

Commodification of Viral Information in the New Media Era (Case Study on Cek Fakta Page of Tempo.Co)

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ABSTRACT

The development of internet technology resulted in drastic changes in the flow of information globally. Now, people can make their own choice of information that they like. But on the other hand, they also have the potential to receive wrong information. Social media, where people interact a lot, also has a lot of false information or hoaxes. Meanwhile, the mass media, which used to be the gatekeepers of information, are no longer the main source of readers. As a way of defending itself from change, the media began to adapt to the flow of information on social media. They seize the opportunity by seeing the circulation of viral information that tends to be hoaxes. This study describes the adaptation of Tempo media to current conditions. This study uses an interpretive or constructivist paradigm. The research methodology rests on the foundation of ontological and epistemological assumptions. The author uses a media political economy approach in this study. In the media's political economy, there is commodification, converting use value into exchange value. This research shows the existence of the Cek Fakta web page on Tempo.co as a way to promote media name branding. Tempo has calculated the business on the Cek Fakta page at Tempo.co. Profits are not only material or money but also in terms of branding. Cek Facts is a tool for branding Tempo. From that point of view, in terms of traffic, the Cek Fakta page's existence contributes to many readers.

Keywords: Internet, Hoax, Cek Fakta, Tempo, Commodification, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

Online media has sprung up a lot. On the other hand, print media has reduced pages and circulation a lot. Miriam J. Metzger and Steven Chaffee once wrote in a scientific journal entitled "The End of Mass Communication?" in 1991. In that journal, he explained that media technology for mass communication allows the sending and receiving of messages to be carried out in larger numbers in the hands of users but at a lower cost. An example is internet services which he predicts will become the backbone of mass media. Together with Steven Chaffee, Metzger clearly distinguishes between "mass communication" and "media communication" due to the

presence of the internet. They brought the discourse of the end of mass communication to be replaced by media communication in the future [16]. Mass media, or at least the gatekeeper, will decide what content is widely disseminated to the public [4].

Currently, what had been predicted by Chaffee and Metzger is happening in Indonesia. Social media makes communicants active, not passive. They actively choose media according to their preferences and needs. New media has been around for decades. The term new media does not refer to a specific technology but is more collective with the current condition of new media, which is closely related to the internet [14]. Sonia Livingstone from The London School of Economics and Political Science, in her journal entitled "*New Media, New Audiences*", asks, what is new in *new media*? He also explained that the failure of the media to gain market share was due to not following what the users or consumers wanted. The history of technological failures in this century shows that the mass media are unsuccessful because they depend more on their social constructs and contexts of use than on their technological capacity [8].

In a series of reports resulting from a research collaboration between the Center for Innovation Policy & Governance (CIPG), the Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (HIVOS) and The University of Manchester, journalist Dandhy Dwi Leksono said that the media as a business was realized by capitalist groups long before the era of reform was born in Indonesia. Especially when the media industry is entering a period in which the internet plays an important role in circulating information. The internet also provides easy access to information through smartphones and computers. Anyone connected to the internet can access any information they want. According to Flew (2005: 3), "*The idea of new media captures both the development of unique forms of digital media and the remaking of more traditional media forms to adopt and adapt to the new media technologies*". In this case, some experts agree that the term new media is used to differentiate it from old or traditional media that existed beforehand [16]. The development of the internet and the emergence of digital media have drastically changed the model of public communication. However, the biggest challenge during this abundant flow of information is the spread of hoax information which can be accessed by all social media users widely and quickly [2]. This condition has given birth to the effects of the recent spread of misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda, which are increasingly amplified daily due to the unprecedented increase in access to social media [3].

According to Wardle (*Verification Handbook*, n.d.), lies, rumours and propaganda are not new concepts. Humans can always deceive, and there are some outstanding historical examples where hoax content was used to mislead the public, destabilize governments, or send stock markets soaring. What is new now is that it is easy for anyone to create interesting, misleading, hoaxes content that spreads quickly to all corners of the world. The bad impact of people who consume hoax information can be instigated. The Indonesian Telematics Society (Mastel) conducted a survey to get an overview of public perceptions of hoaxes, their distribution, classification, and their impact on national life nationally in 2017. As a result, 92.4 per cent of hoax information dissemination came from social media. In the next sequence, chat applications accounted for 62.8 per cent of the spread of hoax information [9]. Various comments by netizens on social media are also increasingly diverse in response to information spread on the internet. The troubling thing is that certain parties are driving the spread of hoax information. The potential victims of spreading hoaxes are the people themselves, especially those who use social media.

