnerships with other organizations, such as universities, to boost awareness of their media brand. I1 must also sometimes write articles to help his reporters meet tight deadlines. On the other hand, I5, even as CEO, manages the social media accounts of the outlet. Also,

I10 mentioned the need to learn photography, videography, and SEO when moving to digital native media to perform tasks usually done by the social media team.

Our findings align with previous study on digital media entrepreneurs in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa (SembraMedia, 2021). SembraMedia's report highlights that team members in a digital native media frequently assume multiple roles, blending skills in content creation, management, technology, and business development. Digital native media in those regions often foster innovation by building diverse teams beyond traditional journalism roles. Moreover, they found that ventures with dedicated sales or business development staff reported six times more revenue than those without. Yet, organizations with staff dedicated to technology and audience analytics reported higher page views and revenue, even in the absence of formal sales teams. The convergence of these traits in both our findings and previous studies underscore the global trend of digital native media adopting startup-like qualities to navigate the challenges and opportunities of the digital age.

However, it is important to note that these startup values in the newsroom have dismantled the so-called 'firewall' between newsroom and business divisions in media organizations. In legacy media, these two are usually completely separated to maintain the idealism and independence of journalists. However, this is not the case in digital native media in Indonesia, where collaboration between divisions is essential to success. Yet, it is also crucial to acknowledge findings from previous research on the practices of digital workers in an Indonesian digital native media company, which has revealed that these workers experience subjugation, alienation, and unequal rewards (Aprilie &

Eddyono, 2024). While they are presented with a 'fun workplace' environment, this masks the reality of exploitation—manifested through excessive workloads, blurred boundaries between personal and professional life, and a lack of fair recognition for their contributions. Using Christian Fuchs' digital labor theory, these conditions reflect key aspects of digital labor exploitation, namely coercion, alienation, and appropriation.

Brand Reputation and Openness to New Actors

With maturity come names and strong branding. As organizations with a long history, legacy media's brands are already familiar in society, politics, and business. This is, to some extent, affecting journalism practices in digital native media. All journalists ($n=10$) in this study stated that the brand is particularly effective in attracting interviews with prominent people. A former television reporter had easy access to top-level interviewees while working in a legacy media outlet. "I could interview the minister alone and interview him privately in a hotel room" (I4). Today, working in an online native media outlet, the best I4 could get was exclusive interviews with CEOs. When this informant wants to conduct interviews with prominent people, it always happens with other journalists, usually at press conferences. This is a great hurdle for I4 who writes long-form journalism, which ideally requires exclusive interviews. Furthermore, this informant also thinks that officials and politicians prioritize broadcasting journalism.

Similar experiences also happened to I10 when working as a magazine reporter, who waited to interview a celebrity with several online journalists, but I10 was the only one allowed to interview the celebrity privately. This has

made I10 believe that, to some extent, legacy media still have “higher prestige.” Our finding resonates the research done by Nelson (2020) that even in a saturated digital news environment, legacy news brands in the U.S. maintain higher popularity due to audience preferences for familiar, established sources, and structural advantages like greater capital.

To deal with brand awareness, I2 and I3 usually mention the name of the former legacy media organizations that they worked for when they approach important people. For I5, the problem demands to maintain a good relationship with interviewees. On the contrary, once I8 moved to digital native media, the network did not last. “It was indeed a privilege working in a legacy media company as huge as my former company. In the past, people could even postpone a press conference if the journalist from our media did not attend. But now, what people are asking in an event is: ‘Have the buzzers already come?’”(I8).

Consequently, digital native media are certainly gaining traction in the industry and paving the way for new entrants. It shows that information is no longer monopolized by legacy media organizations, and also that reliance on them is decreasing. Ekström & Westlund (2019) argue that one of the ways the Internet has disrupted the media industry is by reducing barriers to new entrants. I8 and I10 also argue that the disruption of new actors in media is not restricted to digital native media, but also ‘content-creators’ such as influencers, micro-celebrities, and buzzers who become part of their media production. One of the respondents, I9, even believes that, by analyzing the current trend, one person may serve as ‘media’, thus removing the necessity for established organizations.

Despite the dominance of legacy media brand, an outstanding finding from Latin America is that much of the innovation in journalism comes not from dominant media corporations but from secondary players, which often founded by experienced journalists laid off during economic crises in traditional media companies (Salaverría & de-Lima-Santos, 2021). Many of these professionals have launched digital-native projects that, while not all successful, have gained notable influence and staying power in recent years. What distinguishes the digital-native media that have achieved consolidation is a return to core journalistic values: independence, public service, and editorial seriousness. Rather than focusing on soft or entertainment news like many commercial media, they prioritize serious and alternative topics often overlooked by legacy media.

