

THE EVOLUTION OF JOURNALISM IN THE DIGITAL AGE: ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON NEWS PROCESS AND INFORMATION INTEGRITY

Moehammad Iqbal Sultan, Andi Subhan Amir

Hasanuddin University

iqbalsultan@unhas.ac.id, asa@unhas.ac.id

Abstract. The development of information technology, especially social media, has dramatically changed the journalism landscape. This study aims to analyze changes in the work process of journalists and news distribution and their implications for information integrity. Using a qualitative case study methodology with a narrative analysis approach, this research collected data through in-depth interviews with journalists and content analysis of news reports published on social media. The results indicate a significant shift in news gathering, filtering, and presentation, where speed often precedes depth of analysis. This suggests that social media has caused a change from investigative journalism to instant journalism that emphasizes speed over depth. The findings highlight a decline in fact verification and an increased risk of spreading inaccurate information. Based on these results, this study recommends developing stricter ethical guidelines and training for journalists in handling the pressures of news distribution on social media, as well as implementing new technologies that can support real-time verification of facts to strengthen the integrity of information.

Keywords: Journalism Ethics; Digital Journalism; News Accuracy; Social Media; Journalism Transformation

Abstrak. Perkembangan teknologi informasi, khususnya media sosial, telah mengubah lanskap jurnalisme secara dramatis. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis perubahan proses kerja jurnalis dan distribusi berita serta implikasinya terhadap integritas informasi. Menggunakan metodologi studi kasus kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis naratif, penelitian ini mengumpulkan data melalui wawancara mendalam dengan jurnalis dan analisis konten dari laporan berita yang dipublikasikan di media sosial. Hasilnya menunjukkan adanya pergeseran yang signifikan dalam pengumpulan, penyaringan, dan penyajian berita, di mana kecepatan sering kali mendahului kedalaman analisis. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa media sosial telah menyebabkan perubahan dari jurnalisme investigasi menjadi jurnalisme instan yang menekankan kecepatan daripada kedalaman. Temuan ini menyoroti penurunan verifikasi fakta dan peningkatan risiko penyebaran informasi yang tidak akurat. Berdasarkan hasil tersebut, penelitian ini merekomendasikan untuk mengembangkan pedoman etika yang lebih ketat dan pelatihan bagi jurnalis dalam menangani tekanan distribusi berita di media sosial, serta menerapkan teknologi baru yang dapat mendukung verifikasi fakta secara real-time untuk memperkuat integritas informasi.

Kata Kunci: Etika Jurnalisme; Jurnalisme Digital; Akurasi Berita; Media Sosial; Transformasi Jurnalisme

INTRODUCTION

The title of this article, "The Evolution of Journalism in the Digital Age: Analyzing the Impact of Social Media on News Process and Information Integrity," captures a critical discussion in today's media landscape. Social media platforms have become ubiquitous, fundamentally altering how information is created, disseminated, and consumed. This transformation significantly impacts the practice of journalism, forcing a reevaluation of traditional methods and raising concerns about information accuracy and integrity. The digital age has democratized information sharing, empowering anyone with a *smartphone* to become a content creator. While this fosters diversity and immediacy in news reporting, it blurs the lines between professional and citizen journalism (Vahed et al., 2024).

The rapid advancement of social media has fundamentally transformed how we create, distribute, and consume information. This transformation carries profound implications for journalism, forcing a re-evaluation of traditional methods and raising concerns about information accuracy and journalistic integrity. The democratization of information sharing in the digital age empowers anyone

with a *smartphone* to become a content creator. The urgency of critically examining this challenge, including its impact on credibility and accountability within journalism, cannot be overstated. Social media algorithms can create "echo chambers" where users are primarily exposed to information that confirms their existing beliefs, potentially hindering exposure to diverse viewpoints and fostering the spread of misinformation (Cinelli et al., 2021). This article delves into this evolving landscape by analyzing how social media has impacted the news process and information integrity.

