



Indonesian Sports Journalists' Existence and Professionalism in the Era of Digitalization and Media Convergence

Limpad Nurrachmad^{a*}, Said Junaidi^b, Sri Sumartiningsih^c, Ade Bagus Pratama^d

^{a,b,c} Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

^d Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

Correspondence: limpad.edu@mail.unnes.ac.id

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Abstract

The ongoing advancement of technology in the era of digitalization has brought about significant transformations in all domains, including media. Multiple mass media corporations are vying to transition from traditional to digital systems in order to maintain their ability to compete and survive in the face of the increasing convergence of media. Media businesses are required to ensure that there are repercussions for delivering news in both hard news and soft news formats promptly, accurately, and engagingly. The purpose of this study is to investigate and describe the existence and professionalism of Indonesian sports journalists in the digitalization and media convergence era. The study was conducted using a qualitative approach. The six journalists were requested to express their experiences and perspectives by means of an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The gathered replies were subsequently examined utilizing the methodologies and instruments of Narrative analysis. In conclusion, sports journalists must be proficient in multimedia, able to swiftly adapt to new situations, have high moral standards, be able to interpret sports data, and be able to maintain their professionalism in the face of the challenges posed by the digital age and the convergence of media. Competitors will always find a way to beat out those lacking in soft skills and IT knowledge. Additionally, it is undeniable that sports writers cannot survive without engaging with audiences and sports fans via various internet platforms, including social media.

Keywords: Existence; media convergence; professionalism; sports journalist

1. Introduction

The emergence of the information society as a form of civilizational revolution known as the digital communications revolution means that humans are starting to play an active role in creating various new innovations at a fairly fast rhythm. The terms and concepts of the information society emerged and developed since the 1970s. Until now, the definition of the information society is still being debated. The term information society is often used to describe a society or group of people who use information technology facilities with high intensity in their daily lives (Webster, 2002). Currently, society has transitioned into the period of the fourth industrial revolution, heavily relying on digital technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, big data, machine learning, and blockchain. Consequently, these advancements have resulted in substantial transformations in public life (Micó et al., 2022). The use of digital technology, which can send, receive, and exchange digital data fast between sites regardless of distance, is impacted by these changes. Then, the sophistication of digital technology is applied to a range of business, economic, social, educational, and personal endeavors, including journalism. The rapid development of various technological and

information advances appears to be out of control. One such innovation is the phenomena of media digitalization, which gave rise to social media in the form of blogs and social network sites that are now commonplace. The need for information is growing, and journalists are being forced to quickly implement digital transformation due to the ease of internet access and rising demand for information. (Hayes et al., 2007; Friedrichsen & Kamalipour, 2017).

The phenomenon of media digitalization has changed journalism practices significantly. According to Westlund (2013), digital media has created fresh possibilities for journalists and citizens to swiftly and extensively obtain and distribute information. Furthermore, this has impacted alterations in news production processes, since numerous news organizations are adopting technology-driven customization to offer news information on mobile devices. Furthermore, the process of digitizing media enables the customization of news content for mobile platforms, hence allowing the utilization of the diverse capabilities provided by digital media. The advent of digital technology has revolutionized the global media and journalism sector. Digital technological transformation has an indirect impact on various aspects of journalism, including news content, production, consumption, dissemination, newsroom organization, and overall journalistic dynamics. The advent of digital transformation has greatly altered the methods by which journalists disseminate news and interact with both sources and viewers, utilizing a range of digital platforms, social media, and mobile technologies. Furthermore, digital change and innovation have primarily influenced four key areas of journalism: information and content, audience engagement, methodologies and resources, and news media organizations. (Lopezosa et al., 2023).

The journalism profession is facing significant challenges in the digital era, when information and communication technology takes precedence. These challenges have become much more tough with the emergence of internet-based media. In the age of digitalization, journalists must possess the ability to use diverse technology tools into their professional practices, ensuring that the outcomes of their work are readily accessible to the audience (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2019; Eldridge II, 2019; Maniou et al., 2020). Technological advancements not only affect the speed at which information or news circulates and engages the audience, but also impose the responsibility of upholding news accuracy. Newspapers and magazines are deemed incapable of rivaling electronic media and the internet in terms of reporting speed. Print media unequivocally held the position of being the primary medium for distributing information prior to the advent of the digital era. The printing press has also emerged as a prominent form of mass media in the realm of information industry. Nevertheless, with the advent of more sophisticated technical advancements, the hegemony of the print media business is being challenged (Saragih & Harahap, 2020; Firmansyah et al., 2022). The mass media industry's perspective was altered with the development of the internet, which gave rise to multimedia and the digital press. Since the internet started to disrupt print media 10 years ago, nearly every print media company has been fighting to implement change by developing new media in the form of online media. Not only does this internet media offer quick news, but it also offers current news. The shift in information management from print to online and electronic media is a tactic used by mass media corporations to ensure their continued survival. Managers in the print media sector took this action because they were aware of the dangers posed by electronic and internet media. In the press, this integration of print, electronic, and web media is commonly known as media convergence, or the merging of different media into a single multi-platform media conglomerate (Tapsell, 2015).