In a rapidly evolving media landscape, digital-native media organizations are experimenting with alternative income streams to build sustainable business models amid growing uncertainty (González-Tosat, et al., 2022). These ventures often create innovative products and explore diverse revenue sources, moving away from traditional reliance on advertising. However, in less developed countries, many news outlets remain heavily dependent on donor funding, a support system that is both limited and inaccessible in certain regions, underscoring the urgent need for independent and viable funding models (de-Lima-Santos & Mesquita, 2021).

Changing Journalism Practices

Whenever the informants were asked to describe the differences between legacy and digital native media, they typically paused and took some time to

think before responding. Most of them then said that “not much has changed, actually”. But one common statement pointed by half of them was that the major change relates to the ‘authority’ of editors in selecting issues to be published. Legacy media, according to I2, was mostly based on the subjectivity of the editors, as they were trusted to have good taste and capabilities in deciding what was important for society. In contrast, digital native media decisions are based on audience analytics. Studies have shown that Nielsen’s ratings for television and the number of hard copies sold for print media were also affecting legacy media organizations, but it was not as significant as the utilization of audience metrics in the online news media environment (Chua & Westlund, 2019; Tandoc, 2015).

Our interviews with these journalists indicate that the bigger and more established digital native media organization, audience metrics applications –such as Google Analytics– will be used more often and in a more advanced way. However, all informants also mentioned that they have set boundaries on their reliance on those applications. I6 saw problems with basing decisions on viewer numbers. I6’s team would keep publishing news related to that topic once they noticed interest from the audience. But, the intention, according to this informant, was not to ‘scare off’ the audience. To illustrate this, I6 mentioned the case of K-Pop, in which stories usually received many clicks. Yet if they kept publishing news stories about South Korean music and idols, the audience would become bored and leave their portal. In the opinion of this informant, there is a need to balance the news decisions based on audience analytics. A similar experience was described by I4 whose organization asked journalists to stop “following the clicks”. I10 confessed that their

organization sometimes publishes in-depth news articles as penance for sensational and profit minded stories.

Our findings in regard to editorial authority show both similarities and differences with the Western and Global South countries. A study of editorial management in Chile found that digital native media tend to prioritize editorial criteria over audience metrics (Greene et al., 2022), while newsroom managers in Belgium recognize that these metrics support journalistic work by enabling better planning of content production and distribution (Lamot & Paulussen, 2020). Chua & Westlund (2019) conducted a study with editors in both Singapore’s legacy and digital native media. Their results showed that there is a 50:50 ratio between analytics and human judgment in the news production in the island country.

Another prominent change in the respondents’ answers was the workload. The number of stories that are being expected to be produced by journalists is more than in the legacy media organizations. Similarly, they need to redefine what is their scope of work by doing other activities in the newsrooms, such as producing content for social media, gathering data, etc. In legacy media, journalists usually produce only 3-4 news stories per day. Meanwhile, in digital native media this number varies from 5 to 7 stories per day by each reporter. Also, some informants even mentioned that they have already produced more than ten news articles daily. Two informants (I4 and I8) do not have the same experience because they work on a long-form journalism type of media, which takes longer.

However, the fact that journalists should produce more news does not necessarily make them feel that working in digital native media is tougher. One of the reasons is they produce shorter and straightforward stories, as explained by the

majority of the informants. For I6, in native media, it is common to use one interview in more than one story. As a result, fewer journalists are getting to the field, leading to a worrisome decrease in the need to gather data. Sourcing-based news, aka aggregation (Bakker, 2012), in which journalists gather data from previous stories on the Internet or social media updates, has become a new routine in Indonesian media organizations. Aggregation has largely replaced original reporting because journalists do not need to leave their desks, which reduces production costs. In Indonesian legacy media, conducting interviews is still compulsory to retain the quality and reputation of the news organization. I2 explained that in digital native media, when an event occurs –for instance, a disaster–, journalists could immediately publish it on the publisher’s website even if it is a story of merely three sentences. While this informant worked in legacy media and managed the online portal, I2 still had to have at least one interview with an official source to confirm the information before publishing it.

News industry has always been an industry with high speed and tight deadlines, but digital native media is even tighter, particularly if compared to print media, as agreed by our informants. For newspapers, the daily deadline is usually in the evening. While in digital native media, it is necessary to publish the story within minutes after the event happens. Also, in print media, journalists were under pressure to be accurate and comprehensive, as mentioned by the informants that worked in print media.

