

## HOW ONLINE MEDIA PORTRAY DISASTER IN ACEH AND PALU: A COMPARISON ANALYSIS

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### ABSTRACT

Indonesia is in the Pacific Ring of Fire, which is prone to natural disasters, especially earthquakes. In the last 14 years, Indonesia has experienced several mild earthquakes accompanied by Tsunamis, such as in Aceh (2004) and Palu (2018). The magnitude of the loss of life and property is inevitable. However, efforts can be made to prevent and minimize the risks caused by the Earthquake-tsunami disaster. Preparedness for natural disasters will arise if accurate information about natural disasters is available, both in quantity and quality. This study analyzes how local online media cover the Aceh and Palu Earthquake-tsunami issues--Serambi Indonesia ([aceh.tribunews.com](http://aceh.tribunews.com)) and Radar Sulteng ([radarsulteng.id](http://radarsulteng.id)). Many studies have analyzed how the media frame news about the Earthquake-tsunami disaster, but no studies compare what specific contents were reported about Earthquake and Tsunami in the two areas that have experienced these major and destructive natural disasters. The results of this study may identify new patterns related to the Earthquake-tsunami issue that has occurred so far and become recommendations for more effective news writing in influencing the government and the public to increase their vigilance and preparedness in the face of earthquakes and minimize the risks arising from these disasters.

**Keywords:** *content analysis, coverage, earthquake-tsunami, online media.*

### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a disaster-prone country among the 35 most vulnerable to disaster risk. Indonesia has the highest ranking for both hydrometeorological and geological hazards. The large population makes the disaster at risk of causing many victims. It is recorded that in the last 10 years, there has been an increase in the number of natural disasters that have occurred in Indonesia, such as earthquakes, eruptions of Mount Merapi, forest and land fires (karhutla), volcanic eruptions, floods, landslides,

abrasion, tides, and drought (Djalante, Garschagen, Thomalla, & Shaw, 2017).

The Directorate of Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation (DVMBG), Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources reports that 28 areas in Indonesia are prone to earthquakes and tsunamis. Among them are Aceh, North Sumatra, Bengkulu, Lampung, Banten, Central Java, Yogyakarta, East Java, Bali, NTB, NTT, North Sulawesi, Central Sulawesi, South Sulawesi, Maluku, and East Kalimantan, especially for earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, and volcanic eruptions. The territory of Indonesia is surrounded by the Eurasia plate, the Indo-Australian plate, and the Pacific plate. From time to time, these plates shift and break, causing earthquakes. Furthermore, a collision between tectonic plates can produce a tsunami, as happened in Aceh, North Sumatra, Palu, and Banten (Lestari, 2018).

The Aceh tsunami occurred on December 26, 2004. At that time, the coast of Aceh was swept away by a powerful tsunami wave after a shallow earthquake measuring 9.3 M that occurred at the bottom of the Indian Ocean. Experts even called the earthquake the fifth largest earthquake ever in history. The day after the incident, the United Nations (UN) declared the Aceh tsunami natural disaster the largest humanitarian disaster ever. Since then, international aid has arrived to help communities affected by the Aceh tsunami. The United Nations, on January 4, 2005, issued an initial estimate that the death toll from the Aceh tsunami was likely to exceed 200,000 people (HH, 2012).

Furthermore, Palu City and its surroundings are among the many areas in eastern Indonesia with immense potential for a tsunami. Three incidents have been recorded around Palu Bay, namely in 1927, 1968, and 1996, while around Palu City (Central Sulawesi), there were 6 incidents. In the Palu City area and its surroundings, several pieces of faults have the potential to generate a relatively strong earthquake. The fault is the Palu-Koro Fault which extends from Palu to the south and southeast through the northern part of South Sulawesi to the south of Bone to the Banda Sea. Moreover, the last tsunami hammer occurred in 2018. The death toll from Palu's earthquake, tsunami, and liquefaction reached 4,340 people. In addition, there are 667 missing victims and 1,016 unidentified victims (Sukino, Samad, Mangngasing, & Rivai, 2019).