Mass media convergence is a modern media industry practice that began in the second half of 1990 when media companies began to develop their own websites. It is associated with technical excellence in the field of information transfer and storage, and it leads to the merging of previously disparate media (based on Internet platforms and/or converged newsrooms), departments and divisions of media companies to jointly produce content and replicate it across multiple media platforms. Convergence of mass media is resulting in the establishment of new types of media, genres, and formats of content, as well as worldwide changes at all phases - from creation of content to delivery.

(Baranova et al., 2020). Media convergence can be defined in a variety of ways, including the integration of communication systems and media forms, the merger of media companies or the centralization of their roles and functions, or a cultural shift in which media professionals and audiences collaborate on content creation and other media work (Malmelin & Villi, 2017). The development of media convergence is based on the advancement of technological developments in supporting communication. Media convergence occurs when mass communication media gradually merge into one medium as a result of new technology. The literature on media convergence has a broad scope, covering the processes of production, distribution and use of digital media services, including content production to delivery of services through various channels (Carr, 2019; Di & Kim, 2022). The increasing popularity of online media brings its own challenges to conventional media, including in Indonesia. Various print media such as *Tabloid Bola*, *Soccer*, *Hai Magazine*, *Kawanku*, *Chip Magazine*, *Sinar Harapan Daily*, and *Jakarta Globe* which were popular in their time were forced to close down. This happens due to several factors, one of which is the media's inability to adapt to such rapid and drastic changes. Online media clearly offers advantages compared to print media in the form of speed and free access to read news content, both hard news and soft news. Various content offered via online media is also more easily integrated and disseminated via social media platforms. Apart from that, the internet and social media also provide opportunities for the general public, who previously were only news consumers, to be able to produce their own news, or better known as citizen journalism. With these various advantages, it is normal for various media companies to have popular social media sites and accounts such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Tiktok in order to maintain their existence. What must be done to maintain the existence of media companies is collaboration and elaboration between digital media and print media.

The emergence of media convergence also has consequences for media freedom in Indonesia. As stated by Tapsell (2015), Convergence influences media freedom in Indonesia through five main indicators: (1) media conglomeration; (2) the increasing political affiliation of media owners; (3) the increasing role of social media and citizen journalism in mainstream media; (4) changes to regulations governing media freedom; and (5) changes in journalistic practice. The merger of multiple media platforms necessitates changes not only in the process of news reporting but also in the existence and professionalism of journalists. Owners of media companies expect journalists to work more effectively and efficiently. Carr (2019) & Indrati et al. (2021) provided additional confirmation that journalists need to be multiskilled—that is, able to perform many tasks at once—and multitasking—that is, able to master multiple talents in multiple roles. As a result, media journalists play a critical part in a media company's capacity to survive. It is evident that media owners would give preference to employing journalists with many abilities and the ability to multitask over those with limited skills but experience. It is imperative that journalists possess the ability to deliver news that is not just fast, but also accurate, interesting and shared across various channels of media (Saragih & Harahap, 2020; Sherwood & O'Donnell, 2018). Tapsell (2015) argues that this phenomenon is driven by factors such as efficiency, labour expenses, and technological advancements. The enhanced efficiency will yield significant profits for media owners, particularly by maximising news coverage output while minimising production costs and human resources efficient use. Implementing these methods will result in sacrifices, particularly among journalists who struggle to adapt to various changes, especially those in the field of sports journalism. A significant future problem for media firms pertains to enhancing their skills base. This challenge gains prominence as underscored by Murray et al. (2011), who pinpoint four essential facets integral to sports journalism: (a) reporting skills, (b) sports knowledge, (c) editing skills, and (d) broadcasting skills (Ketterer et al., 2014). The primary focus of media firms presently revolves around enhancing the knowledge and expertise of journalists to align with the demands of digitalization and media commercialization. It may of course be that the new media environment is so different from the existing one that future media content will be produced by different professionals with different skill sets. Perreault & Bell (2022) asserts that these patterns and models of journalism practice are highly probable in the field of sports journalism, where sports journalists are expected to

possess not only expertise in journalism and multimedia, but also knowledge of sports, including the analysis of sports "big data." Despite being commonly regarded as the "toy department" by many, sports journalism demands such comprehensive skills.