I2 admitted to having bias concerning digital media. I2 used to believe that stories produced by digital media do not count as ‘news’. But after working in a

digital native media, this interviewee realized that short straight forward news stories (even though sometimes incomplete and misleading) is indeed the way it works. Another informant made the following similar point.

“Print media culture is a standardized culture. Standard of ethics, standard of writing. We were equipped with a set of moral and regulation burdens, [...] which is really strict and binding. When entering the online ecosystem with more freedom, liberal in its literal meaning, it is possible to create any kind of news. But, at the same time, it is hard to attract the reader as it is a very competitive ecosystem (I8).”

Therefore, I8 also believe that news in digital native media could be ‘hand-made’ instead of ‘industrialized’. News does not need to be straight and serious, it could be entertaining and personal, while still accurate yet reliable. This is in line with the emergence of a new genre in journalism that Hurcombe et al. (2021) defined as “social news”, in which news outlets, like BuzzFeed, are based on the vernacular conventions and pop-culture sensibilities of social media. I9 mentioned that BuzzFeed has inspired their organization, while I8 similarized the organization the informant works for with Vice.

After all, even with the changing journalism practices, digital native media does not necessarily leave the norms and routines of legacy media behind. To some extent, it is mimicking legacy media to become an established media organization. IDN Times, for example, is not only similar to BuzzFeed in terms of using listicles, but also in the efforts to launch a transition into the serious news business (de-Lima-Santos

& Zhou, 2018). In 2012, BuzzFeed hired Politico editor Ben Smith (Wu, 2016), while IDN Times created a specific “news” section and hired two editors with strong experiences in legacy media. Furthermore, they also hired an editor-in-chief that is a member of the Indonesian pressboard, which, according to I2 and I3, is strict in complying with the journalism code of ethics. This shows how the uncertain environment of the news ecosystem makes these nascent media look for traditional forms through which to gain recognition in the industry by mimicking once rejected routines and practices, as shown on the previous studies on the evolution of companies like BuzzFeed, Vice, and Vox (Bullock, 2014; Lowrey et al., 2019). BuzzFeed used infotainment – once considered an innovative way to bring information to their audience– to engage its audience in more conventional journalism (Hanusch, 2010). Vice was responsible for creating new narratives that place emphasis on “amateur aesthetics, immersive approaches, and ethics of witnessing with commentary”, such as their reporting on the Ferguson riots (Bødker, 2017, p. 27). The same applies to Vox Media that focuses on creating deep engagement by exploring new forms of journalistic content, mainly through video. The new forms of content of these digital native media were becoming more structured according to the routines, norms, and practices of the legacy publishers.

CONCLUSION

This study explores how journalists adapt and perceive the differences between two types of media: legacy and digital-native. While numerous studies have examined how digital-native media has transformed journalism, our research highlights how Indonesian digital-native outlets adopt Western business models

while simultaneously grappling with challenges related to reputation and legitimacy. These new players in Indonesia’s media ecosystem often operate with small teams whose skill sets go beyond traditional journalism, reflecting a more entrepreneurial and multifaceted approach. Hybrid profiles seem to be essential to deal with a continuous evolution in technologies. In order to keep up the pace of this evolution, not only professionals have to reinvent themselves, but also newsrooms that need to accelerate to survive in this wild environment that is the Internet.

The startups’ values also bring a flat rather than hierarchical model to these pure digital players, which diminishes the barriers and bureaucracy of long-established organizations. Furthermore, established norms, routines, and practices of the legacy news media have seemed to be evolved to adapt in the digital age. However, Indonesian digital native media are not destroying and starting from scratch these taken-for-granted processes, they are in a continuous transformational change to respect the new generation, medium, and business decision. In several aspects, digital native media is going mainstream and becoming the mimicry of legacy media organizations. Although digital native media organizations are being spread a lot over the country and become part important in the news ecosystem, giving voice to people that were not heard before, they are being undermined by people in the higher echelons, who tend to prioritize legacy media instead of digital natives.

This study is certainly not the pioneer in discussing the correlation between startups and newsrooms, but this article deliberately steps outside this somewhat narrow area of study of the West and instead focuses on the yet still under-researched case of Indonesia. Further

studies should be conducted, even a comparison study, to understand how other journalists in the world are adapting to this everchanging news ecosystem in other countries, including but not limited to understand how Western society still influences them. Moreover, our effort to achieve gender balance among the journalists in this study was not fully

realized, as only three out of ten informants were female. This highlights an opportunity for future research to explore whether gender influences journalists' perceptions of the transition from legacy to digital-native media, as well as how gender intersects with newsroom structures and work dynamics

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