Indonesia's geographical condition, which is in the Pacific Ring of Fire, cannot be avoided as an area that is vulnerable to natural disasters, especially earthquakes. For over a decade, 14 years to be exact, Indonesia has faced several small and large earthquakes. This country has even experienced two large waves or Tsunamis that accompanied earthquakes with huge magnitudes, such as in Aceh in 2004 and Palu in 2018. Therefore, there is a need for all parties to be vigilant in maintaining preparedness in areas prone to disasters and respond quickly to minimize the risks caused by the disaster (Djalante et al., 2017).

Mass media is one element that significantly contributes to preventing and providing solutions to the risks of disasters. One of the functions of the mass media is to provide accurate and quality information related to disasters. The quality of this information is the ethical and moral demands of presenting media content. In addition, the mass media are required to deliver original, actual and accurate news according to events in the field. In general, there are many things that mass media

and journalists can do in covering disasters and reporting on disasters. Such as providing information related to an early warning system, the media can play a role as an information gate for the community about impending disasters, the impact of disasters, and even self-rescue due to disasters (Nazaruddin, 2015).

In disaster issues, the mass media should convey correct information to the public. So that people do not get wrong information. The ability of the media to accurately convey information in disaster events will significantly determine what kind of impact will occur in a disaster area. Incorrect information from the mass media will also create a wrong image in the audience that it causes the wrong response and attitude towards the disaster (Nazaruddin, 2015; Rosemary, Rochimah, & Susilawati, 2022).

Both print and electronic media have advantages and disadvantages in form performance or the process of disseminating messages to audiences, including newspapers. Elvinaro and Lukiati (2005: 106) explain the lack of newspapers from the reader's perspective. Namely, in understanding the contents of newspapers, readers are required to be able to read and have specific intellectual abilities. In addition, McQuail (2010) asserts that either directly or indirectly, the goals of commercial mass media have an influence on the content of newspapers and make its aspects populist and more supportive of the business world, consumerism, and free competition, if not more supportive of political rights (McQuail, 2010). However, the mass media should pay attention to the aspects that characterize it in conveying the information needed by the community to maximize its function as a mass communication medium. New Media or online media is a product of technology-mediated communication shared with digital computers (Gere, 2009) or information.

In addition to the development of digital technology, the needs of audiences who demand fast and cheap information necessitate a shift in the dissemination of information from print media to online media. The ease and availability of data and the speed of coverage are the advantages of reporting through online media. However, this media also applies the principle that bad news is good news, where negative news and controversy will attract more public attention. Therefore, online media coverage pursues the speed of information and emphasizes clickbait (headlines that focus on bombastic news). It is also challenging for the public to obtain excellent quality information about natural disasters, such as the Earthquake-tsunami (Rosemary et al., 2022; Yusuf, 2021).

Mass media is vital in providing information and publications on the earthquake-tsunami event in Aceh and Palu. So that people, both in Indonesia and abroad, can see and know the condition of the Aceh and the Palu community after the catastrophe. The role played by the mass media is applying the supervisory function. According to Lasswell (Severin, 2011), a communications expert and professor of law at Yale, noted the three functions of mass media: environmental observation, correlation of parts of society to respond to the environment, and transmission of societal heritage from one generation to the next. Observation or surveillance is the first function to provide information and provide news. In this function, the media often warns us of possible dangers.

According to A.W. Widjaja and M. Arisyk Wahab, there are three messages: (1) Informative, namely, providing information on facts and data, then the communicant

draws his conclusions and decisions. In certain situations, informative messages are certainly more successful than persuasive. (2) Persuasive, which contains persuasion that evokes human understanding and awareness that what we convey will change attitudes. Nevertheless, it changed of its own accord. So, changes like this will be accepted with openness from the recipient. (3) Coercive, namely conveying a coercive message by using sanctions. A well-known form of delivery is essentially agitation with an emphasis that fosters inner pressure and fear among the public (Widjaja & Komunikasi, 2000).

In reality, when a disaster occurs or has just occurred, the mass media becomes a place for information seeking to find out the actual situation or event. The ease of obtaining this information is an advancement of communication technology, including newspapers which currently have widespread circulation. Earthquake-tsunami preparedness will arise if there is awareness, one of which is stimulated by sufficient information. By maximizing the function of the media not only as entertainment, information and education, the media can also encourage the formation or change of policies (media advocacy). Furthermore, media is expected to open up insight and increase knowledge, particularly about disaster issues, to the community, including providing information and learning about other disaster management methods and providing convenience for the government with the latest related information needed by the community in disaster management.

