

Research Article

Mainstream Media Strategy Embracing Muslim Centennials

Ratri R. Kusumalestari*, Arba'iyah Satriani, Andalusia N. Permatasari, Ajeng Nurhasanah, Mediani T. Rahmawati

Communication Science Faculty Bandung Islamic University

ORCID

Ratri R. Kusumalestari: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6356-5426>

Abstract.

The mainstream mass media has recorded its history in the journey of Indonesian journalism. The development and condition of the Covid-19 pandemic that utilizes digitalization technology have forced the mainstream mass media to transform to survive. The mainstream media is still read by Gen Z or centennials even though in the onslaught of social media and the shift of the age of information seekers or readers. Despite using social media and news aggregators as their first information sources, centennials still use mainstream media to clarify dubious facts they found on digital media. This study explores how the mainstream mass media survive and embrace the 100th generation as them. The researcher used an approach with case study methods and data collection techniques using observation, in-depth interviews, and document studies. The research subjects are editors of online mainstream media, namely suaramerdeka.com, krjogja.com, pikiran-rakyat.com, and Republika.co.id. This study discusses the strategic differences between the online mainstream media in the regions and the national media. Three interest findings are the highlight of this study. First, the routine media and approaches used to embrace the centennial generation as a potential audience. Second, the existence of content creators in the ranks of journalists is a new phenomenon that presents pros and cons. Third, the Republika.com approach as a media that serves Muslim audiences to Muslim centennials. Lastly, the use of journalistic language style that is familiar to centennials.

Keywords: mainstream media, Muslim centennials, content creator, media routine

1. Introduction

The study of mass media and audiences on the one side is within the framework of audience theory, starting from The Hypodermic Needle Model, Two-Step Flow, Uses and Gratifications to Reception Theory [1] which in essence discusses the effects of media on audiences. Much research on social media and mainstream media has mostly leaned towards audience usage patterns, perceptions, awareness, and related themes [2]. On the other side, discussions from the media's point of view using case studies

Corresponding Author: Ratri R.
Kusumalestari; email:
ratri rizki2021@gmail.com

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to see media strategies in achieving goals, for example, maintaining existence during pandemics and after the pandemic, are still rarely done.

The pandemic conditions gave a big surprise for the media to maintain their existence in the audience. The great leap of digitization and the flood of information sources in digital media also pose challenges, coupled with changes in audience consumption patterns that place mainstream mass media in a vulnerable position in terms of declining levels of public trust [3]. However, several studies show that mainstream media is still a reference for audiences, even young people such as generation Z or centennials [4], [5].

Centennials are the generation born between 1997-2012 [6] or between 8 and 23 years old today. They are the generation that will lead the world in the next few years. Innovation is born and developed by this generation. Based on the 2020 Population Census, the number of centennials reached 75.49 million people, equivalent to 27.94 percent of Indonesia's total population of 273 million [7]. This number is an opportunity for mainstream media to maintain their existence by embracing centennials as potential readers. Therefore, meeting the information needs of centennials should be a concern for the mainstream mass media in Indonesia.

Studies on information consumption by centennials show that more and more students choose social media than mainstream media to gather information. The main reason is that social media platforms are fast, easy, and convenient [8]. Another study showed almost the same results. The centennials made social media and news aggregators their first source of information [9]. Hence, they still use the mainstream media as a reference to ensure the truth of much information in digital media that they think is false or dubious. This has also been found in several studies on media audiences [4], [5], [10].

Research on Public Trust in Mainstream Press Media conducted by the Press Council [11] also shows similar results. These findings said that the public still believes in the information in the mainstream media. Therefore, the long-standing values of credibility and trust in the world of journalism are crucial elements to maintain the relevance and continuous use of mainstream media as a platform for information gathering among centennials. The rapid flow of information and the need for centennials for fast and easy information often ignore the authenticity. Meanwhile, mainstream media must increase its comparative advantage by incorporating speed, simplicity, and convenience into its online features.

Starting from the existence of mainstream media for the centennials audience phenomenon, this paper describes the results of research on how the mainstream mass media strategies in the form of online maintain their existence among centennials.

