NEWS CONSTRUCTION STUDY OF TERRORISM CASES IN THE MASS MEDIA OF CENTRAL SULAWESI

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Abstract

This study discussed the news construction of terrorism cases in the mass media of Central Sulawesi. This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study method. This study aims to understand the news construction of terrorism cases in the mass media of Central Sulawesi. The results stated that information sources regarding terrorism cases were limited to authorities and involved parties due to the nature of the high-risk operations combined with the geographical and emotional proximity and the presence of two dominant beliefs of Islam and Christianity with conflict history in Poso and Sigi. The limitation of the sources was also due to the nature of terrorism cases which are sensitive to the nation’s unity. Thus, journalists positioning and news development of the mass media of Central Sulawesi are crucial to construct the news of terrorism cases without spreading additional fear and fight radicalism with deradicalization programs through news and message stimuli.

Keywords: Construction, News, Terrorism, Mass Media, Central Sulawesi.

Introduction

Terrorism stems from coordinated attacks by certain groups to create terror and confusion within the society (Hesterman, 2020; Lolong & Rusdiana, 2018; Mustafa & McCarthy, 2020). In addition to generating terror and confusion, intentions and interests of the terrorism party also accompanied the act to be fulfilled by the focus of terror

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In this case, terrorism is defined as the threat of violence aimed at random targets (no direct relationship with the perpetrator) which results in damages, deaths, fear, uncertainty and mass despair (Makkonen et al., 2020; Mustofa, 2002; Richards, 2014). These acts of terrorism are to impose the terrorist groups’ will and interests on those deemed as opponents. In this way, the group's will and interests are recognized and respected (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2011; Taylor, 2010). Thus, the elements that must exist in the definition of terrorism are: acts of violence that have the result of damage, death, fear, uncertainty and mass despair; random targets that has no direct relationship with the perpetrator; and driven by the motivation of the actors' interests which cannot be devoted only to political motivations considering, in many cases, non-political interests such as beliefs are also could become the basis of the act (Abrahms, 2012; Bruce, 2013; Hesterman, 2020; Kaplan, 2016; Sarwar et al., 2020).

As published on tempo.co, the National Police Headquarters released a year-end report on their performance throughout 2020 on Tuesday, August 22 2020. From the report, the National Police Headquarters revealed that there were 228 terrorism suspects arrested by the National Police throughout 2020 in Indonesia. Idham, as the National Police Chief, explained that the report publication is a form of transparency and accountability of the police to the public. On that occasion, he also revealed several other data, ranging from the performance of eradicating drug trafficking to the implementation of special operations throughout 2020 (Adyatama, 2020).

According to the National Police Chief, the transparency efforts of the National Police Chief through reports in the mass media is a needed and necessary form of information dissemination related to terrorism. The Special Detachment 88 (Detasemen Khusus 88, abbreviated as Densus 88) is demanded to be more professional and transparent in carrying out efforts to arrest terrorism suspects both in terms of more thorough, detailed and accurate reporting as well as information dissemination to the mass media. This matter is to prevent the emergence of new terrorist actors, as stated by the Special Committee for the revision of the House of Representatives’ Terrorism Law.

The mass media can function properly, when the news is broadcast as it is originally, not as a form of propaganda that is used as a form of fluency in fulfilling certain desires and goals (Aechtner, 2016; Fenton, 2014; Pohl, 2015). The mutualism between the mass media and terrorists is an obstacle for the government to eradicate terrorism (Jaspersen & Montibeller, 2020; Kearns et al., 2018). The mass media experienced an increase in sales circulation of print media and high ratings on television for reporting terrorism news (Kearns et al., 2018;

In many studies on radicalism and terrorism in Indonesia, Central Sulawesi is considered as one of the important areas for the growth and development of terrorism and radicalism. The radical and terror movements and actions that took place in Central Sulawesi were substantially driven through two main nodes: first, as the excesses of the past communal conflict events that occurred in Poso and its broad implications that transcended time and period boundaries; and second, radical actions caused by the expansion of networks of radical and terrorist groups to Central Sulawesi in both the inside and outside of Poso conflict setting and context (Jaspersen & Montibeller, 2020; Khairil, 2019; Sukabdi, 2015).