Recent investigations into the intersection of social media and journalism highlight the multifaceted impacts on news processes and the implications for information integrity. Carlson's comparative study across international newsrooms demonstrates a shift in journalistic routines, where social media engagement and *audience* metrics often take precedence over traditional news values (Carlson, 2023). The prioritization of virality and *audience* interaction within the social media ecosystem has further led to a blurring of roles between journalists and the public. Harlow and Chadha (2022) point out that the ease of content creation on social platforms fosters an environment where citizen journalists and professional reporters often occupy the same space, complicating the public's perception of credible sources and authority in the news.

The speed and reach of social media also pose challenges to established journalistic practices. Broersma and Eldridge (2023) analyze breaking news coverage and indicate an increased pressure to publish information quickly. This often occurs at the expense of thorough verification practices. Moreover, the potential for algorithmic manipulation and targeted content dissemination within social media platforms raises concerns about filter bubbles and echo chambers. Research (Cinelli et al., 2021) shows that users are frequently exposed to content aligned with their pre-existing beliefs, potentially reinforcing biases and limiting their access to diverse and challenging perspectives.

The implications of these changes extend to the fundamental relationship between journalism and public trust. Studies addressing misinformation proliferation, (Tandoc et al., 2018), reveal increasing difficulty in separating factual reporting from false or misleading content. The long-term consequences of this erosion of trust are a critical area of research. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) emphasize the need to develop new frameworks to address the complex landscape of information disorder.

The literature review reveals a critical shift in the journalism landscape, driven by the influence of social media. Existing scholarship explores the transformation of journalistic routines, information accuracy challenges, and public trust erosion. However, a notable gap exists in providing tangible recommendations for journalists and news organizations seeking to navigate this complex terrain. This research aims to fill this gap by offering actionable strategies to foster information integrity within journalism in the digital age.

This research seeks to make a unique contribution by moving beyond simply identifying the problems associated with social media's impact on journalism. Unlike the studies focused on the theoretical implications of changing news values (Carlson, 2023) or the consequences for public trust (Nurlatifah & Irwansyah, 2019; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017), this research is solutions-oriented. It delves deeper into the practical strategies and interventions news organizations can adopt. The goal is to provide a roadmap for responsible and impactful journalism in an era shaped by digital communication and social media.

Building upon the established knowledge gaps, this research seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How has social media changed how journalists work? This question explores the transformation of newsgathering, dissemination, and *audience* interaction practices within news organizations due to social media platforms. (2) How has social media impacted the way news is distributed? This question examines the mechanisms and algorithms that drive content visibility on social media and how they influence news exposure, reach, and potential for virality. (3) How has social media affected information integrity in journalism? This crucial question delves into the challenges of verification in a fast-paced digital environment, the prevalence and impact of misinformation, and strategies to uphold journalistic accuracy amidst the complexities of social media.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), adopting a comparative case study design. This methodology is particularly well-suited for delving into the complexities of how

social media is transforming journalistic practices and its subsequent impact on information integrity. Case studies provide an in-depth examination of a specific phenomenon within its real-world context, enabling a comprehensive exploration of diverse perspectives and experiences within a particular environment. By employing comparative case studies, this research will draw comparisons and contrasts between different news organizations, allowing for the identification of common themes, emerging trends, and unique challenges journalists face in the digital age.

This research involves a purposive selection of several media organizations in Indonesia. These organizations are carefully chosen to represent the diversity of media landscapes in the country, encompassing variations in size, scope, and prioritized social media platforms. This strategic selection allows for a comprehensive understanding of how media organizations across different scales and orientations navigate the complexities of social media integration within their journalistic practices.

Data collection in this case study employed a mixed-methods approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), combining semi-structured interviews and content analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with journalists and newsroom leaders in the selected organizations. These interviews delved into how journalists utilize social media platforms for newsgathering, information verification, *audience* engagement, and adaptation to the demands of fast-paced digital journalism. Additionally, content analysis was performed on news outputs across both traditional and social media platforms for each participating news organization. This in-depth analysis provided insights into how news organizations present news and information, including the potential for disseminating inaccurate content. Combining these methods facilitated a comprehensive understanding of how social media influences news practices and their subsequent impact on information integrity within the Indonesian media landscape.