2. Methods

The method used in this research is a case study with data collection through in-depth interviews with media leaders who are the research subjects, namely Agus Toto Widyatmoko as editor-in-chief and Andika Primasiwi as editor concurrently editorial secretary of suaramerdeka.com; Octo Lampito as Editor in Chief of the online edition of krjogja.com; Yusuf Wijanarko as Managing Editor of pikiran-rakyat.com and Elba Damhuri as managing editor of Republika.co.id. Apart from interviews, data were obtained through literature review and document studies related to the scope of the research.

The data obtained were then analyzed by the provisions of qualitative data analysis as proposed by Bogdan and Biklen [12], namely organizing, sorting, synthesizing, searching and finding patterns, finding significant results to study, and deciding what to convey to the public. Interview transcripts and literature reviews are collected as data are processed and published through scientific articles.

3. Adjusted Media Routine

Based on the interviews, data obtained that the three local mainstream mass media as the subject of this study used different strategies. The goal is to maintain an existence amidst the onslaught of social media while accommodating the needs of centennials. The strategy developed by each media is not the same. It can be seen from the media routines carried out by journalists from suarmerdeka.com, krjogja.com, pikiran-rakyat.com, and Republika.co.id.

The first media routine is gatekeeping or editor activities in selecting and determining the facts to be presented. In this routine, journalists from suarmerdeka.com select facts not only based on news value but by continuously monitoring trending topics using Google Analytics or monitoring from other social media. Information from social media, which is the result of citizen journalism mostly, becomes a kind of inducement or initial idea to facts-finding related to events that appear on social media. It is acknowledged that reporting on events that are going viral is also one of their strategies to survive,

as implied in the following statement by Agus Toto Widyatmoko, Editor in Chief of suaramerdeka.com:

”Yes, that’s right, going online brings up the virality of things on social media such as (television series) Love Bonds (*Ikatan Cinta*), Broken Kites (*Layangan Putus*), and zodiac signs whose issues are close to the emotions of the audience. And it turns out that the audience’s emotions are awakened there. .”

In this gatekeeping routine, krjogja.com also monitors trending topics everyday, in addition to pursuing news in the field by collecting facts that have news value. Based on the interviews result, both were conducted simultaneously, firstly seeing the trending and then being chased by the news. However, krjogja.com ensures that it will not get caught up in the competition between media that then creates clickbait.

Meanwhile, pikiran-rakyat.com stated that they had to balance between heavy news and light content in looking for facts that made into the news. Sometimes they have to follow the market taste, but sometimes they also report content by journalistic functions, such as public unrest and so on. It formed along with changes in the information ecosystem dominated by trending topics in the digital world, so to maintain its existence, the mainstream media had to follow the way journalists work in the digital era that was affected by the pandemic.

Furthermore, Republika.co.id as a national media applies a flexible strategy between editorial meetings and viral keywords in determining the facts made in the news stated by Elba Damhuri as the managing editor;

“... Starting from what the editor made, then we saw what was happening outside and usually in the online media what was busy outside, which we then made news of, it had far more readers than what the editors had planned regarding issues related to the issue. Current issue. Usually, it is, but not all issues usually. Unless we have a strong issue and it becomes interesting for people to read. So, that is what we do, and in digital journalism, one of the main points in developing issues is that apart from being viral, keywords are keywords.”

Deadlines are the other media routine, namely the time limit for collecting news material which makes journalists often have to work under pressure and find it difficult to work optimally. Based on the interviews, all the local mainstream media (suaramerdeka.com, krjogja.com, and pikiran-rakyat.com), apply a shift work system by setting a target number of news that must be submitted by journalists within a certain time. Likewise with Republika.co.id. as national scale mainstream media. This work system was implemented because of the demand for changes in rhythm due to digitalization which seemed to eliminate distance and time, and everything was demanded to be fast.

