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HIDDEN ADVERTISING IN LOCAL ELECTION ERA: REDUCING THE PUBLIC'S RIGHT OF INFORMATION AND CRITICAL POWER OF MEDIA IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

The article aims to explore hidden advertising phenomenon in the era of local election in East Java. Based on the Indonesia constitution (UUD) 1945 article 28 which is implemented in the Act No 40/1999 about the principles of press and the Act No 32/2002 about broadcasting, it is stated that society has the right to obtain information. In implementing its function to fulfil the society's right of information, media should be professional. Hidden advertising is a phenomenon in which news mixed with advertising. News is not objective anymore but only telling sponsorship interest. The research conducts deep interviews with some senior journalists in Malang Regency to understand the pattern of news production in order to reveal hidden advertising phenomenon. The results portray that some of newspapers producing news which are mixed by other interests. It can be concluded that the economic aspect of media affect the quality of the news. The research also proves that hidden advertising news between media and political elites will lead to degradation of good governance quality.

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INTRODUCTION

Reformation era, since 1998, has opened democratization and freedom of speak (Siriyuvasak, 2005). In this case, mass media has two roles, as a subject as well as an object. As a subject, mass media as stimulator of democratization because its information can explore critically toward New Orde (*Orba*) otoritarian regime. The information has been consumed by scholars and students who were important element promote democratization at that time. After Orba fell down, democratization such as freedom of speak and write are guaranteed by the state. The freedom of the press has begun in 1999 which stated in the Act No 40/1999 about the principle of press. This Act is an umbrella for freedom therefore media and other elements of society simultaneously become an object of democratization, i.e. having ability to express opinion freely. It is linked to Chin-Chuan's (2001) statement that "mass media should serve, promote, and participate in democracy." As a result, mass media grew up sharply. The growth of media fastens to fulfil the public right to get information.

The right to get information is also stated in the constitution (UUD) 1945 chapter 28 which is implemented in the Act no 40/1999 and the Act no 32/2002. This information is needed to help society interpreting social realities that relate to public interest (chapter 6 part d in the Act 40/1999). In order to fulfil the public right of information, professional media becomes main factor. Professional media focuses on presenting the truth information, focuses on public interest, be independent toward news sources and be discipline to verify the quality of information. According to Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson (1992), professional media is able to provide information that coherent with social realities so it can create a system of media which relevant to democratization.

Adopting Littlejohn and Foss (2008), profesional media can be said as the situation that all information is useful to educate and to entertain people, to help people to adapt with the environment, to control society, and to disseminate social heritage for the next generations. As consequences, the functions above claim the media to keep the idealism characters, independent from others and be critical. In other words, professional media level is highly determined by how freedom the media workers (journalists, writers and editors) to express their idealism, independency and critical power

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toward social phenomenon. On the other hands, media existence can avoid commercialization of the economic powers (Dertouzos and Trautman, 1990). Media is a producer of particular product to offer in the marketplace and the society is consumers. Media existence moves with economic and market logics. This media commercialization often push media move away from the ideal functions, i.e. as the window of information and data source for the society (Kriyantono, 2007), and this situation also occurs in other places, such as in the United States and the developed countries (Gamson, *et al*, 1992), yaitu "The lens through which we receive these images is not neutral but evinces the power and point of view of the political and economic elites who operate and focus it." (p. 374).

Because media has ability to disseminate messages simultaneously, it has ability to shape public opinion. Through this power, media creates "global village", i.e. the bridge of globalization in order to reduce geographic boundaries among countries. Finally, media is also able to control the government (*watchdog*). This characteristic of media make other parties that have power –economic, political and cultural power- will be interested in determining media contents (McNair, 1994), with the aim "to offer competing construction of reality to defend what they would prefer to have taken for granted." (Gramson, *et al*, 1992). It is linked to Foucault's statement that "power and knowledge cannot be divided. Power is a creative force that pervades all human activity" (Littlejohn and Foss, 2008). The freedom era of the press has given an opportunity for the media to express freely their opinion without fearing of the government (Siriyuvasak, 2005). However, commercialization of media contents create negative information commodity that impact on social conflicts (Sudibyo, 2001). Media news is mixed by business messages or sponsorsips (from individual or groups) that actually will reduce critical power of media and the public right to know (Kriyantono, 2011; 2012a).

This current article will not urge the media to produce news objectively because there is no objective realities as a result that realities are the product of construction struggle through media discourses (Erriyanto, 2002; Gramson, 1992; Hidayat, 2001; McNair, 1994), determined by some elements such as political, economic and cultural power, economy-business, media workers, media routine and ideology (McNair, 1994; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Relate to democracy, according to Chin-Chuan (2001), democracy will not never be perfect because various perspectives offered by media. Therefore, this current article focuses more on exploring how social construction and interaction take place. One of the results of social interaction that construct realities is Hidden advertising, i.e. a phenomenon that news media is mixed with sponsorship. (the sponsor can be organization, corporation or individuals) (Kriyantono, 2012a).