Since the internet is easily accessible, many media have flocked to digital transformation. Especially print media, which so far have been widely known to the public, such as Kompas Daily, Surya Morning Daily, and Tempo Magazine. Throughout human history, forms of communication media have changed in the complexity of how messages are conveyed dramatically [13]. Nicholas Negroponte lists the changes that will ultimately result from the new media of the information age.

The first change is a place with no space. Geographical limitations are being eradicated. Life will have less dependence on a particular place and time. The two are asynchronous. With media out of sync, time management capabilities are greatly improved. People can respond to messages and watch things conveniently, not limited by time. The third is demanding requests. New media born because of the internet makes it possible to change from 'broadcasting' to 'broadly capturing'. From receiving standardized program broadcasts to the public, they sort and organize programs according to their individual needs. Negroponte noted that on-demand information would become an accepted standard in the *new media* era.

When the internet makes it easy for journalists to get information, such conditions also present a challenge, namely the accuracy of the information. Ideally, the news material presented in the mass media is an attraction that can invite the curiosity of readers or the public [1]. A lot of viral information tends to be incorrect or hoaxed. Responding to this phenomenon, several online media in Indonesia started to create pages that specifically analyzed the viral information and finally made conclusions about the accuracy of the information. The page is often called the Fact Checking page. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) summarize the problem of the abundance of hoax information by writing: "Information is personally and socially valuable when people can infer the true state of the world". Academics continue to suggest new ways to deal with "fake news" in the mass media and social media [6].

In this research, the author takes a case study in the online mass media Tempo.co. At Tempo.co, there is a page called Cek Fakta. Quoted from the official website, the Cek Fakta page verifies selected claims based on four considerations. The four considerations consist of the importance of the topic for the public, reports claimed by certain parties as fact, whether the claim is the subject of extensive discussion or discussion and whether the source of the report has been verified.

After selecting the claim to be verified, the Cek Fakta team must ascertain the substance of the news circulating or the content of the claim submitted by the owner of the statement. Fact-checking is not a new issue in the development of journalism. Every journalism process requires checking facts because the basic principles of journalists themselves are actualization and verification [12]. The author assesses the need to complete commodification research studies through hoax information. Through this research, the authors observe the commodification of information that tends to be a hoax on a special channel belonging to the mass media as a novelty. The data that will appear in this research are facts reported on the Cek Fakta channel and interviews with the editorial team, especially the Cek Fakta channel manager. The primary data will become material for revealing how the commodification of information that tends to be hoax works in mass media. This disclosure will add a new colour to the study of commodification, especially towards strengthening the commodification of

content, audiences and workers, manifested in the form of linkages between news and hoax information.

METHODOLOGY

Research on the commodification of information on the Cek Fakta channel at tempo.co uses an interpretive or constructivist paradigm. Constructivism is an ontological position that asserts that social actors and humans form social phenomena and their meanings. That implies that social phenomena are not only present as a result of social interaction but are also formed from constant changes [7]. The interpretive paradigm approach views social reality as something complete of meaning, and there is an interactive symptom relationship. The interpretive approach departs from seeking explanations about social or cultural events based on the perspectives and experiences of the people or organizations studied. In general, the interpretive approach is a social system that interprets behaviour in detail by directly observing [11]. The interpretive paradigm views facts as unique and has a certain context and meaning as the essence of understanding social meaning. This paradigm sees facts as fluid, not rigid, and attached to a system of meaning. Behaviours and statements can have many meanings and be interpreted in various ways [11].

Paradigm is an idea popularized by Thomas Kuhn (1970), meaning a basic orientation to theory and research. There are many definitions of paradigm. In general, the scientific paradigm is a whole system of thinking. It includes basic assumptions, important questions to be answered or puzzles to be solved, research techniques to be used, and examples of what good scientific research looks like [11].