Given the country's rapid development of social media and digital journalism, the research was conducted in Indonesia. Indonesia provides a unique and essential context for understanding social media interaction, journalists, and news production in a dynamic media environment. Data Analysis Data collected was analyzed inductively. Interview and content analysis data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed to identify key emerging themes. The analysis results were compared with existing literature to provide an in-depth interpretation and evidence-based recommendations for the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research aimed to illuminate the transformative impact of social media on contemporary news processes and its implications for information integrity. Driven by a desire to provide a nuanced understanding of this complex phenomenon, the study conducted an in-depth analysis to address the critical research questions posed in the introduction. Through this analysis, crucial insights emerged regarding the altered journalistic routines, shifting distribution models, and the persistent challenges of safeguarding accuracy amidst the complexities of the digital age. These findings underscore the profound ways social media has reshaped the fundamental practices of journalism, impacting not only the creation and dissemination of news but also the public's perception of reliable information sources.

Firstly, the findings reveal a fundamental shift in journalistic practice due to social media platforms. Journalists heavily rely on social media for newsgathering, often prioritizing real-time updates and *audience* engagement over traditional in-depth reporting. This reliance usually leads to a prioritization of speed at the expense of meticulous verification practices. Moreover, the widespread circulation of potentially unverified information on social media contributes to blurring the lines between professional journalism and user-generated content, presenting significant challenges for upholding standards of accuracy.

Secondly, the study highlights the profound influence of social media algorithms and distribution models on how news is disseminated. News organizations compete for visibility as content is curated based on engagement metrics rather than journalistic merit. This algorithmic amplification risks promoting sensational or polarizing content, hindering public exposure to diverse and balanced news reporting. The findings further emphasize the difficulty of combating the spread of misinformation in this environment, as false or misleading information often travels faster and further than factual reporting due to its tendency to incite strong emotional responses.

Finally, the research underscores the tension between pursuing immediacy and upholding journalistic integrity. Newsrooms struggle with the relentless demands of the 24-hour news cycle and real-time *audience* interaction, leading to compromises in fact-checking and thoroughness. The constant

pressure to be the first to break a story and the expectation of continuous *online* presence and engagement often overshadow the time-consuming processes of verification and deep analysis. This trend has severe implications for journalistic credibility, as *audiences* can be exposed to premature, unverified, or deliberately misleading information that spreads rapidly through social media networks. These findings highlight the urgent need for news organizations to develop robust social media policies, establish clear guidelines for balancing speed with accuracy, and integrate novel verification techniques into their workflows. This proactive approach is crucial for news organizations to leverage the reach and engagement of social media platforms while maintaining their vital role as reliable sources of information in a rapidly evolving media landscape.

The first key finding of this research revolves around the significant shift in journalistic practices due to the influence of social media platforms. Journalists have increasingly come to rely on social media for newsgathering, often prioritizing real-time updates and *audience* engagement over traditional in-depth reporting. This reliance on social media can be visualized through interviews conducted among journalists in participating news organizations. Analysis of interviews and newsroom observations reveals a dependence on social media for newsgathering, often prioritizing real-time updates and *audience* engagement over traditional in-depth reporting. Journalist A stated from the National News Organization:

“Twitter has become my main news source. I see a trending story, something said by a politician, or a viral video, and that is often the starting point for a story.”

Table 1. Social Media Content Integration in News Reporting

Content Type	Organization A	Organization B	Organization C
Tweets embedded in articles	35%	20%	50%
Direct quotes from social media posts	15%	30%	10%
User-generated videos included as sources	8%	5%	12%
News articles based on trending hashtags	20%	30%	25%
Real-time event updates sourced from social media	22%	15%	3%

Source: primary data 2024

Content analysis, supported by Table 1, suggests a significant transformation in newsgathering practices. The high percentages of social media content embedded across all organizations indicate that platforms like *Twitter* have become essential tools for sourcing information. Further analysis reveals a potential over-reliance on user-generated content, particularly eyewitness accounts and viral videos, without robust verification practices. While efficient for real-time reporting on events, this reliance poses risks to accuracy. Additionally, limited references to social media verification tools point to a potential need for greater adoption of these resources within newsrooms.