The third media routine is the dependency on official sources in finding information and data to be processed into the news. The official sources in question are representatives of the government in charge of delivering news or releases to journalists. To maintain their existence, the three online mainstream media that are the subject of this research tend to reduce “red plate” news by considering the “click” value tends to be low. Indirectly, the dependency of the media on sources from the government is not huge. It is reflected in the following interview with the editor-in-chief of suaramerdeka.com::

”One of the basics is that I don’t want any news from the ‘red plate’, especially from our relationship with the Provincial Government, City Government, which every day has an interest in the media, including us, that’s why I emphasize it. It does not need to be published. Because if it is loaded, it turns out that there is no traffic for us in the sense that the traffic is there but it is very low compared to content based on social media”

Other local media, namely krjogja.com and pikiran-rakyat.com stated the same thing. News that comes from the government tends to have fewer readers. Republika.co.id. did not mention specifically about news sources from the government, but in the choice of topics seen that news from the government was indeed given a part, but was not dominant.

Fourth, the routine media related to news exchange activities between one news organization and another considering the role of news agencies as news suppliers is no longer as important as it used to be. The viral thing on social media has penetrated online news media. The mainstream mass media use information that is currently viral as a source of information. It causes changes and shifts in mainstream mass media. Journalists are no longer looking for, writing, and publishing news. Journalists function only as distributors or disseminators of news from social media sources [13].

Media suaramerdeka.com, krjogja.com, pikiran-rakyat.com allow their journalists to take news from social media under certain conditions. In addition, online and print journalists can exchange information through the “kitchen” or “newsroom” which accommodates news from various sources. Republika.co.id. frees its journalists to seek news from sources that are considered credible with a note of verifying before the news is written and delivered to the public.

The adjustments to the media routine carried out by the four mainstream media are a form of adaptation to maintain existence in the digital world after the pandemic that accelerates digitization. Gatekeeping, deadlines, dependence on sources, and the exchange of information by each media affect the content of the news that aims to increase the number of readers.

4. Content Creator, Journalist, and Writer

A study on journalism in the digital era found that the transformation of journalism in the digital age occurred in four points, those are the way journalists work in seeking information, the nature of news content, the organizational structure of the media in the newsroom: and the nature of the relationship between the media, reporters and public as audience. The challenge of digital journalism in the digital era is in terms of presenting accurate, quality, and credible information to the public [14].

One of the strategies of online mainstream media to maintain its existence is to use the services of a content creator (CC). The three media have different views on CC working for their media. Suaramerdeka.com and krjogja.com media, as stated by their Chief Editor, consider online media journalists to be CC because they carry out the same journalistic activities. The use of the term CC adjusts to the current trend. When opening a job vacancy for a journalist position, few people ask. It is opposite if the job position offered is CC.

Meanwhile, pikiran-rakyat.com stated that there is a dichotomy between journalists and content creators by borrowing Agus Sudibyo's term from the Press Council. In contrast to the large media that have grown and have direct access to the center or government, and even have the political power to pressure them to get funds from there, pikiran-rakyat.com is a local media whose sources of funds are so limited. Journalists and CC actually can combine work patterns in the sense that journalists are required to always comply with the journalistic code of ethics, while CC is required to be creative. At pikiran-rakyat.com, someone must undergo a training period with the journalism knowledge and material, before being accepted to work as CC.

In the Republika.co.id. point of view, there must be a clear distinction between journalists and CC. When hiring CC, they don't want them to work as journalists later. This national mainstream media not only employs journalists and CC differently. There are some people whose job is to write feature writings but not journalists. They call themselves writers as the editors say as follows;

"Well, there is one more thing. Besides content creators are writers, many writers are also hired by online media to attract traffic, and there are a lot of great writers in online media. He's not a content creator but a writer because he doesn't want to be called a content creator, right."

Journalist at Republika.co.id. is hoped that later they can become experts in their coverage areas, as has been the case in the United States. Thus, the distinction between journalists, CC and writers is significant for this media.

The existence of CC, in addition to journalists, provides its role for the four media as the objects of this research. The diversity of news content in terms of themes and language selection is acknowledged by the four media that many target centennials because of the number of them who dominate internet users in Indonesia. For this reason, the existence of CC is to be able to assist the work of mainstream media journalists in embracing centennials as potential readers.