Galtung and Ruge (1965) have compiled 12 news values, namely (1) frequency, (2) impact or intensity of an event, (3) clarity of the event (obscurity), (4) relevance of events, often in terms of geographical proximity and cultural similarity (meaningfulness), (5) the connection of the issue to expectation about the state of the world (consonants); (6) the strangeness of the event (unpredictability), (7) further development of the story newsworthy before hand (continuity), (8) mix of different types of news (composition), (9) references to elite countries, (10) references to elite people, (11) events that can be made personal (references to people), and (12) references to something negative (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). Other scholars have talked about news value and news worthiness (Bednarek & Caple, 2017; Shoemaker, 2006). To reach trustworthy news, Galtung and Ruge's News Value Theory remains relevant to understanding how media portrays particular issues, including disaster-related issues.

In addition, scholars agree that news is something journalists capture from an event into a publication. Events or circumstances which are not considered public interest are not news and are unlikely to be published. So, the task of journalists is to raise news for readers' consumption (Dewabrata, 2004). In general, events that are considered newsworthy contain these elements:

- (1) Significance (essential), events that are likely to affect the lives of many people or events that impact readers' lives;
- (2) Magnitude, events involving numbers that are meaningful to many people's lives or events that have consequences that can be summed up in numbers that are interesting to the reader;
- (3) Timeliness (time), events involving things that have just happened or have just been stated;

- (4) Proximity (closeness), events close to the reader. This closeness is both geographical and emotional;
- (5) Prominence (famous) involves things that are well known or very well known to the reader, such as people, objects, or places;
- (6) Human Interest (humane), namely events that give a touch of feeling to the reader, events involving ordinary people in extraordinary situations, or prominent people in ordinary situations (Barus, 2010).

Many studies have been conducted to observe the news content about natural disasters like the current pandemic, such as earthquake-tsunami and non-natural disasters (Agustina, Dewi, Soemantri, Qureshi, & Moenanto, 2020; Gandasari & Dwidenawati, 2020; Prawira, Irawan, Evelina, & Rizkiansyah, 2021; Rosemary et al., 2022). However, they have yet to examine the comparison of reporting in local media, specifically news coverage about the earthquake and tsunami, which have proven massively destructive. Furthermore, studies have yet to be found that look specifically at comparing the content of news reports about the Earthquake-tsunami in Aceh and Palu. This study examines two local online media in two areas where the earthquake and tsunami occurred: Aceh (2004) and Palu (2018).

This paper studies how the mass media, especially online media, explore the theme of the tsunami 'disaster' and compare the news value about the earthquake-tsunami disaster. It can be seen from the optimal role of online media journalism in finding, collecting, and disseminating news to the public through mass media channels (Sambo, 2017). Information and data are the main ingredients of journalists in making news that will be consumed by readers/viewers. Journalists can obtain news sources based on credibility in providing the necessary information. At the same time, news about disasters generally includes data on the number of victims and scientific data, which is sometimes difficult for the public to understand. On the one hand, news containing information from a religious perspective or delivered by religious leaders is more desirable and understood. So this research is important to see how the media peels and packs this phenomenon so that the media appears to be an essential agent as an intermediary between the community and policymakers in providing information. On the other hand, the pattern of reporting between the two news portals that convey information on the same issue (earthquake-tsunami) is an essential reference for more disaster-responsive journalistic activities.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study used the content analysis qualitative method (Krippendorff, 2018; Lacy, Watson, Riffe, & Lovejoy, 2015). This research method is used to identify patterns in recorded communication and systematically collect data from a set of texts, which can be written, oral, or visual. The qualitative content analysis focused on understanding and interpreting the collected information. In this study, the information is news coverage on the issue of the earthquake-tsunami disaster in Indonesia. Data collection of news related to the earthquake-tsunami at local online portals in Aceh and Palu, Serambi Indonesia ([aceh.tribunews.com](http://aceh.tribunews.com)) and Radar Sulteng ([radar-sulteng.id](http://radar-sulteng.id)). For Aceh on 26 December and Palu on 28 September 2018. The data were analyzed drawing from the concept and component of news value and news-

worthiness (Harcup & O’neill, 2017).