The research methodology rests on the foundation of ontological and epistemological assumptions [11]. In the book *Social Research Methodology Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, Neuman explained that ontology concerns the problem of what exists or the basic nature of reality. In contrast, epistemology is how researchers know the world around them or what makes true claims about things around them.

In detail, ontology is a philosophical area related to human nature. In the study of philosophy, this ontology asks what is actually and what is fundamental to reality. A realist sees this world as part of it that is 'out there'. The world is organized into pre-existing categories and is waiting for humans to discover them. A realist assumes that the 'real world' exists independently of humans and their interpretations. That makes access to the real world less difficult. Put, 'what you see is what you get' [11].

Neuman explained that other epistemology leads someone to learn about the world rooted in ontological assumptions. Epistemology covers what humans need to do to produce knowledge and how scientific knowledge behaves after it has been produced. What humans experience is a reality of the results and the process of interpretation. It is impossible to separate objective reality 'out there' from the interpretation or where it is happening.

The best knowledge about the world that is produced offers interpretations that are then carefully considered by certain people. To produce social science knowledge, it is necessary to inductively observe, interpret and reflect on what others are saying and doing. Specifically, in the social context, humans reflect and interpret their experiences. Epistemology is the study of

philosophy related to knowledge creation; it focuses on how humans know what they know or what is the most proper way to reach the truth.

After explaining philosophically, Neuman explained that three approaches could be used in social research. The three approaches consist of a positivistic social science approach, social interpretive and social criticism. Much of the ongoing social research is positivistic and interpretive. Positivism is the oldest and most widely used approach. The other two non-positivist alternatives represent different views and assumptions about social science research. The author uses a media political economy approach in this study. In the media's political economy, there is commodification, converting use value into exchange value (Mosco, 2014). Commodification consists of content, audience, and workers. This research attempts to reveal these three practices on the editorial desk of tempo.co.

This research does not prioritize the size of the population or sampling. Even the population or sampling is very limited. If the data collected is in-depth and can explain the phenomenon under study, then there is no need to look for another sampling. What is emphasized here is the depth (quality) of the data, not the amount (quantity) of the data. The research results are more casuistic alias not to be generalized.

The author uses an interpretive paradigm from this description because it is considered ideal based on practical experience. This research will explain the phenomenon of commodification that is interrelated, namely between content, audiences, and workers at the editorial desk of tempo.co to produce news on the Cek Fakta channel.

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Data collection was carried out by the author using interviews and observing the online Cek Fakta channel. In this Viral Information Commodification study, the authors face distance

constraints with sources, but this can be overcome using telephone interviews and virtual or online face-to-face.

The interview model in social science research has been around for a long time, like the ancient Egyptians, who used interview techniques as a population census tool [5]. Interviews take many forms and use. Three types of interviews are structured, semi-structured and unstructured [5]. The interview context demands a neutral role without having to insert the researcher's opinion into the respondents' answers. Meanwhile, data collection through observation of the Cek Fakta channel was carried out by direct access to the tempo.co page. The author directly observes the news on the Cek Fakta channel and then matches it with the interview results.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Viral Information Search Metadata

In this phase, interviews were conducted with the coordinator of the Cek Fakta Tempo.co website, Angelina Anjar Sawitri. Based on the results of the interviews, it is known that the existence of the Cek Fakta web page on Tempo.co is one of the ways to promote media name branding. The presentation explained by Angelina indicates that the contents of the news coverage on Cek Fakta are not solely for public information but also to be traded for profit, namely media branding. He stated that the history of the formation of Cek Fakta began before the 2019 Presidential Election, in January 2019, to be precise. Angelina did not know the date of the establishment of Cek Fakta because she was not the first person to manage Cek Fakta.

"Actually, Cek Fakta Tempo.co started before the 2019 presidential election, so it's taking longer, right? One of our concerns in the midst of the presidential election is that it's a hoax. Previously, it had started in the DKI Jakarta Pilkada," (Angelina, 2021).

