

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF JOURNALISM IN THE POLITICAL ADVOCACY OF HEALTH POLICY IN INDONESIA?

Apa Peran Jurnalisme dalam Advokasi Politik Kebijakan Kesehatan di Indonesia?

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Abstract

In this short commentary article, the complex association between journalism, health policy, and political campaigning in Indonesia is explained, in need of more scholarly expansion. Within those limitations, the paper does alert to the necessary function journalism serves intrinsic to the public discourse that drives health policy recommendations, as well as noting how this has been perverted by misinformation and dwindling faith in the media. The article examines how journalism (including digital and social media) has shaped health policy advocacy and public opinion and highlights the role of the media in health communication campaigns and policy reform. Through scrutiny of its role in health policy advocacy, with a broader look at how journalism roles have shifted over time. In this article, the author demonstrated that journalism is a bridge between health policy experts and the public, enabling a more informed democratic engagement with health policy. These conclusions highlight the need to build a nexus between democratic journalism and health policy advocacy for public health priorities in Indonesia.

Keywords: health policy, journalism, political campaign

Abstrak

Dalam artikel komentar singkat ini, hubungan yang kompleks antara jurnalisme, kebijakan kesehatan, dan kampanye politik di Indonesia dijelaskan, yang membutuhkan lebih banyak pengembangan keilmuan. Dalam keterbatasan tersebut, makalah ini mengingatkan akan fungsi jurnalisme yang penting dan vital dalam wacana publik yang mendorong rekomendasi kebijakan kesehatan, serta mencatat bagaimana hal ini telah disesatkan oleh informasi yang keliru dan berkurangnya kepercayaan terhadap media. Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana jurnalisme (termasuk media digital dan media sosial) telah membentuk advokasi kebijakan kesehatan dan opini publik, serta menyoroti peran media dalam kampanye komunikasi kesehatan dan reformasi kebijakan. Melalui pengamatan terhadap perannya dalam advokasi kebijakan kesehatan, dengan melihat lebih luas bagaimana peran jurnalisme telah bergeser dari waktu ke waktu. Dalam artikel ini, penulis menunjukkan bahwa jurnalisme berperan sebagai jembatan antara para ahli kebijakan kesehatan dan masyarakat, yang memungkinkan adanya keterlibatan demokratis yang lebih terinformasi dalam kebijakan kesehatan. Kesimpulan ini menyoroti perlunya membangun hubungan antara jurnalisme demokratis dan advokasi kebijakan kesehatan untuk prioritas kesehatan masyarakat di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: jurnalisme, kampanye politik, kebijakan kesehatan

Introduction

It can be argued that journalism is crucial in informing the public about policy issues and providing the necessary information for public discourse and decision-making (Napoli, 2020). In some cases, the role of journalism can be said to be more specific in public health issues related to health policy. The relationship between journalism and social security and health financing has attracted significant attention from journalists, resulting in

numerous studies on media framing (Jung, 2016; Calnan, 2020; Eriksen *et al.*, 2023).

The role of journalism (and media) has become more relevant and closer since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The role of journalism in guiding public health protocols and critiquing government policies has become increasingly important during the pandemic (Estella, 2020; Perreault and Perreault, 2021). However, on the other hand, their products leave a lot of criticism regarding accuracy, misinformation (Luengo and García-Marín,



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2020; Nasir, Baequni and Nurmansyah, 2020; Arora, 2022) and addressing public trust issues (Bromme *et al.*, 2022) have been identified as key areas for future research.

The series of events during the COVID-19 pandemic has been linked to the democratic crisis (Amat *et al.*, 2020; Bandelow, Hassenteufel and Hornung, 2021; Engler *et al.*, 2021). In Indonesia, democratic backsliding has allowed anti-democratic actors to become more explicit in silencing dissenting voices (Fealy, 2020; Hermawan, 2020). Threats to press freedom during the pandemic have been associated with anti-science narratives that compromised the government's ability to manage COVID-19 (Wiratraman, 2020). More than ever before, journalism, democracy and public health converge in the face of a health crisis. Each sector contributes significantly to determining how people relate socially.

Additionally, the connection between journalism and health policy in political campaign events in electoral democratic setting is something worth exploring further. This is because it embraces many dimensions of unexplored interdisciplinary studies on journalism approaches in Indonesia contributing to health policy advocacy such as *Indonesian Journal of Health Administration* (IJHA). The paper provides insight into their dynamic interplay within political campaigns taking place in Indonesia.

Discussion

The 2024 presidential election in Indonesia has prompted discussion on a number of health issues. These issues include programs such as free lunch (makan siang gratis), stunting, and distribution of medical doctors (Nurhasim *et al.*, 2024). In an electoral democracy system, political campaigns play an important role in shaping public opinion and assessing the direction of policies politicians offer (Matsubayashi, 2013). This provides the impetus for journalism and the media to perform their function of disseminating information and framing public health issues to get the attention of

advocates, policy analysts, and academics in the field of public health. Otherwise, it may lead to misunderstandings among the voting public and policymakers. Furthermore, the extent to which health issues are included in political decisions and reflected in journalists' media reporting indicates policy neglect (Jessani *et al.*, 2022; Picard, 2020).

The role of journalism in strengthening democratic values is crucial, including in health policy formulation processes that involve public participation. The dissemination of accurate and unbiased information by the media helps inform the public about important health issues, policy developments, and debates that encourage public participation (Henderson, Hilton and Green, 2019). Transparency and access to public health information can only work through a well-functioning democracy. Framing public discourse is also a role of journalism. This role highlights the impact on the public interest, ethical considerations, and social determinants of health rather than presenting issues through a narrow technocratic lens. This framing influences how the public and policymakers perceive and prioritise health issues (Calnan, 2020; Eriksen *et al.*, 2023). This public framing strengthens democratic representation and challenges power imbalances that often sideline minority groups in the policy-making process.