Reports and publications concerning terrorism that occurred in Central Sulawesi, especially Poso and Sigi, became the consumption of the mass media (Sukabdi, 2015). This kind of relationship creates a symbiotic mutualism in which news about terrorism not only are needed but also creates a sense of terror in the community (Junaedi, 2010). For the terrorist groups, understanding the value of news is an absolute factor to get maximum coverage of their actions. News value can be described as follows: timeliness or the existence of actuality or new events and developments; proximity or the geographical and or emotional closeness with the audiences; conflict or the existence of physical (e.g. feud between groups) and non-physical (e.g. difference of opinion) conflict; eminence and prominence which are related to famous events or people; consequence and impact which affect the life of the reader; and human interest which is to attract attention and feelings of the audiences (Itule & Anderson, 2007).

If mapped, the mass media coverage of terrorism in Central Sulawesi in Poso and Sigi regencies refers to several items of the news value of geographical and or emotional proximity where Poso and Sigi are dominated by two religious beliefs, Islam and Christianity, accompanied by elements of conflict. What happened during the Poso conflict made Poso a home for the East Indonesia Mujahidin (Mujahidin Indonesia Timur, abbreviated as MIT) group in Gunung Biru of Tamanjeka hamlet (Singh, 2014; Sukabdi, 2015).

A previous study by Fajar Junaedi regarding terrorism and media relations explained that terrorism was a major problem in recent years (Junaedi, 2010; Khairil, 2017). As a form of political communication, terrorism became a significant act of communication if the terrorist group’s actions are transmitted through the mass media to a large audience. Terrorists commit violence and other acts of terror to gain
support from the community and increase funding from their supporters (Junaedi, 2010; Malang et al., 2020). Meanwhile in another study explained that terrorism is a planned act of terror by certain groups in various forms of violence against parties who are considered potential victims (Wardani, 2017). Media coverage can polarize public opinion in response to acts of terror, whether it be pro or con (Kearns et al., 2018). Media coverage revolves around the radical acts committed by terrorists, the anger of the victims and their families and the implications that follow after the acts. The mass media can be a means of supporting acts of terror, such as reporting on the ideology and ideals of terrorists (Phillips & Pohl, 2020; Pohl, 2015).

Messages in mass media coverage in Sulawesi are being constructed by the editorial staff of the mass media operating in Central Sulawesi. Through the editorial of the mass media, the construction of the news is mapped to see the message construction model formed by the mass media. The issue of terrorism in Central Sulawesi is an ongoing topic, especially with the existence of the MIT in Gunung Biru and the massacre of a family by an unknown which is suspected of being a group acting on behalf of the MIT in Torpedo Hamlet, Lemba Tongoa Village of Sigi, Central Sulawesi on Friday, 27th November 2020. The media is needed to not easily be provoked by the incident and maintain unity between fellow believers regardless of religion, ethnicity and race (Khairil et al., 2017; Zhu et al., 2020).

**Research Method**

The main problem posed in this study concerns the construction of news, reporting and publications on acts of terrorism cases handled in the mass media operated within Central Sulawesi. In this study, we employed qualitative research with a case study approach following the aforementioned formulation of the problem and objectives to be achieved (Khan, 2014; Yin, 2013). The case study was selected based on the scope in which the case study approach examines various cases through detailed and in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2015; Yin, 2013). Data were collected through observations, interviews, audiovisual materials and document studies from various reports and presented through cases’ themes and descriptions. The location in this study is focused on Palu, Poso and Sigi with the consideration that the aforementioned three areas are developing areas for many large mass media based in Central Sulawesi.
The Construction of Terrorism News of Mass Media in Central Sulawesi

The reporting model of an issue of interest cannot be suppressed because the search rate for the news will be high and it also involves advertisers (Wasko, 2014; Wulandari, 2017). The more open the mass media is, the more economic side of the company will also be impacted (Terchilă, 2014; Wasko, 2014). However, journalistic ethic codes are needed not only to increase the economic aspects of mass media but also to safeguard the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia in the news (Halim, 2015; Ward & Madison, 2012).