She stated that much incorrect information or hoaxes were circulating among the people of DKI Jakarta during the 2017 DKI Jakarta Pilkada. At that time, the DKI Jakarta Pilkada brought together governor candidate Basuki Tjahaja Purnama or Ahok as the incumbent against Anies Baswedan. Angelina said many hoaxes and black campaigns were circulating at that time. These conditions make the information captured by the public inaccurate. Angelina called it a maze.

"That makes information confusing, some people even easily judge, for example, one particular candidate with hate speech or racism, even though this is wrong," (Angelina, 2021).

After the DKI Jakarta regional elections, social media still circulates hoax information in society. There are even several websites, such as the mass media, which also spread hoax information. Before entering the 2019 presidential election, Tempo.co created the Cek Fakta website. The web is made to report which information is right and wrong.

Sure enough, conditions worsened when entering the 2019 Presidential Election, which pitted Joko Widodo - KH Ma'ruf Amin against Prabowo Subianto - Sandiaga Uno. An indicator that the conditions during the 2019 presidential election were more severe was the polarization of the Indonesian people, not only in DKI Jakarta. The head-to-head battle between Jokowi and Prabowo has forged a dividing line between supporters. The battle for the influence of supporters also occurs on social media.

They do various ways through social media to beat each other. Various discourses were thrown, and they did not hesitate to spread slander. Angelina said that this condition had been predicted by the editorial staff of Tempo.co. Therefore, Cek Fakta is presented as a 'clearer' of confusing information.

"We finally took the initiative to establish this Cek Fakta channel. In fact, there are many Cek Fakta organizations overseas that are specifically dedicated to tracing the truth or facts. So, there is nothing wrong either, Tempo as the mass media in Indonesia started this initiative so that it can help at least reduce the hoaxes that are here, indeed it can't be eliminated immediately. Indeed, it departs from the many hoaxes in Indonesia" (Angelina, 2021).

Every day there is always news published on the Cek Fakta channel. Based on direct observations on the Cek Fakta channel, there are between 1 and 3 news stories daily. On the official Cek Fakta website, the editors explain the methodology for tracing the hoax information. The explanation is as follows; This Cek Facts channel verifies the claims selected based on the considerations; (1) is the topic important to the public? (2) does the report claim to be fact? (3) did the claim become the subject of widespread (viral) discussion or discussion? (4) has the source of this report been verified?

After selecting the claim to be verified, the Cek Fakta Team must ascertain the actual substance of the news circulating or the content of the claim submitted by the owner of the statement. Relying solely on citizen reports is sometimes not accurate enough. Therefore, the first step for the Cek Fakta Team is to conduct preliminary research to ascertain whether the media have reported the statement or claim. If so, the Cek Fakta Team studies how the media reports on this issue and what is the context of that statement.

After confirming that the claim was widely circulated in the community or uttered by a public official, the Cek Fakta Team will try to contact the relevant parties. When the claimed source can be contacted, the Cek Fakta Team will ask what evidence is the basis for the claim. This confirmation is important, so the Cek Fakta Team understands the statement's context to be verified.

The next step is to research to find all public sources, especially data that is open and accessible to everyone, regarding that claim or statement. All available sources will be explored and, if used, will be included in the article so that the audience can immediately check their validity. "The Cek Fakta team believes that transparency of methodology and sources is the key to the credibility of our fact-checking process," wrote the editorial statement on the Cek Fakta channel.

After all, research has been completed, if deemed necessary, the editorial staff of the Cek Fakta channel will also interview competent experts in related fields with related claims. This interview is important to ascertain whether or not the editorial conclusions regarding the claim are strong enough.

Collaborative Work

The Cek Fakta team also collaborated to help the editors choose which claims to examine. Tempo cooperates with the Indonesian Anti-Defamation Society (Mafindo), which manages its

fact-checking website and pages on social media. Mafindo is a non-profit organization consisting of activists, programmers, and community members concerned about the accuracy of the information in cyberspace. Tempo does not pay and does not gain financial benefits from this cooperation. Mafindo's financial reports can be accessed on its channel.