Inspired by Perreault & Bell (2022), The author has the opportunity to (1) investigate and find out the existence and professionalism of Indonesian sports journalists in facing the era of digitalization and media convergence, (2) identify the challenges and obstacles of Indonesian sports journalists in facing the era of digitalization and media convergence.

2. Research Method

This was a qualitative descriptive study that employs a critical narrative inquiry approach. The qualitative method was chosen because this research comprehensively describes events, experiences, occurrences, and a realistic image of the social reality faced and experienced by participants, which cannot be assessed numerically. (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). The purpose of this study was to examine the existence and professionalism of sports journalists in Indonesia as they face the digital era and media convergence.

The focus of this study was on sports journalists employed by the leading local mass media organization with national affiliations, namely PT. Kompas Media Nusantara, PT. Jawa Pos, and PT. Suara Merdeka Press. The research employed a purposive sample technique, utilizing specific inclusion criteria. The requirements for inclusion were as follows: (1) working as professional journalists in established mass media outlets; (2) willing to participate as informants in the research; (3) individuals who were in good bodily and mental health; (4) between the ages of 25 and 50; and (5) possess certification demonstrating their competency as journalists.

The research employs three instruments: (1) Observation for collecting preliminary research data; (2) Semi-structured interviews for obtaining comprehensive information from sources; (3) Documentation for validating and providing reliable data pertaining to document information. The reliability and validity of these three instruments have been assessed. The research used the Interactive Analysis Model (Miles & Huberman) technique for data analysis, which has four stages: (1) data gathering, (2) data reduction, (3) data display, and (4) conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014).

3. Findings

The Indonesian Sports Journalists Existence in Facing Digital Era & Media Convergence

In the digital era and with media convergence, Indonesian sports journalists encounter both dynamic difficulties and opportunities. Sports writers are confronted with the primary obstacle of intensifying competition arising from emerging media platforms, including social media and over-the-top (OTT) media. These emerging media platforms provide a diverse range of captivating and high-caliber sports content, making them highly appealing to readers and viewers. Amidst the digital era and media convergence, the significance of Indonesian sports journalists is growing, accompanied by new problems. The following are several aspects of the existence of Indonesian sports journalists summarized based on the data obtained:

- 1) *The Rapid Change of News*: Sports journalists must be able to adapt to the speed of news change in the digital era. Information must spread widely and quickly, so journalists need to work efficiently to present accurate and relevant news.

- 2) *Media Convergence*: The integration of print, web, audio, and video media with other media platforms is known as media convergence. Cross-platform information delivery and cross-media proficiency are essential for sports journalists.
- 3) *Social Media and Citizen Journalism*: Social media plays an important role in news distribution. Citizen journalism, where ordinary individuals contribute information, can influence the way sports journalists gather and verify news.
- 4) *News Selection and Credibility*: Selecting information carefully is necessary for sports journalists to maintain their credibility. Sports journalists must comprehend the significance of ethics and integrity in the presentation of information in an era of plentiful data.
- 5) *Interactivity and Reader/Audience Engagement*: Digital media allows for greater interaction between readers and journalists. Sports journalists must be able to communicate with readers through comments, responses, and involving them in news creation.
- 6) *Use of Technology*: Sports journalists need to understand and utilize technology, such as algorithms and data analysis, to identify trends, analyze data and present sports news in an engaging way.
- 7) *Multimedia Capabilities*: Sports journalists need to have multimedia skills, such as photography, videography, and graphic design, to present news interestingly and effectively across multiple platforms.
- 8) *Financial aspects and Sustainability*: Various media organisations encounter financial difficulties in the digital age. Journalists must possess a comprehensive understanding of digital media business models and devise strategies to ensure the continued relevance of their work while also fostering financial sustainability.

From the points outlined, it is important to remember that although the challenges journalists face are increasing in the digital era, they also have access to greater resources and can reach a wider audience. Journalists who are adaptive and skilled in managing and overcoming all forms of change are the ones who are able to survive. Apart from that, the ability to compete in presenting credible, interesting and up-to-date sports news is a positive value for sports journalists to maintain their existence in the media companies where they are employed.

