

SEEING NEWSGATHERING ISSUES IN ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

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Abstract

Environmental news has an important role in educating people about the environment around them. Good environmental news, of course, results from the fact-gathering process and good analysis of the journalists. The process of gathering news (newsgathering) determines how well environmental news is presented. This study aims to see how the newsgathering process is carried out by journalists in Riau Pos in covering environmental issues. Newsgathering is an important and distinctive stage in environmental news. By using sources of interviews, observations, releases, and research, the process of newsgathering environmental news is considered capable of providing news that is in favor of environmental sustainability. Previously, this research was conducted from 2016 to 2017 by conducting direct observations and interviews with journalists of Riau Pos related to coverage of forest and land fires that occurred in Riau. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method, in its presentation, the researcher analyzes three news related to the case of forest and land fires in Riau. This research found that the problem in environmental newsgathering is the lack of news sources in coverage. lack of direct research and observation in the field. Journalists collect the environmental data and information only through interviews and release.

Key Words : Newsgathering, Environmental news, Journalist.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental issues become a problem that is close to the people of Indonesia. Starting from natural damage caused by humans, or natural disasters that are not unexpected such as earthquakes or volcanic eruptions. For the mass media, this natural disaster is a major event that has extraordinary appeal to be reported, because natural disasters cannot be engineered (Putra, 2006). Environmental news has its own peculiarities, the raw materials are different, ranging from air pollution, flooding, forest fires, illegal mining, logging, development that destroys the environment, earthquakes, community advocacy, and so on related to the environment in which humans live.

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Environmental news, of course, must be obtained and presented in a unique way by the journalists. Environmental journalists have an important role in conveying information or issues about environmental damage that occurs around them. However, in practice, reporting on environmental issues is still limited to the surface, or even in the form of short writings that seem to be only complementary to media coverage.

If you look at it, the media gives more space to economic and political news than environmental news. The existence of environmental issues in the media only occupies a small space. In fact, the media is very influential in making the public aware so that they immediately care about the environment, to jointly save the environment, and prevent the "destruction of the earth" which is accelerated by environmental damage.

It doesn't stop there, the practice of environmental journalism is still minimal, journalists are only tasked with interviewing sources and writing news and then distributing it, without special knowledge and further deepening of environmental cases ranging from reclamation, sand dredging, development in the area of springs, hunting wildlife, forest fires, to mining. Environmental journalists are required to see the state of the environment directly in their coverage. This is because the news gathering process will determine the quality of good environmental news. An environmental journalist is a field journalist who actually goes to see, witness, and investigate environmental conditions directly (Sudibyo, 2014:72).

The experience of one of the Indonesian journalists in carrying out their field coverage of forest fire cases, as was done by Harry Surjadi, is the coordinator of Greenpeace Indonesia who is also a former journalist for the Kompas Daily. He recounted his experience of being an environmental journalist. In his story, environmental news is indeed a conflict or issue that lacks a lot of interest or can be said to be not sexy enough to sell in the market (Kompasiana.com, 2013). However, what is different is that Harry Surjadi is an environmental journalist who has a story telling technique in presenting cases of environmental problems.

This is done to make the environmental issues that are reported to be more evocative to the readers. It doesn't stop there, the experience as an environmental journalist shared by Harry is how he did what could be considered a violation of the code of ethics as a journalist, namely a violation of objectivity. In the case he investigated regarding the import of excavated mud from Singapore, Harry succeeded in persuading him. Harry seems to make the objectivity of environmental news is how to save the environment itself. In the article, Harry said that the most important thing an environmental journalist should do is cover the environmental damage directly in the field.

The life of an environmental journalist in Indonesia is indeed quite interesting, with a journalist background who is not always related to the environment or understands environmental problems. In an interview that the researcher conducted earlier with Hary Istawan, a journalist from Okezone.com who is a Bachelor of Education and is not an environmental activist or environmental journalism community in Indonesia.