This includes examining the proportion of news stories that incorporate embedded tweets, *Facebook* posts, or other social media elements. Crucially, analysis will track the types of social media content that serve as primary sources. The distinction will be made between official verified sources, expert commentary, and user-generated content. Additionally, the study will evaluate the presence of references to social media verification tools or strategies within news articles, indicating how journalists adapt their practices to mitigate the risks of inaccurate or misleading social media information.

The data demonstrates that news organizations adapt their distribution strategies to the social media environment. Frequent calls to action, shareable headlines, and the use of trending hashtags reveal an emphasis on optimizing content for visibility and engagement across platforms. A deeper analysis should compare topic selection on traditional vs. social platforms to assess whether algorithmic

influence might narrow the news coverage scope. Including *audience* metrics within news content suggests a significant shift towards data-driven editorial decisions in the social media age.

Findings related to information integrity offer a mixed picture. While the presence of some direct fact-checks addressing social media misinformation is encouraging, the overall frequency may indicate an underutilized strategy, particularly in Organization B. Additionally, discrepancies in error correction practices between traditional and social media platforms raise concerns about inconsistent standards. However, instances where news organizations highlight ethical guidelines in social media content offer a promising sign of proactive efforts to build trust and credibility.

The second key finding of this research delves into the profound influence of social media algorithms and distribution models on news dissemination. News organizations participating in the study highlighted the constant struggle to compete for visibility in an environment where content curation is driven by engagement metrics rather than journalistic merit. This algorithm-driven prioritization of user engagement often amplifies sensational or polarizing content, hindering public exposure to diverse and balanced news reporting. Consequently, *audiences* may be trapped within "filter bubbles" where their existing viewpoints are reinforced, limiting their access to alternative perspectives. This algorithmic influence poses a significant challenge to the traditional role of journalism in informing the public and fostering a healthy democracy. An interview from a social media editor at Organization C sheds light on this struggle:

"The pressure to get clicks and shares is immense. We constantly analyze social media metrics to see what content resonates most with audiences. Sometimes, this means prioritizing stories that evoke strong emotions, even if they are not necessarily the most in-depth or nuanced."

This interview excerpt exemplifies news organizations' pressure to tailor their content for social media algorithms. The editor emphasizes the importance of "engagement metrics" and prioritizing content that garners "clicks and shares." This algorithmic focus can have insidious effects on news production. The need to appease the algorithm may lead to a shift away from traditionally valued journalistic principles like in-depth investigation and balanced reporting, favoring content that is more likely to go viral, regardless of its substantive value or contribution to informed public discourse. Over time, this practice risks compromising the news organization's credibility, diluting the distinction between news and entertainment, and potentially exacerbating societal polarization for short-term *audience* engagement.

The third key finding of this research underscores the tension between the pursuit of immediacy and upholding journalistic integrity in the digital age. Newsrooms participating in the study grapple with the relentless demands of the 24-hour news cycle and real-time *audience* interaction. These pressures often lead to compromises in fact-checking and thoroughness, potentially jeopardizing the accuracy of reported information. The constant pressure to be the first to break a story and the expectation of continuous *online* presence and engagement often overshadow the time-consuming processes of verification and deep analysis. An interview from a journalist at Organization B illustrates the challenges of maintaining accuracy amidst the pressure for speed:

"There is a constant race to publish breaking news online. Sometimes, we might rely on information from unverified social media accounts just to get something out there first. We go back and fact-check later, but the damage might already be done if the initial report is inaccurate."

This excerpt highlights the potential pitfalls of prioritizing speed over verification. The journalist describes the pressure to "publish breaking news *online*" quickly, even if it means relying on unverified sources like social media posts. While the interviewee mentions a fact-checking process occurring later, the concern lies in the potential spread of misinformation before corrections are made. This rapid dissemination of unverified information can severely affect public trust and the news organization's reputation.