Our study relies on a content analysis of Indonesia news items available from Serambi Indonesia onlinenews (<http://aceh.tribunnews.com/>) and Radar Sulteng (<http://radarsulteng.id>). We included articles in Bahasa Indonesia with the keywords: *tsunami, gempa, korban gempa/tsunami, memperingati tsunami, penanggulangan/mitigasi bencana* (In English: tsunami, earthquake, victim tsunami/earthquake, tsunami commemoration, disaster mitigation). The period for data collection was news/articles since the Aceh disaster, 2004 to 2021. Duplicate articles and articles that did not include any discussion about earthquakes and tsunami were excluded from the final set following an initial reading.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This content analysis examine and compare how two local newspapers in Indonesia in different area cover about earthquake and tsunami. We found 136 news from Serambi Indonesia/SI (Aceh) and 27 news from Radar Sulteng/RS (Palu). More news found for earthquake and tsunami in Aceh is because the disaster in Aceh occurred in 2004, and related news on the issues found not until 2012. This can be explained due to the massive destruction caused, including the Serambi Indonesia headquarters, there were no news found during the disaster reconstruction and rehabilitation stage in Aceh. Meanwhile, earthquake and tsunami in Palu occurred in 2018, less news coverage about the disaster were captured by the Radar Sulteng. However, the news on the disaster in Palu reported by other media, is beyond the scope of this study. Drawing from the components of news value by Galtung and Ruge in Harcup and O’Neil (2017), our study shows three indicators—theme of coverage, types of coverage, and source of coverage.

**Tabel 1. Comparison news coverage on earthquake-tsunami in Aceh and Palu**

News Value	Online Media				
	Serambi Indonesia		Radar Sulteng		
	N	%	N	%	
Theme	During disaster	13	10	11	41
	Postdisaster	29	21	5	19
	Victims/loss due disaster	17	12	5	19
	Disaster commemoration	77	57	6	21
Types	Straight News Report	34	26	23	86
	Depth News Report	10	7	0	0
	Comprehensive News Report	8	6	0	0
	Interpretative Report	11	8	0	0
	Feature	47	35	3	11
	Investigative Reporting	2	1	0	0
	Editorial Writing	2	1	0	0
	Opinion News	18	13	1	3
	Explanatory News	4	3	0	0

Source	Government	48	35	2	7
	Family	15	11	13	48
	Community	42	31	5	19
	Academician	19	14	1	4
	NGOs	12	9	6	22
<b>Total</b>		<b>136</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Themes of Coverage

The coverage in Serambi Indonesia (SI) shows more themes about post-disaster (N=29), especially the commemoration of the disaster (N=77). While Radar Palu (RP) focuses on information during the disaster (N=11). The difference themes between the two media online explain the difference in the time of the disaster and how destructive the earthquake and tsunami occurred.

The earthquake and tsunami that hit Aceh and several countries near the Indian Oceanin 26 December 2004, lasted approximately 10 minutes and was recorded to have a magnitude of around 9.0 Richter scale. The catastrophe caused many casualties from Sumatra to the Andaman Islands, Thailand, South India, Sri Lanka, and parts of Africa. After that, the tsunami waves began to impact the Aceh region and parts of North Sumatra.; there were about 230,000 people who died in 14 countries. Severe damage occurred in the Aceh region, with approximately 170,000 people killed. In addition, all buildings were destroyed around the coast, and hundreds of people lost their homes(Pratama & Galih, 2018).

Meanwhile, the 7.7 on the Richter scale earthquake which rocked Donggala Regency, Central Sulawesi, on September 28, 2018, at 17:02, caused the death of 2,010 people; the SAR team found 778, and volunteers and the community found 1,232. The dead were found in several districts and cities, such as 1,601 in Palu, 171 in Donggala, 222 in Sigi, 15 Parigi Moutong, and one in Pasangkayu, West Sulawesi(Hadi & Kurniawati, 2018).