Indonesian Sports Journalists' Professionalism in the Digital Era and Media Convergence

The professionalism of sports journalists remains an important part in the digital era and media convergence. The demands of modern progress and technology require sports journalists to be able to work multi-tasking and multi-skilling. The following are several aspects of professionalism summarized by the research team based on the data obtained:

- 1) Accuracy and Speed;
Sports journalists must maintain a high level of accuracy in reporting sports news and events in order to preserve their professionalism at work. Despite increased time constraints as a result of competition and the speed of digital news, accuracy remains a key objective.
- 2) Ethics and Integrity;
The professionalism of sports journalists entails adhering to ethical principles and maintaining integrity when covering news. This encompasses the act of refraining from engaging in situations where personal interests may compromise objectivity, as well as the principles of truthfulness and

openness in the communication of information. Adhering to journalistic ethics is essential in order to uphold the professionalism of sports journalists.

- 3) **Extensive Knowledge of Sports;**
It is essential that sports journalists possess an in-depth knowledge of the sport they report on. Proficiency in this area encompasses an understanding of game regulations, team tactics, and the intricacies of the athletic world. A comprehension of statistical analysis and big data can enhance the quality of sports reports. Data can be utilized by sports journalists to provide readers with comprehensive analyses and insightful content related to sports information.
- 4) **Multimedia and Technology Capabilities;**
Modern professionalism necessitates that sports journalists possess proficiency in multimedia and an awareness of technology. They must possess the capability to generate content across many digital platforms, including text, photographs, videos, and other mediums.
- 5) **Context and Analysis Skills;**
Sports journalists need to have analytical skills to provide in-depth context about sporting events. This can involve understanding trends, statistics, and off-field factors that influence athlete and team performance.
- 6) **Adaptable to Change;**
The digital era and media convergence often involve rapid changes in the news industry. Sports journalists need to be responsive to these changes, both in terms of technology and industry dynamics.
- 7) **Sports Audience and Fans Engagement;**
Sports journalist professionalism involves positive engagement with readers and fans. Sports journalists can use social media to interact with audiences, provide feedback and build positive relationships.
- 8) **Lifelong Learning;**
In order to maintain professionalism, sports journalists must consistently enhance their understanding of sports, journalistic principles, and technology advancements. Sustained learning is the key to remaining relevant and growing in the industry.
- 9) **Self-Empowerment and Independence;**
Sports journalists can increase their professionalism by building independence in their work. This includes the ability to independently craft news narratives, conduct research, and create content that is not only competitive but also objective.

The Digital Era and Media Convergence: Challenges and Constraints for Indonesian Sports Journalists

Indonesian sports journalists face a number of challenges and obstacles in facing the digital era and media convergence. Some of them include;

- 1) **Challenges**
 - a. **Rising Competition from Emerging Media Companies**
Social media and over-the-top (OTT) media, among others, provide an extensive selection of high-quality sports content that is both engaging and informative, thereby enabling them to

captivate readers and viewers. Thus, the competition for public interest among sports journalists becomes more intense.

b. Increased Competency Required

Sports journalists are required to have strong competencies, both in terms of journalism, sports and technology. This is because sports journalists must be able to produce quality, informative and interesting content, and be able to adapt to rapid technological developments.

c. Changes in Media Consumption Patterns

The consumption patterns of individuals with media have undergone a transformation in the digital age. Sports content is preferred to be consumed personally and interactively in modern society. Consequently, sports journalists must have the ability to produce content that accommodates the requirements and preferences of the audience.

2) Constraints

a. Limited Resource Availability

Sports journalists frequently have constraints in terms of resources, including financial, equipment, and personnel limitations. This can impede sports writers from generating high-quality content.

b. Lack of Competency Training Facilities

In order to ensure that journalists persist in producing public-interest journalistic works, it is imperative that their competencies and skills be continually enhanced through participation in training programs, seminars, and workshops. In contrast, for unspecified reasons and considerations, media organizations presently give journalists little regard and do not facilitate their participation in journalism-related training, seminars, and workshops.

4. Discussion

The rise of the Digital Era and Media Convergence has brought about significant and substantial transformations in journalism practices in Indonesia. The effect of such changes also affects the overall and specific activities of disseminating information, including sports information. The research findings reveal several aspects regarding the presence and expertise of Indonesian sports journalists in adapting to the digital age and media convergence. In order to survive in the age of digitization and media convergence, sports journalists must deal with the fact that they need to respond to rapidly changing news and information. This requires the capacity to work efficiently. According to the informant, integrating many social media platforms and media websites to distribute sports information is an efficient strategy to highlight the role of sports journalists in adapting to the digital age and media convergence.