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“Not all news is directly observed by me, I can get some data from NGO press releases, advocacy parties, environmental experts from NGOs. If the data obtained is deemed insufficient, then I will observe the case of the Gemulo spring in Batu, East Java, but the news is not published in my media. at Okezone.com itself, environmental news is included in the news or feature rubric, there is no special desk for reporting. Covering environmental cases is usually the editorial team's agenda, if they are not ordered, they don't cover environmental cases” (Hary Istawan, Interview. 26 September 2016)

Other data shows how the newsgathering process for environmental news is carried out by journalists with a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering background. Eko Widiyanto is a journalist for Koran Tempo. Eko Widiyanto is also a member of The Society of Indonesia Environmental Journalist (SIEJ), so that according to Eko, this community is quite helpful for him in learning about reporting on environmental problems.

“Covering environmental problems always has its own obstacles, such as the lack of accessible data, while data from NGOs alone is not enough to represent the news. Some of the environmental problems that I cover sometimes involve black businessmen and public officials, one of which is the Umbul Gemulo case. Tempo itself does not have a special section for environmental cases, so it is only included in the rubric of science or technology” (Eko Widiyanto, Interview. 26 September 2016)

From the data obtained by the author through the interview, more or less describes the general practice of newsgathering on environmental news among journalists. Some still consider environmental issues to be issues that are still quite sexy, some also use environmental issues as complementary news. It can be seen how the media does not have a special desk for reporting on environmental cases. Thus, the coverage and writing of environmental news also seems modest without the need to go directly to the field, for example. The process of news gathering on environmental cases is a special obstacle in covering environmental news. From here, the issue of news gathering on environmental news needs to be studied more deeply.

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted using a qualitative descriptive study. Descriptive studies are also aimed at making systematic, factual and accurate descriptions of facts and characteristics of certain populations or objects (Kriyantono, 2006:69). This description will later be carried out to describe and interpret the news gathering process for journalists who cover environmental issues, especially the news about forest and land fires published in Riau Pos. Thus, through this method a systematic description of the reporting process, data collection from forest and land fire cases by Riau Pos journalists. This research was conducted by studying literature, interviewing journalists according to the forest fire news they wrote. This study also describes according to newsgathering indicators, namely:

Table 1. Source of Environmental News Coverage

Newsgathering			
Interview	Observation	Release and Press Conference	Research (Literature Study)

Source: (Abrar:2005)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The News Gathering process includes searching for data or information from an environmental event, before it is written into a news story. The process of reporting or gathering facts by journalists is determined based on general duties, beat systems, and special coverage. Special coverage allows one environmental journalist to cover more in depth than others. A journalist who reports on environmental issues must understand what he is writing by collecting facts in the field (itule & Anderson, 1987). Techniques for collecting facts are observation, interviews, press conferences, literature studies (research), and press releases (Abrar, 2005).

In the newsgathering process carried out by journalists, researchers used three main stories related to forest and land fire news published by the Riau Pos newspaper. If described then, from the three news stories, most journalists collect their information or data from direct interviews with relevant sources or only through press releases and conferences or clearly, they only quote back what is contained in government releases related to the issue of forest fires occur. For more details, the data is described in the table below:

TABLE 2. *Newsgathering* Environmental News

News Title of Riau Pos	<i>Newsgathering</i>	Description
Commander ready to send the troops (12/1/2017)	Interview	Direct interview with Pangdam Mayjen Lodewyck Pusung
	Observation	None
	Release and Press Conference	None
	Research (Literature Study)	None
Hotspot Monitor Combat Aircraft	Interview	None

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(11/1/2017)	Observation	None
	Release and Press Conference	Data sourced from a press conference from the Commander of the Air Force Base Rsn
	Research (Literature Study)	None
This Year, Peat Restoration 400 Thousand Ha (13/1/2017)	Interview	None
	Observation	None
	Release and Press Conference	Press Conference Conducted by Head of Peat Restoration Agency
	Research (Literature Study)	None

Of the three news stories analyzed above, only one news uses direct interviews with sources. Interviews are an important stage, because this is an attempt by a journalist to verify the information obtained through release or direct observation in the field. If you do not conduct interviews with sources, the value of journalists' objectivity should be questioned. Because, the main obligation of a journalist is objectivity (Kusumaningrat, 2006). Covering environmental issues is certainly not much different from covering other issues. One of the objectivity values of an environmental journalist lies in how he or she verifies information. Because it is possible that environmental problems that are misreported will have a worse impact on the community, especially on the environment.