The high earthquake magnitude in Aceh--9.0, scientifically proven to cause the giant wave tsunami in Aceh, resulted in massive destruction, including the offices and staff of SI were destroyed on 26 December 2004. The media industry was forced to stop publishing due to the loss of 55 employees—13 of whom were senior editors and missing journalists- and the severely damaged printing machines. However, SI started to re-publish using its printing press in Lhokseumawe city in January 2005. As a result, the printed circulation began to significantly increase from 7,000 /day to 40,000 /day from 1989 to 2014 distributed throughout 18 districts and 5 cities in the Aceh province which explained that news coverages on the issues were not in SI, not until 2012.As a result, the printed circulation began to significantly increase from 7,000 /day to 40,000 /day from 1989 to 2014, distributed throughout 18 districts and 5 cities in the Aceh province which explained that news coverages on the issues were not in SI, not until 2012.Moreover, most coverages are found during the commemoration of the tragedy, celebrated on 26 December yearly, which aims to inform and help people to reflect on what happened on that particular day.

Unlike the tsunami in Palu, even though the earthquake's magnitude was also high, the destruction caused by both earthquake and tsunami was not as severe as what happened in Aceh. Tribunpalu.com, a newspaper under the same media group

of Serambi Indonesia (SI)--tribunpalu.com, was not found reporting any news about the tragedy in Palu; instead, Radar Sulteng has published more coverage about the catastrophe, especially during the disaster. For example, the phenomenon that occurred after the earthquake and tsunami hit Palu is called liquefaction. Liquefaction takes place on sandy soil quickly submerged in water, such as the soil in Palu City, which is close to the sea (Lin & Henschke, 2018).

### **Types of Coverage**

In comparing types of news in the two media, straight news and features are the most commonly found talking about the earthquake and tsunami that occurred in the two places. For SI, features are mostly found to explain the tragedy (N=47). Since the coverages were mostly about commemorating the earthquake and tsunami in 2006, information containing human interest stories was argued to be influential in driving people's emotion in reflecting on a historical day (Ali & Mahmood, 2013). In contrast, news coverage about disasters in Palu are in the type of straight news (N=23).

The study of how the media cover disaster events has been extensively researched in media and disaster studies. Most of the research results show that mainstream media reporting patterns in covering disasters tend to follow standard patterns, namely giving a greater focus on the impact of disaster events and the perspective of victims, how many people were killed and injured, how much material damage was caused, a straight news reporting (Houston, Pfefferbaum, & Rosenholtz, 2012; Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen, & Cottle, 2012). Unfortunately, the media often fail to "explore" the causes of disaster events and sometimes even worsen the situation.

Studies on media and disaster have received attention since the 2004 Aceh tsunami. The study is mainly on the themes of reporting on disaster events through analysis of news content, ethics of reporting on disaster events, and construction or representation of disaster events through discourse analysis and framing (Wahyuni, 2008).

### **Sources of Coverage**

As for sources of coverage, SI tends to portray information about disasters directly from the government (N=47). The findings are in line with a recent study examining the case of a non-natural disaster, the current health outbreak—the covid-19 pandemic. The media coverage likely refers to government resources as the main data source for information about the pandemic. The government was expected to be responsive in communicating about the disaster to the public. Moreover, online media is the primary source to distribute information due to its speed of coverage and availability. Which sometimes undermines the use of 'clickbait' to attract its readers' attention (Rosemary et al., 2022).

However, for RP, news coverage are likely covering information about disaster from the families. It is argued that RP reports mostly information during the disaster which means that the coverage are news about the loss and the suffering that people experience during the tragedy, like losing their loved one, through testimonies members of the family. There is a tendency for media coverage in Indonesia to cover disaster events and even exploit disasters by dramatizing the condition of the



victims to benefit the media industry (Nazaruddin, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

This study compares news coverage about Earthquake and Tsunami in the two areas that have experienced these major and destructive natural disasters, Aceh through Serambi Indonesia (aceh.tribunews.com) and Palu, through Radar Sulteng (radarsulteng.id). The findings of the content analysis study reveal three themes regarding the news value of the coverages: themes of coverage, types of coverage, and source of coverage. This study focuses only on two local media in two locations experiencing earthquakes and tsunamis, Aceh and Palu, which may not represent the overall numbers of disaster coverages. Further research is necessary to include other local media in the two regions to capture the quantity and quality of coverage about earthquakes and tsunamis based on the news value and worthiness. Moreover, framing analysis research is significant for understanding how local media frame disaster coverage in both cities. Instead of focusing too much on reminiscing the tragedy by commemorating it every year and focusing too much on reporting on the victims of disaster, this study recommends more effective news writing to influence the government and the public to be more prepared to face the disaster and minimalizing the risk cause.

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