Terrorism today has a wide and global network that threatens national and international peace and security (Gadarian, 2010; Gaibulloev et al., 2012; Singh, 2014). Academically, terrorism is categorized as an extraordinary crime and crime against humanity (Nasution, 2018; Sukabdi, 2021). The echo of this action grew bigger with the mass media coverage (Khairil et al., 2017; Sukabdi, 2021).

The construction of news coverage in the mass media is not expected as a forum for terrorists to carry out their actions (Khairil et al., 2017; Mahardika et al., 2018). The importance of mass media is tested in the terrorism reporting model as an issue that has no end in its coverage in Central Sulawesi in which the issue of terrorism has become one of the important issues that national and international media are waiting for (Sukabdi, 2015).

Regarding the applied model of terrorism cases handling in Central Sulawesi, journalists admit that access to the field is very lacking. The red zone dotted within the areas means that no civilian has the right to enter the area except for the Tinombala Task Force Team in the Tinombala Operation which has now turned into the Madago Raya Operations Task Force.

As explained by Mercusuar editor, the information on terrorism could come from many sources, but the official and primary source was from the Regional Police of Central Sulawesi, or at least from the public relations department of the Regional Police. However, the media cannot depend solely on the information given by the Regional Police as the media could also directly go to the field or interview the people in the red zone. Nevertheless, the media still have to confirm the pieces of information back to the Regional Police. The intelligence information can also be possible be published as a piece of news, but the problem is that the media cannot officially take intelligence information if there is no authorization of such official information from Regional Police officials.
Muhammad Rifky from the Mercusuar stated that the journalists’ information was limited to the field officers and public relations department of the Regional Police of Central Sulawesi. However, the nature and the importance of the news on terrorism dictated that it still has to be through official confirmation from the authorities. In this case, the news agency Antara of Central Sulawesi stated that the issue of terrorism is not the main focus of coverage by disregarding other news or stories, but the network to obtain information is the important point.

Wahono from Radar Sulteng also acknowledged how important the network was in enriching the repertoire of news coverage in terrorism reporting. The more information obtained, the deeper the reporting model is. Tricks in reporting on terrorism must also be supported by how deeply the news is contested in an article. The coordination of the mass media in Central Sulawesi in deepening the news is determined by how much information can be obtained from the Madago Raya task force and the public relations department of the Regional Police of Central Sulawesi.

The media and journalists’ source of terrorism information is somewhat limited to officials and important parties based on the life-threatening risk and danger of the red zone. The core of the development of terrorism news then becomes not exaggerating and not spreading fear. The media is building news with a positive side without causing fear and helping the terrorists achieve their goals (Makkonen et al., 2020; Sarwar et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2020).

**Information Scepticism, News Sensitivity and Deradicalization**

According to Nurdiansyah, the chief editor of Media Alkhairaat, the principle of all journalists is the scepticism of information. Thus, if there is information available from the Regional Police or any sources in that matter, journalists should not be too trusting and believe the information too much. Rather, the intelligence side of journalists is contested when curiosity is high and can also be the basis for how the news develops.

Scepticism is an attitude of doubt regarding information or knowledge that has been passed down to mankind (Aechtner, 2014). Various information and knowledge written in the past are not considered exact and doubtless. This trait becomes commonplace in a journalists’ line of work based on the demand for a high sense of curiosity (Aechtner, 2016).
Sensitivity in journalism is also needed because the issue of terrorism always brought two sides of the impact of the news: the alleged perpetrators and the victims. The principle of senasib sepenanggungan (experiencing similar fate) needs to be applied in positioning journalists within the reporting model. As in one of Qidam's cases of 2020, journalists should have the presumption of innocence even if it was stated that Qidam was mistakenly shot. Similar cases happened in Poso several times in the past.