The next news gathering process for forest and land fires news was carried out by reporter Eka Gusmadi Putra. In collecting data, according to Eka, the main source was the results of an interview he conducted with the military commander Major General Lodewyck Pusung. This statement is different from what was conveyed by Muslim assistant coordinator of the coverage who said that the main source of the January 12 news only came from the release.

"At that time, I was flying over with helicopters, I didn't participate, so I did an interview with the commander of the regional commander and the task force team" (Eka Gusmadi Putra, interview. January 15, 2017)

From these interviews, the main source of news obtained in collecting facts is from interviews, not from press releases. News coverage carried out by reporters or journalists is

generally based on assignments given by the person in charge of coverage or the coordinator of the coverage. However, this is different when Eka covers cases of forest and land fires. Because he is at the command post dealing with forest and land fires, this makes it easier for Eka to find out about the case in advance without having to wait for an assignment from the person in charge of coverage.

"So, because I joined the forest and land fires alert task force team, when there was information about hotspots, the task force was immediately notified. So coincidentally, there was a hotspot, because the region couldn't afford it, so the Pangdam attended the meeting, so he said basically if Riau was on fire again, he wanted to send troops. If it's an assignment, it's usually done, but because it's a forest and land fires, so this is the initiative" (Eka Gusmadi Putra, interview. 15 January 2017)

In the fire and forest fires report dated January 12 2017, according to Eka, environmental news should be written in depth and through an observation process. This, according to him, will differentiate between other environmental news stories. This statement is different from what Eka practiced in reporting which was not done by direct observation or at that time by flying over by helicopter to monitor hotspots at the scene.

"The difference is that it's more about events, if the writing is really deep, or there is field observation. Usually, it's more about activities, yes, the issue of forest and land fires has been around for ten years. Yes, the difference is that it is more regional, we want the news to describe the team's work and the government is also willing to work on tackling forest and land fires like that" (Eka Gusmadi Putra, interview 15 January 2017)

From this statement, Eka described more or less how it is best to make a report on forest and land fires. According to him, good forest fire news offers a solution by suppressing arson companies and government work. Thus, in the news he wrote, "Pangdam is Ready to Send Troops," the value of the news shown is about handling so that forest and land fires do not happen again.

"If you corner a company or government, it's more of a solution that the location is on fire and the location is so we explain the sanctions there so that other regions don't do the previous thing. Yes, just take it from the case, the fix is more like a threat. The Pangdam team went down and the TNI also failed, that's a series of previous news. It's more so that it doesn't happen again, my concern is to make forest and land fires, that's all, just let the fire die, that's all. The pressure at the post is usually normal" (Eka Gusmadi Putra, interview. 15 January 2017).

The newsgathering process starts from receiving data and interviews with the Regional Military Commander, then continues with writing the news, then the next process is that the news is sent to the reporting agency, or the one who is responsible is the coverage coordinator.

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The source of the observations in table 2 shows how the three environmental news stories were not obtained this way. Observation is an important resource in the process of news gathering on environmental cases. Why? In the news above, it is related to the case of repeated forest fires in Riau Province. If a journalist who is in charge of covering environmental issues does not see directly in the field, how can he describe in detail to the reader what is happening in the field. Based on the results of an interview with one of the journalists who covered the news above, it was found that the observation process has always been a journalist's obstacle. The absence of a special desk for environmental issues adds to the difficulty of allocating time to go directly to the field or where forest fires occur.