The results of this study resonate with the existing body of research on the transformation of journalism in the digital age. The reliance on social media for newsgathering, evidenced within your

data, aligns with observations by Carlson (2023) on shifting journalistic routines and the dominance of *audience* metrics. Furthermore, Harlow and Chadha emphasize the blurring lines between professional and citizen journalism in this study's content analysis findings (Harlow & Chadha, 2022). This highlights a trend in which social platforms empower individuals to disseminate information alongside traditional news outlets, challenging established newsroom practices.

In addition to the three main findings above, this research also found some unexpected findings: While the study confirms the anticipated trend of social media's influence on news gathering, some surprising findings emerged. A small percentage of journalists expressed concerns about the potential for bias within social media algorithms, suggesting a growing awareness of the limitations of these platforms. Additionally, some news organizations highlighted efforts to integrate social media verification tools into their workflows, indicating a proactive approach to addressing accuracy concerns. These unexpected findings suggest a potential for adaptation within the journalism industry. News organizations prioritizing verification techniques and critical evaluation of social media content can navigate the challenges of speed and accuracy in the digital age.

Several organizations expressed a growing awareness of these algorithms' potential limitations and biases. Additionally, some newsrooms reported experimenting with strategies to promote in-depth investigative journalism on social media platforms. These efforts, such as utilizing longer video formats or serialized content, suggest a potential for adaptation and innovation within the industry. The awareness of algorithmic limitations might be attributed to a growing body of research and discussions on social media bias within the journalism community. Efforts to experiment with longer content formats could be seen as a proactive approach to counter the dominance of "snackable" content often favored by social media algorithms. These unexpected findings highlight the ongoing efforts within the journalism industry to navigate the complexities of the digital media landscape.

Several news organizations strongly emphasized developing robust social media policies prioritizing verification procedures. Additionally, some newsrooms reported adopting novel verification techniques tailored to the digital environment. These proactive measures suggest an emerging awareness of the need to adapt traditional verification practices to the complexities of social media. The emphasis on social media policies and novel verification techniques might be attributed to a growing recognition of the potential consequences of spreading misinformation. News organizations prioritizing accuracy and implementing stricter verification measures will likely be viewed as more credible sources by *audiences*. These unexpected findings offer a glimmer of hope, suggesting a potential for the journalism industry to rise to the challenges posed by the digital age.

The challenges newsrooms face in balancing speed with accuracy echo the concerns raised in Broersma and Eldridge's analysis of breaking news coverage (Broersma & Eldridge, 2023). Tandoc Jr. et al. (2018) further support the potential dangers of prioritizing immediacy and underscore the risks of sacrificing fact-checking in digital environments where misinformation spreads rapidly. Additionally, the algorithmic influences on content visibility and the potential for amplifying sensationalism align with the vast research on echo chambers and misinformation (Cinelli et al., 2021; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Studies focusing specifically on the context of misinformation offer additional frameworks for interpreting the findings. Weeks and Gil de Zúñiga (2022) point to the complex relationship between news consumption on social media and public trust. Their research suggests that the prevalence of misinformation and lack of verification practices can erode *audiences'* confidence in news media institutions. This erosion of trust highlights a critical consequence of the speed-focused, algorithm-driven news environment uncovered in this study.

While the research offers valuable insights into the Indonesian context, it is essential to situate the findings within a broader global conversation. Several studies exploring the impact of social media on journalism across different countries reveal both commonalities and regional variations. Similar to the research findings, a recent study by Newman et al. (2023) examining journalism practices in 46 countries highlights the widespread reliance on social media for newsgathering, particularly among younger *audiences*. This trend underscores the global nature of the challenges faced by journalism in the digital age.