News content is not sociological facts about realities in society but merely telling sponsor interest. The news motive and frame are not determined fully by media but determined by other power. It happens because media receive particular compensation from sponsor. As a result, it is difficult to differ news (publicity) to advertising (promoting other parties with receiving payments). Publicity is a message purposefully

planned, executed and distributed through selected media to further the particular interest of the client –individual or organization, public or private- without specific payment to media for which time or space was not purchased (Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman, and Toth, 2007; Newsom, Scott, and Turk, 1993; Seitel, 2001). On the other hand, advertising is paid non-personal communication of ideas, goods or services from an identified sponsor using mass media to persuade or influence an audience (Belch and Belch, 2007; Lee and Johnson, 2007; Wells, Burnet, and Moriarty, 2003). The authors often finds that many news are doubtful their independency, whether they are truly news or news that are mixed or ordered by sponsors with receiving compensations/payments, such as product launching, graduation ceremonies, political candidates, and so on. The research depart from the assumption that there is hidden advertising behind media news. The research tries to provide scientific data regarding the assumption and expose the practices and motives why the phenomenon happens.

In term of local election (*Pilkada*), hidden advertising, can be mirrored through media tendency to report in special manner toward particular candidates. Refers to definition of advertising, news that reports one party or one side only, such as positive or negative only, should be doubt its independency. Independent Alliance of Journalist (AJI) conducted content analysis toward media report (news). The analysis consisted of Detik.com, Kompas Cyber Media, Vivanews.com, Okezone.com, Warta Kota, Pos Kota, Indo Pos, Koran Jakarta, Republika, Kompas, Koran Tempo, and Suara Pembaruan during 1-15 Juni 2015 and found that 71% of 675 media news tended to report one side only. This current research is important to provide a model to write news as policy recommendation in term of the media role as a democracy tool. It is beased on the assumption that there is a mutualism symbiosis between media and news source (Kriyantono, 2011; Syahri, Kriyantono, and Nasution, 2015), as one of the factors in news making process (McNair, 1994; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). It is important to create regulation about the relationship between political actors and media in order to create good governance which is free from transaction of private interests that reducing media critical and the public right to know. To prove the truth of the assumption, the current research focuses on the model of media report of local election by conducting deep interviews. Interviews also explore some factors that influence any distortions during news productions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Based on the description in the introduction above, the research questions can be defined: How is the model of media report regarding the assumption of hidden advertising during local election?; What are the factors that influence the media report model? This current research used a qualitative approach. This approach was applied because it allowed me to collect information from the respondents in depth. The approach allowed me to ask questions of the respondents in more detail, with flexibility, and freely about all aspects regarding the mudflow crisis. The approach also allowed me to use a variety of perspectives and theories to analyze data as well as a wide range of multiple sources of data (Hesse-Bibber and Leavy, 2006; Kriyantono, 2014; Willis, 2007; Wimmer

and Dominick, 2008). Berger (2000) averred that by conducting interviews, researchers will be able to obtain several sets of data about attitudes, motivations, opinions, and verbal statements. Interviews is applied to explore data from media workers in order to obtain data about news production, including the factors that determine news writing model in term of the assumption of hidden advertising. The researchers interview senior editors from Radar Malang and Malang Post. Content analysis is conducted to explore media news to add data from interview. The two newspapers are chosen because they are under the same management (group) therefore it is interesting to understand whether they have different editorial policy in term of the local election in Malang Regent. The analysis is conducted toward August-September editions based on the actuality reason.

RESULTS

In this chapter, the interviews data are presented in four categories: the news production regarding local election, hidden advertising phenomenon, management of local election news, the main factor of hidden advertising.

News Production

From interviews with senior editor from radar Malang and Malang Post, generally, the local election news production processes are the same as other events. They put journalists in every running candidates to cover each activities. In the afternoon, the journalists must be back to the office to write the reports. Then, the editors will edit them to decide which report is suitable to publish. The decisions are based on journalistic principles only. However, the informants admitted that media –journalists, editors, chief of news desk- has their own subjectivity when they cover and write the news but it will be minimalized when they are conducting a meeting. They usually have a regular meeting in the afternoon to consider and decide which news will be published for the next edition, through editorial meeting. This meeting discuss some aspect for news that will be published, for example, what news will be published, is there something to be added from the news? Is the news needed to make further confirmation? Why some news are properly published? Why are not the others? All the issues are usually decided in the editorial meeting.