Press releases and conferences turned out to be the most frequently used source of forest fire coverage. In practice, the Riau Pos journalists in this case were analyzed from three news stories, two of which used release sources. The use of these sources is considered to make it easier for journalists to work, because when they get a release, all they have to do is edit and send it to the news editor.

"Press release data and press conferences are the main data, the development of which is from data obtained from the location and also from statements of related parties. In this case, it can be from the government, as well as the TNI who go directly to the field" (Agustiar, interview. 15 January 2017)

Research is a stage of environmental news newsgathering that journalists miss. It is not easy to be an environmental journalist who conducts research on every environmental case, especially regarding forest fires.

"There is no research. Except, to make long writings to be contested. In the field, the coverage just flows. Because the problem and its impact were clear from the forest and land fires, which were deliberately set on fire by irresponsible people, observations also flowed. To get the data, all methods are done, down to the field, direct interviews, by phone are also carried out to get accurate data" (Agustiar, interview .15 January 2017)

Environmental News Source

Environmental issues are very complex. This is because environmental problems include many interrelated matters such as politics, culture, economy, health, or social (Sobur, 2005). It is not easy to cover and present environmental news, how to search for complex news sources and how to present them. However, that does not mean it is impossible. Indeed, more efforts are needed to cover these environmental issues, especially the issue of news sources. In covering environmental news, a journalist must pay attention to the sources of information they are looking for. Sources of interviews, releases, observations, and research will determine their ability to analyze an environmental issue. Good environmental news is one that is able to link environmental realities with political, social, and economic aspects (Abrar, 1993:134).

Covering environmental news is indeed not easy, because the process of collecting data and information must be obtained from many sources, especially direct observation. So far, news produced by environmental journalists has tended to rely on the opinions of elite groups or state officials (Kaheru, 2005). Not only that, these unsuitable sources are always oriented to environmental crises or to a dramatic event (Berger, 2000). Tells about the number of victims, losses, or other things that are oriented to the consequences. So far, the environment will be reported if it contains negative values or tends to talk about environmental pessimism. Environmental journalists often tell of setbacks (Lowe and Morison, 1984).

Environmental news coverage always plays in the safe realm, if there is environmental damage, it must be reported. This way of reporting seems to be considered a setback. Whether it's searching from various sources, or analyzing an environmental problem. In fact, according to journalists, it is still very difficult to be objective. This is because it is not easy for environmental journalists to comprehensively describe the environmental reality. This practice is similar to that of the Jawa Pos journalist Fathra Nazrul Islam, whose practice is not enough to deepen only one source's data, but is also unable to trace data from other parties, due to limitations in the range of work locations and deadlines.

"It should be comprehensive. But yes, that was before, Narsum could not detail the program in detail. Yes, just follow up on the next news. For example, it is mentioned that peat restoration in 2017 is 400 thousand hectares. When asked for details on where it was carried out, they only answered throughout Indonesia, or only mentioned the name of the province, not yet reached the name of the sub-district or village" (Fathra Nazrul Islam, interview. 15 February 2017)

From the results of the interview, the same thing was conveyed by Didik, namely a Riau Pos reporter who is also experienced in covering forest and land fire cases since 2014. Comprehensive will always be presented in forest fire reporting in Riau Pos because as a media policy that holds an accommodative tagline so that, when advertisers are involved in the case of forest and land fires it will be reported, but not judged.

"When he is involved, as long as there is confirmation, it doesn't matter, but the news doesn't beat him. That's Riau Pos policy, the title is not based on hatred, because our tagline is accommodative journalism, we still accommodate the wrong parties, we don't judge" (Didik Hermanto, interview. January 4, 2017)

Confirmation turned out to be an important key in reporting cases of forest and land fires. It is not easy to report the problem indeed. Especially when companies involved in forest fires advertise a lot to Riau Pos. This issue is something that Riau Pos needs to be wary of, as to which side it should take, whether it's just playing it safe to please the advertisers or providing insight to the public. It does not stop at the managing editor, the statement regarding accommodative journalism was also re-explained by the chief editor of Riau Pos, namely:

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“We classify ourselves as accommodative journalism, which means we will present a piece of news that always needs confirmation, so let the public judge. Well, news of forest and land fires like that, no matter how bad the events are, we still report the companies involved, so we really need confirmation. If it's bad, let people judge, we'll pass on the data, yes, it's a journalistic code of ethics” (Asmawi Ibrahim, interview. 28 December 2016)

In covering environmental news, the newsgathering process determines the quality of news that supports the community and the environment itself. Critical values are important for a journalist who covers this issue. For example, the interview data above shows the existence of an accommodative concept. This concept illustrates the lack of critical media, especially the journalists, in covering the news. Because it turns out, making environmental news that contains long-term analyzes of how the environment will be in the future is what the community needs. This is in accordance with research conducted by Hanitzsch entitled "Journalist in Indonesia: Educated but Timid Watchdogs" written based on a survey conducted on 385 journalists in Jakarta (50% of total respondents), Yogyakarta (25% of total respondents), and North Sumatra. (25% of the total respondents). He found that journalists in Indonesia tend to be oriented towards imparting information in a neutral and objective manner, rather than being critical watchdogs. The orientation of Indonesian journalists includes neutral news, staying away from unverified news, describing the existing reality, and delivering it quickly to the public (Hanitzsch, 2005: 498).

The news gathering process of the forest fire case carried out by Riau Pos journalists in their coverage was actually more or less influenced by the level of knowledge and background on environmental issues. At the individual level, journalists will be in direct contact with the realities they encounter in the field (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013). As the news of forest fires presented in the media is the result of a construction subjectively shaped by the journalists themselves. At this level, the Riau Pos journalists who cover forest fires are mostly those who do not have an environmental education background or join environmental organizations. This experience was approved by the coordinator of JIKALAHARI (Riau Forest Rescue Work Network). According to him, with an educational background, experience, and reasoning that lacks an environmental perspective, this makes the news that is made seem shallow. This is conveyed in the following quote:

“Journalists from environmental perspectives are very rare, so very few can be covered, local media are still very rare. now it is more a matter of law enforcement. The news so far has been softer, even though it should have been deeper, revealing the problems of the actors, because the media is also supported by the government and the government is also involved with people who set fire to companies and so on. When several issues from an NGO perspective were also published in the media, the 2015 fires actually became a point of everyone's awareness that this issue needed to be controlled. The government finally issued a new policy, at the local level but it was not up to par, not optimal. The government views this industry as income, regardless of the risk that it has not become mainstream yet our policy” (Woro Supartinah, interview. 9 January 2017)

One of the challenges in the practice of environmental journalism comes from journalists who still have little background and understanding of the different ways of reporting and writing news. With such abilities and general coverage assignments given by the editors, journalists have generalized the coverage and assignment of environmental news with coverage and writing of popular news.

In fact, covering environmental news requires critical thinking and analysis, not only with environmental issues that have already occurred, but also on future environmental issues. Because, the ideal environmental news is one that can explain how environmental damage can occur, how the forest fire case is repeated every year. Instead of always accommodating the consequences that have occurred from forest fires or other environmental damage.

CONCLUSION

Indeed, there is no standard guide on how to cover environmental news. Because earlier, environmental news is very complex. If you look again, the problem of newsgathering in environmental news lies in the use of sources that are still minimal. Sources of environmental news in practice are mostly done by means of interviews and the use of releases. This method is considered the most common by Riau Pos journalists who are tasked with covering cases of forest and land fires. This is of course less than perfect. When viewed again, environmental journalists are fully responsible for environmental information that educates the public and conveys the truth by taking sides with the environment and society. All of this can happen if journalists do not only get news sources from releases and interviews with the government. Sources of observation and research are the difference between journalists who cover environmental issues and other journalists. Research on the environment is expected to be able to add sharp analysis from journalists to raise environmental issues. Sources of observation, will add a more real point of view and side with environmental issues.

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