The Radar Sulteng was being sued because of the news at the time of the study. Wahono, representing Radar Sulteng, stated that he was the first person to be sued by Qidam’s family and the Regional Police. He also stated that the night when the Radar Sulteng received information about the scene, Radar Sulteng immediately contacted the PR of the Regional Police of Central Sulawesi because the media had given a description and explanation that the area was set as a red zone. The media still say that Qidam was mistakenly shot but the Regional Police denies and stated that for anyone in the red zone who does not follow the orders of the Tinombala Task Force, warning shots will be fired and will be shot if the warning shot was ignored (Radar Sulteng, 2020). According to Wahono, it was important to confirm an incident. For example, Qidam was considered a suspected terrorist but was confirmed by his family that he was not. Qidam’s mistake at that time was to be in the red zone area of the Tinombala Task Force which made the Regional Police win the case.

The Antara news agency gave an example of the other side of terrorism reporting, namely in terms of news presenting in the Antara media related to the notion of intolerance of radicalism as an act of violence. The Antara news agency was explicitly stated that cases of the act of violence or the act of terror will not be published. For example, the Lembantongoa massacre case of the hard-line MIT (Hidayat, 2020) was not covered by The Antara news agency. The Antara news agency considered that if it was broadcasted, the media will be supporting the act of terror by the hard-line MIT. This perspective is based on the purpose of the terror which was to scare or to disturb the general situation of the community. Thus, the Antara news agency did not want to cover it but the data on the incident would be elaborated in a news that is more highlighted towards the handling step. The existence of the media is certainly expected to stimulate messages to recipients which are not only fear but also the sensitive side of the neverending issue of terrorism (Aechtner, 2016; Khairil et al., 2017; Sarwar et al., 2020).

Deradicalization is important for people who have a horizontal conflict background (Abozaid, 2020; Khairil, 2019; Wahyuni, 2019). Radical understanding that is implanted and embedded in the minds of people
exposed to radicalism makes people tend to justify various ways and act impulsively on things outside their beliefs. There are many reasons for jihadists to carry out and act impulsively on things that the general public considers in their judgment to be beyond the limits of normalcy in ordinary society. The existence of conflicts that give birth to radicalism in society is more or less disrupts the existence of the social environment (Khairil, 2017; Rokhmad, 2017; Sinaulan, 2016). If not anticipated, it will have a greater influence on the life of the community (Arnus, 2017; Fair et al., 2020). Therefore, the strategies carried out must be able to cover all groups and elements of society, both those who are exposed to and those who have not been exposed to radicalism (Lolong & Rusdiana, 2018).

The mass media as a tool in the dissemination of positive and negative message stimuli certainly plays an important role in the dissemination of ideas to the public as receivers. One way to reduce and fight radicalization is through a deradicalization program (Abozaid, 2020; Nursahid, 2017; Sukabdi, 2015) which has the aim of neutralizing ideology. Thus, the deradicalization program should be more focused on what Golose calls the deideologicalization aspect (Khairil, 2017; Khamdan, 2015; Llorent-Bedmar et al., 2020; Rokhmad, 2017). If the target for deradicalization, in particular, is the terrorist prisoners of Jamaah Islamiyah (JI), then the portion of de-ideology is also larger. Because of this, there is an expansion of reach not only to the detainees but also to their families and relatives.

**Conclusion**

From the research results and discussions, we conclude that mass media coverage on terrorism in Poso and Sigi of Central Sulawesi experience several conflicts of interest with related and involved parties. For example, the lack of access into the red zone. On one hand, journalists strive to provide actual and rapid information from the site of the conflict. On the other hand, Tinombala Task Force or the more recent Madago Raya Operations Task Force restricted civilian access to the red zone area due to the high-risk nature of the operations. Thus, journalists have limited access to the source of information which in this case is funnelled through the PR department of the Regional Police of Central Sulawesi. The nature of terrorism case news which is sensitive to the nation’s unity and the geographical and emotional proximity combined with the presence of two dominant beliefs (Islam and Christianity) accompanied by elements of conflict in Poso and Sigi dictated that it needs to go through official confirmation from the authorities. The sensitivity of journalism is needed, as the issue of terrorism will bring two sides of the impact of the news: the alleged perpetrators and the victims. The principle of senasib sepenanggungan
became the core of journalists positioning and news development in covering terrorism cases. Said principle is also helped the media construct the news without supporting the act of terror by spreading and causing additional and unnecessary fear within the community by disseminating positive and negative message stimuli of radicalization through a deradicalization program.

**Bibliography**