5. Muslim Centennials as Potential Readers

According to Dominick (2005), the social implication of the internet and social media is that they complement as the functions of mainstream media. It shows that social media has established itself as a means of gathering and disseminating information, such as mainstream media that serves various needs of society, ranging from cohesion, cultural continuity, social control, and circulation of diverse information [15].

Centennials usually like something out of the box, tend to be overconfident, and dare to express opinions, either directly or through social media [16]. Previous research on centennials shows that even though social media is the first source of information, this generation still uses mainstream media as a reference to check the truth of news that they think is dubious [17]. It shows that centennials are potential readers of mainstream media. One interesting fact was the existence of Muslim centennials, who became the attention of the four mainstream media in this research.

Based on the results of the interviews, it was data that the three local mainstream media that were the subjects of this study had their respective strategies in targeting Muslim centennials. Media *pikiran-rakyat.com* admits that it still maintains its loyal readers, but on the other hand, it still has to increase its reach to young readers. One of the strategies used is to do research related to keywords that are most sought after by them.

Meanwhile, *suaramerdeka.com* views centennials as potential readers based on the tools used, so a different strategy is needed to approach them as below:

“Of course, this is our strategy as well as our efforts to reach friends who come from the 18-24 year age group. One of the things we implement here is that we reproduce the content that relates to children at that age. Not only breaking up kites, soap operas like that but also news about K-Pop that we want to increase as well.”

Furthermore, *krjogja.com* chose a strategy of organizing activities involving centennials to attract their attention. One of them is holding a prayer competition aimed at Muslim centennials. The large number of participants who take this online competition

shows the potential of Muslim centennials as an audience of readers for krjogja.com as online mainstream media.

Republika.co.id. as a national media that serves Muslim reader has made a breakthrough to embrace these Muslim centennials. This media not just provides Islamic content that adapts to the style and psychology of centennial readers but prepares a forum for them to participate in writing articles published on Republika.co.id.

“So, there is a digital model strategy that we have developed related to answering the needs, yes, gen Z, millennials. Because many people are also interested in how we can be productive by playing in the digital world. Including students, students, and workers. So, first of all, we develop a new digital model which we call Republika netizens. Republika netizen is a new model where all content comes from outside parties, not from Republika editors. So there are thousands of active ones, a day, we get around 500-1000 content from workers, students.”

The explanation of religious law or aqidah is more touching for Muslim centennials in their everyday lives. The aim is to make it more easily accepted by them. If there are differences regarding religious law, the media strives to present multiple perspectives without exacerbating differences. It gives Muslim centennials the option to make their own decisions, which one they think is most appropriate.

Another essential thing in the findings of this research is the linguistic approach taken by the three media in embracing the centennial audience. Language is the lifeblood of print, electronic, and cyber media. Language variety is an identity or characteristic of a media [18]. In the writing stage and news editing, the use of journalistic language is a very significant aspect. However, cyber media often violates the rules of journalistic language [19]. The vary of journalistic language in each online media is adjusted to the target audience and media ideology [20]. The use of good and correct Indonesian, such as in print media, is starting to be replaced by online media languages that are more familiar with centennials.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussions in this study, it can be concluded that online mainstream media make various efforts as a form of strategy to maintain their existence. Although the strategies used are different, the significant point to note is that the media routines of the four media, namely Suaramerdeka.com, krjogja.com, thought-rakyat.com, and Republika.co.id, are evidence that the media are adapting to embrace more many

readers, especially centennials. The existence of content creators, in addition to journalists, aims to produce content that is of interest to centennials. In particular, the four media approached Muslim centennials to attract their attention as potential readers. The use of online media languages that are more familiar with centennials is one of the strategies.

The novelty in this study is the finding of data regarding the strategies carried out by the mainstream mass media that have managed to survive in the pandemic and post-pandemic eras as input for the media who are still struggling amidst the onslaught of information from social media and online media lines. The findings in this study also provide development opportunities for broader research, either by adding research subjects to the national or local mainstream media.

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