Public framing by utilizing digital media and social media in political campaigns can also substantially influence priority issues in health policy advocacy. Today, the merger of digital technology and social media platforms has the potential to facilitate targeted outreach, audience segmentation, and personalized communication in encouraging public participation on public health issues (Afful-Dadzie, Afful-Dadzie and Egala, 2021; Akbar, Kurniadi and Nurliawati, 2021; Barberá *et al.*, 2022). In the framework of political advocacy (Gilardi *et al.*, 2021), the use of social media platforms by political authorities has the potential to shape public health communication and encourage policy reform. Empirical evidence suggests

that the media, including political advertising, can influence public opinion, policymakers, and policy agendas (Fowler *et al.*, 2019). In addition, some models explain the impact of social media on public health campaigns, which are related to indirect influences on behavior modification, such as how health sector reforms can be driven by media coverage pressures (Charalambous, 2019; Abuhashesh *et al.*, 2021; Afful-Dadzie, Afful-Dadzie and Egala, 2021; Akbar, Kurniadi and Nurliawati, 2021; Apriliyanti, Utomo and Purwanto, 2021).

What Happens in Indonesia?

In Indonesia, health policy issues in political campaigns have gained a place in media coverage. Issues raised include inadequate health budgets, malnutrition, stunting, health service gaps, health service accessibility, and dangers related to non-communicable diseases. This depicts how online media amplification, as a consequence of journalism, has directed public attention towards diverse health policy concerns in Indonesia. In the realm of political campaign contestation, the role of online media is noteworthy because it has the potential to stimulate public discourse in shaping the political agenda (Adiprasetyo and Larasati, 2020; Benning, Ashby and Chapp, 2020; Fadhlurrohman and Purnomo, 2020), including public health issues.

The discourse revolving around journalism (and media more broadly) and health policy is particularly intriguing, especially after a meticulous analysis of several articles on the interconnectedness of journalism and public policy and how certain media outlets have also assumed the role of health policy advocates during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, online media outlets such as *Project Multatuli*, born during the pandemic, and *Watchdoc*, a documentary video genre media, serve as an alternative medium for disseminating COVID-19 countermeasures. *Narasi*, employing a social media approach, also offers an alternative avenue for public deliberation.

Meanwhile, other media outlets with a more scholarly disposition, such as *The Conversation Indonesia*, were initially established to amplify research findings for the public and policymakers. The emergence of several new online media does not diminish the role of traditional media that have long been established (such as *Kompas*, *Tempo*, *Media Indonesia*, *Jawa Pos*, *The Jakarta Post*, and others), which also have amplification for policymakers.

Journalism bridges health policy experts and the public, effectively translating complex issues into narratives that are easy to comprehend. In political campaigns, media coverage can greatly shape health topics that have become part of the political discussion. The role of media diversity and independence is significant. Conversely, a concentrated or state-controlled media landscape may limit the range of perspectives and narratives presented, thereby reducing the impact of journalism (Hanitzsch, 2005; Haryanto, 2011; Tapsell, 2012, 2017; Ali and Eriyanto, 2021). In addition to state control, other factors, such as media ownership, media literacy, alternative sources of information, cultural diversity, and political divisions, can also influence the role of journalism in shaping the public narrative about public health.

There is some research on how health topics can be integrated into political communication and become public attention (Ridlo, 2023), so that it has the potential to provide a deep public understanding of health policy even though this is often intended for populist purposes. This populist goal will not become a public issue without the involvement of journalism and the media so that political issues about health can be moderated for the wider public interest. This step of journalism and the role of the media plays an important role in enabling voters to understand the policy implications and allowing candidates to articulate their positions on pressing health issues. Therefore, the relationship between journalism and health policy advocacy cannot be separated as a strategic part in creating discourse around health issues has become an important

point in the political process (Aarva, 2006; Aelst, 2019; Luengo and García-Marín, 2020; Napoli, 2020; Perreault and Perreault, 2021). Despite the current and future political and democratic challenges, the Indonesian people still have a great opportunity to advocate for the public by encouraging deliberative democratic spaces for public health goals for all. Bringing journalism closer as an effective tool in the health policy advocacy process can help leaders in the health sector to address information gaps, increase public participation at large in health development and future health emergency preparedness.

Conclusion

The relationship between journalism and health policy in political campaigns is a complex realm, but studies and efforts to bring this field together have important potential to encourage public participation in public health in Indonesia. As explored in this article, the role of journalism and the media in moderating health issues into the public agenda is something that the author feels needs to be considered by policymakers, regardless of whether it is in a political campaign. In striving for a healthier democracy, the interaction between these areas must be fostered to ensure that health policy debates are adequately informed, evidence-based, and reflect the democratic values that seek to be upheld. Through these efforts, journalism and the media play a role in strengthening the foundations of a democratic society that prioritizes health and well-being for all.

Declarations

Ethics Approval and Participant Consent

Not applicable.

Conflict of Interest

The author is the former managing editor of *The Indonesian Journal of Health Administration*. The author expresses ideas and scientific opinions under the journal's policies in this commentary publication. This type of commentary

publication still undergoes peer review and editorial process even though it falls into the lower level of the evidence hierarchy (expert opinion).

Availability of Data and Material

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