The findings of this study resonate with several vital theoretical frameworks that illuminate the tensions within contemporary journalism. One such framework is (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) agenda-setting theory, which traditionally focuses on the power of media outlets to influence public perception

of what issues are essential. In the social media age, however, the concept requires a nuanced reinterpretation. Algorithmic curation, driven by user engagement rather than editorial decisions, plays a significant role in shaping what content gains visibility on social media platforms (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). This algorithmic influence can amplify sensational or polarizing content, potentially create filter bubbles, and limit public exposure to diverse viewpoints (Cinelli et al., 2021).

Another relevant theory is Entman's (Entman, 2002) framing theory, which emphasizes how media frames shape an *audience's* understanding of events. The pressure to generate content that garners clicks and shares on social media may incentivize news organizations to adopt specific frames prioritizing emotional impact over balanced reporting. This prioritization of "shareable" frames, fueled by social media algorithms, can potentially restrict public understanding of complex issues by presenting a limited range of perspectives.

Finally, the concept of gatekeeping, traditionally associated with journalists acting as gatekeepers of information flow, needs to be re-evaluated in the digital age (Harlow & Chadha, 2022). The decentralized nature of social media empowers individuals to disseminate information directly, bypassing traditional verification processes. While this democratization of information has positive aspects, it also challenges journalists who must navigate an information landscape saturated with credible and unverified content.

This research also contributes by offering valuable insights from an Indonesian perspective. While the core challenges identified – balancing speed with accuracy, grappling with algorithmic influence, and navigating the information landscape of social media – resonate with global trends (Fauzi et al., 2023; Septiana & Maghfirah, 2020; Sultan & Amir, 2023b), this study enriches the discussion by providing a focused look at how these challenges manifest within the Indonesian context. The research can highlight potential regional variations by comparing your findings to studies conducted elsewhere (Apuke & Omar, 2021; Luna et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2023). For instance, the emphasis on "fake news" in the Philippines may not be as prevalent in Indonesia, suggesting the need for further research to understand the specific information environment faced by Indonesian journalists. This comparative analysis strengthens the research contribution by demonstrating the value of exploring these issues across diverse national contexts.

Finally, this research offers valuable insights that can inform best practices and future research endeavors within journalism in the digital age. The unexpected finding regarding the development of social media verification policies merits further exploration. Studies could investigate the specific strategies employed by newsrooms in different countries and assess their effectiveness in combating misinformation. Additionally, this research underscores the need for ongoing efforts to support journalistic adaptation in evolving digital media landscapes. By highlighting the tensions identified in your study and the potential solutions emerging within the industry, this research offers a springboard for further discussion and practical application. This focus on informing best practices is a crucial contribution to the ongoing dialogue about the future of journalism in the digital age (Harcup, 2023; Sultan & Amir, 2023a).

CONCLUSION

The research presents three key findings. First, social media has become a primary newsgathering source, shifting journalists' focus on real-time updates and *audience* interactions on these platforms. Second, algorithmic curation and distribution models significantly influence news visibility, often amplifying sensational or polarizing content at the expense of balanced reporting. Finally, there is an ongoing tension between pursuing immediacy and upholding journalistic integrity. Newsrooms continuously grapple with the need to be first with a story while ensuring rigorous fact-checking and avoiding the spread of misinformation.

These findings have implications for both journalistic theory and practice. The influence of social media algorithms necessitates a re-evaluation of traditional notions of gatekeeping and agenda-setting in news. Practically, the findings underscore the urgent need for news organizations to develop robust social media policies, integrate novel verification techniques, and critically examine content strategies to navigate the tension between speed and accuracy. Additionally, media literacy initiatives to educate the public about the potential pitfalls of social media consumption become increasingly important.

While this study offers valuable insights within the Indonesian context, it has limitations. The case study methodology may only be fully generalizable to some news organizations or across different countries. Further research could explore how regional variations, cultural influences, and specific platform preferences shape news practices. A longitudinal study would also show how news organizations' social media strategies are evolving to address the challenges identified in this research. These future research directions could lead to an even greater understanding of the transformative impact of social media on journalism, informing best practices that uphold journalistic values in the digital age.

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