Tempo institutionally cooperates with Mafindo solely to produce an integrated hoax database to facilitate joint verification efforts. This collaboration is also manifested in a website created by the collaboration between the Indonesian Cyber Media Association and Mafindo, namely CekJadi.com.

The Cek Fakta team also provided an assessment of the information analyzed. After the verification process is complete, the editor of the Cek Fakta channel will provide conclusions on the claims examined. There are five categories of assessment used. Namely, the first statement is true. The true statement is concluded based on all available sources; this statement is accurate. The second is Partly True judgment. The statement is based on all publicly accessible sources, which is partially true.

The third assessment is Not Proven. This assessment is based on all the evidence that can be obtained, this statement cannot be concluded as accurate or not. The fourth assessment is heretical. This assessment is based on existing sources, this statement uses the correct facts and data, but the way of delivery or conclusions is wrong and leads to wrong interpretation. Meanwhile, the latter is an erroneous assessment. This statement is based on all available evidence, which is not accurate.

The Cek Fakta editorial team also opened the widest possible door for the public to provide reports, input, and suggestions, even criticism, for all of Tempo's news coverage, including content on the Cek Fakta channel. The way to do this is to invite readers to report through a form that can be downloaded on the Cek Fakta channel. The method is relatively easy. Residents only need to include their name, email where they can be contacted, the text of the claim or hoax they want to examine, and evidence in the form of a screenshot. Inputs, suggestions, criticisms regarding the methodology, and conclusions on the Cek Fakta channel can be submitted via email to CekJadi@tempo.co.id. This email is managed by Tempo's editorial team and will be checked periodically by the editor and followed up proportionally.

The Tempo editorial team is also subject to the guidelines for cyber media reporting formulated by the Press Council. The guideline regulates a correction mechanism if there is erroneous reporting. After receiving information regarding content errors, the editor immediately verifies and corrects the error.

At the end of the explanation, Tempo.co also pointed out the person in charge of the Cek Fakta channel. Namely the Editor in Chief of Tempo.co, Setri Yasra. Daily, the Cek Fakta channel is managed by several fact checkers who have attended training on verification methods and Cek Fakta held by the Google News Initiative in collaboration with the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) Indonesia.

Based on information on the Cek Fakta channel, the Cek Fakta Team consists of Moerat Sitompul as the Head of the Tempo Media Lab Team, then Angelina Anjar Sawitri as the Coordinator of

Cek Fakta Tempo, Ika Ningtyas as the Checker of Tempo Facts, Zainal Ishaq as the Checker of the Tempo Facts and Ibrahim Arsyad who is also the Checker of the Tempo Cek Fakta.

Cek Fakta plays an increasingly vital role when it is known that public media literacy is low in Indonesia. Angelina emphasized that in the future, Cek Fakta will play an important role, not only as an information cleaner but also as educational material so that the literacy level of the community increases, more specifically in the mass media.

People still cannot tell which information is true or a hoax. When it is so easy to receive information, it is also easier for people to get inaccurate information. Angelina admits that she does not know the statistical picture of literacy levels in Indonesia, but she believes her position is at the bottom. "When they get information, they immediately believe the information without double-checking. I forgot the statistics, but what is clear is that the level of literacy in Indonesia is still low," (Angelina, 2021).

Branding Advantages of Commodification

Based on Angelina's experience managing the Cek Fakta page, in searching for information, she often finds a tendency for people to rely only on one source. According to him, even though the source might not be the mass media. The buzzer account they follow on social media may be better. Buzzer accounts often carry out propaganda through information on social media. Angelina said that someone had made the narrative wrong. Not facts, but twisting facts. There are also fake media and blog sites that contain information and news like the real mass media. Such similarities often deceive the public, especially if the information or news supports the reader's expectations.

"And there is also fake media. Not really media, but the site looks like media. They write news articles so people believe them. Even though it could just be copy and paste, then the content was changed and twisted in all kinds of ways. There must be someone who straightens out and explains this. So, it really starts from the habits of people who are like that too," (Angelina, 2021).

The characteristic of netizens is that they often just read the news headlines. Not until the end did I read the entire contents of the news. The phenomena encountered made Angelina sure that hoaxes would continue to exist and circulate, especially on social media. CekFacts strives to prevent people from getting too caught up in hoax information holes.