This is in line with what was conveyed by Hayes et al. (2007); Boyle (2017); Friedrichsen & Kamalipour (2017); dan Perreault & Bell (2022) who asserts that journalists must possess the ability to comprehend the consequences of digital journalism practices and the interdependence between journalists and social media in the creation and dissemination of news, as well as media sensations. This is particularly crucial in light of the rapid development of the digital era. In addition, in order to sustain the existence of sports journalists in the digital age and media convergence, informants emphasized several crucial factors to be taken into account. These include proficiency in technology and multimedia (such as photography, videography, and graphic design), literacy of big data and statistical analysis, as well as the skill to produce news that is both quick and accurate while also attracting readers. Journalists

should have these three essential abilities in order to meet the requirements of media organizations, where they are required to demonstrate proficiency in multitasking and possessing several skills (Carr, 2019; Indrati et al., 2021). In order to enhance these skills, informants have a duty to engage in lifelong learning, meaning they should continue to acquire knowledge throughout their lives. The absence of competencies training opportunities offered by their media companies should not be used as an excuse for neglecting to improve their journalistic abilities. The knowledge acquired throughout one's career as a journalist is a crucial component of the process of self-learning.

The demand to possess the ability to multi-task and multi-skill is also a special concern in building the professionalism of sports journalists in facing the era of digitalization and media convergence. Sports journalists are expected to be able to work not only quickly and purposefully but also skilled in completing work effectively and efficiently. The meaning of effective and efficient here is that the digital era and media convergence mean that journalists are obliged to equip themselves with skills in managing media and technology, mastering sports material and issues, analyzing sports statistical data, and complying with journalism rules and ethics in carrying out their main tasks and functions. The responsibility of sports journalists is not only to cover sports information, but also to process sports information until it becomes sports news that is ready to be presented via print media, social media and online media. This aligns with the previously mentioned by Jasun Carr (2019); Eldridge II (2019); Cohen (2019) that in the digital age and media convergence, journalists are now expected to engage in multitasking, which entails performing and concentrating on multiple tasks simultaneously, as well as multiskilling, which refers to possessing multiple skills within a single role, as a standard practice in journalism.

The research informants conveyed several issues and obstacles resulting from media convergence and digitalisation. The primary difficulties faced by sports journalists in the current digital age involve growing rivalry within the media sector, the demand for more complex journalist skills, and transformations in media audience preferences. It is important to emphasise that shifts in media consumption patterns within society have a significant influence on how journalists approach the management of sports news. This is consistent with what was revealed by Jerónimo et al. (2022) a significant challenge for media and journalists today, particularly in local settings, is to discover innovative methods of engaging with individuals who were previously regarded as loyal audience. This challenge is amplified by the fact that journalists are increasingly immersed in communities, both physically and digitally, through platforms such as social media and mobile devices. Furthermore, according to Wahl-Jorgensen et al. (2016), social media has evolved into a tool that enables audience engagement and journalistic activities in the era of digitalization and media convergence. Media convergence refers to the combining of information, communication, and content technology in response to the intensifying competition within the media sector (Wahyuningsih & Zulhazmi, 2020).

Sports journalists have various challenges, including a shortage of resources and the absence of adequate training facilities for enhancing their skills, which are offered by their respective media organisations. This is mostly due to the absence of a company policy that mandates the provision of training and certification opportunities for journalists to enhance their skills and expertise. Journalists are increasingly expected to enhance their skills autonomously in order to improve their performance. In addition, the budgetary constraints and cost-saving measures implemented by media firms contribute to the lack of training opportunities and competency certification for sports journalists.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that sports journalists continue to play a crucial role in the digital era and media convergence. In order to survive, sports journalists must possess the ability to adjust to the significant transformations occurring in conventional media methods. Essential skills that one must have include proficiency in multimedia, information and

communication technologies, statistical data analysis, and foreign languages. Meanwhile, in order to uphold professionalism, sports journalists must ensure to promote of their credibility and integrity while fulfilling their journalistic responsibilities. Every journalist must adhere to journalism standards and ethics with uncompromising obedience and compliance since it is an essential obligation and responsibility. The commitment to enhance journalistic skills through lifelong learning can empower sports journalists to continually progress and maintain proficiency amidst the competitive landscape of digital media and media convergence.

The study's recommendation is that, in order to strengthen sports journalists' abilities to meet the digital era and media convergence, news organisations should provide journalists with training and competency certification on a regular basis, based on the demands they encounter. Collaboration between practitioners and academics in the field of sports journalism must be implemented on a constant basis through joint research to ensure scientific sustainability and advancement.

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