"Surely the so-called hoax will not run out, but at least we tell the public how to check for a hoax. We educate them how to remain skeptical of information that is not yet clear," (Angelina, 2021).

In the following discussion, Angelina provides an overview of business calculations after the Cek Fakta page on Tempo.co. She said the name of profit is not only material or money but in terms of branding as well. Angelina emphasized that Cek Fakta is still a tool for branding Tempo. From that point of view, it is quite profitable. In terms of traffic, the existence of the Cek Fakta page contributes to several readers.

"But the matter of branding is far more profitable than just traffic. When people find out that Tempo has a Cek Fakta channel, they judge 'ok, here's the media'. Moreover, we have been verified by an international fact checking network," (Angelina, 2021).

When people discovered that Tempo.co had a Cek Fakta page, Angelina believed that readers or the public would trust Tempo as a credible mass media. So, according to him, from what side of the business before? From a branding standpoint, he explained that it was very profitable. In a month, there are about 800 thousand readers.

"Financially it depends, because it is a media company, there are short- and long-term targets. We cannot see because the results are like this, it is said to be unprofitable. Just the fact that the traffic is good. Increasing the value of Tempo, including the value to the company's brand and finances," (Angelina, 2021).

Differences in the Work of Fact-Checking Journalists

The way journalists work behind the Cek Fakta website is different from journalists in the field. Cek Fakta coordinators and journalists collect posts on social media that have the potential to be hoaxes, especially information that contains claims that appear to be facts, even though the truth is not certain. After gathering that information, it is proposed in the daily editorial meeting every morning. After approval, it is distributed to each fact-checker.

Journalists or fact-checkers are responsible for which posts to check. If you search for the truth of the information in the form of a taxi, you usually only search for news or documents. Besides that, journalists usually also contact experts who can provide an assessment or view regarding the discussion of the topic. It works by using internet devices or image tools for photos and videos. Journalists also often take photos from videos to then trace them.

"Refresh the image or use the name InVID. It is a tool that fragments videos in multiple images. Well, that is the image that will be explored later. In fact, InVID only automates it. We can screenshot ourselves, but sometimes videos are long, so we need a tool to be able to fragment videos automatically. So, the difference is more manual and automatic," (Angelina, 2021).

Tracing digital footprints using tools that exist in the digital world. Finally, journalists must trace the track record of the information to find out whether it has been circulated. So, after all the facts are found, all that remains is to assemble them. After that, it is sent to the editor, edited, and frothing uploaded. After uploading, there is dissemination, distributed to several channels on social media, or a video is made.

Cek Fakta is under the editorial section of Tempo.co. There, also consists of several journalists who work in the field. If confirmation is needed from sources in the field, the fact-checkers must take the news from the reports. Without asking for help, the journalists at Tempo.co have confirmed sources regarding related news.

"So, all we must do is look for Tempo's news archive. If it is not there, we use other media where we list the sources," (Angelina, 2021).

Tempo also collaborated with the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN). Tempo has participated in several activities with IFCN. Since the Covid-19 Pandemic began, they have often gathered online to form the Cek Fakta Covid-19 coalition. The results are published on the IFCN website. Tempo is listed as the only media participating Cek Fakta from Indonesia in the program.

CONCLUSION

The existence of the Cek Fakta website on Tempo.co is a way to promote media name branding. The presentation explained by Angelina indicates that the contents of the news coverage on Cek Fakta are not solely for public information but also to be traded for profit, namely media branding. Every day there is always news published on the Cek Fakta channel. Based on direct observations on the Cek Fakta channel, there are between 1 and 3 news stories daily. On the official Cek Fakta website, the editors explain the methodology for tracing the hoax information. Tempo institutionally cooperates with Mafindo solely to produce an integrated hoax database to facilitate joint verification efforts. Tempo has calculated the business on the Cek Fakta page at Tempo.co. Profits are not only material or money but in terms of branding as well. Cek Fakta is still a tool for branding Tempo. From that point of view, in terms of traffic, the Cek Fakta page's existence contributes to many readers.

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