The person who has the power to determine the final decision about the news which will be published in the next edition is editor in chief. He gives final control over the news as well as be responsible over any consequences after publishing the news. He also determines the angle of the news, what the frame will be directed. "He looks like a food chef who cooking food materials from journalists in the fields. If the food is too salty, we will give sugar," admitted Informant A. It often happens that the editor in chief urges either the journalists or the chief of news-desks to complete and to enrich the news by confirming to news-sources. Regarding the election news, Radar Malang said that they are neutral. This neutral means to cover candidates both sides, to give candidates the same space for news, and to reject black campaign over every candidate. However, Radar Malang admitted that there is media frame which has already came from the journalists, such as the way the journalists conduct

interviews, choose the news sources and write the news. In addition, Radar Malang give priority to candidate's events that have news values, therefore, the concept of balance does not refer to the same number of news appear about each candidate. One candidate has chance to be reported if he/she has event that has news value.

Hidden Advertising

From the interviews, it can be revealed that both Radar Malang and Malang Post conduct hidden advertising regarding local election. However, the way of practicing hidden advertising is different among them. Radar Malang admitted that some clients prefer to advertise them in the form of news and prefer to not mention clearly that it is advertising. Radar Malang agreed to avoid giving the sign of advertorial in the end of news, however, they give other signs, such as write the news in the boxes separate with other news, write in different fonts and give name of the rubric: political information. The practice of hidden advertising is clearer in Malang Post. They printed hidden advertising in the form of news that the same as the way they printed other news. There are no different place or fonts for advertorial. They also did not write the sign of advertorial.

Management of Local Election News

Firstly, newspapers, both Radar Malang and Malang Post, provide special column for local election news. The special columns accommodates all political candidates. Malang Post provides the page called "*Road to Pringgitan*" and Radar Malang provides the page called "*Menuju Pendopo Agung*". Based on the interview process, candidates' "creativity" during campaign events are the important factor for getting media publicities because the editors perceive as news-values. However, from the column of "*Road to Pringgitan*" Malang Post tries to cover all of the three candidates. The proportion differs among the candidates, either the news content or the pictures. Malang Post tends to provide large amount proportions, both the content and the pictures, for two candidates, Rendra Kresna dan Dewanti. On the other hand, another candidate, Choma, obtains little proportion of publicities. The editors are also aware that they cannot avoid getting control from the public and the candidates. For example, Jawa Pos was criticised in being not neutral in the local election of 2010 when Jawa Post gave large amount of news to Risma-Bambang, the candidate that won the election. Therefore, the editors realized to report all candidates into special column proportionally and make the media avoid critics for not being objective.

Secondly, the editors has full authority to control the news content rather than the journalists. It is different than online media which emphasizes on the speed and quantity of information therefore the editors are not dominant in news selection. Printed newspaper still has process and mechanism in selecting the news. This process give the editors the role to control and to determine the news. As a result, the editors has a wide chance to interpret and change the news. In term of the local election, if a candidates, success team, and political parties ask for news from the media, the editors become "the strategic door". Journalists have no authority to determine

which news will be published or not. Although the candidates try to persuade the journalists, this persuasion will be ineffective. The situation is stated by the editor of Malang Post. In addition, the editors also determine to interpret the portion and frame of the news. Malang Post which admit having a close relationship with either the incumbent or another candidate who is also commissioner of Malang Post, give large amount of proportion toward the two candidates. Although, Malang Post denial to support those two candidates, the editors admit that there is a conflict of interest which push them to do special treatment in making the news. In this context, hidden advertising occurs.

The Main Factor of Hidden Advertising

Printed media faces media-routine which relates to technical aspects, such as time management of news production (from journalists to editors, editors to lay-outers up to printing process), design and layout (how to arrange words, photos, pictures, and advertisement), and so on. News tendency is analyzed to ignore the technical aspects. The technical aspects cannot be ignored in news production in printed media. If the media tends to give large amount of portion to particular candidate, the media actually will face the technical aspects. However, the media tendency to do hidden advertising does not directly relate to these technical aspects, because the tendency relates to wider factors.

The factors for conducting hidden advertising: (i) Media dependency to advertising. It is stated by the editor of Malang Post. This dependency stimulates printed media to provide opportunities for the companies, the organization, and the candidates to advertise themselves. Malang Post provides special column for local government to publish the government activities. For this reason, Malang Post provides columns or pages for all local government in Malang areas (City of Malang, Malang Regency, and City of Batu) and report the activities regularly. Malang Post admits that advertorial for these local government is a form of partnership. With this partnership, Malang Post gains enough income. Malang Post admits that the advertising content is written by the journalists and is confirmed by the local government. There is special request from the government, such as the photograph of Malang Regent, Mr Rendra, must be in wide size. The important thing is that there is no advertising sign in the news.

Secondly, trying to maintain partnership with the government and advertising opportunity (potential clients). This situation occurs because the media depends on advertising. For The candidates who have big chance to win the election, because they have high electability from surveys, media will carefully report their activities. The news is also under consideration in order to avoid the candidates' disappointment. In addition, the media chooses to report those candidates positively because they are potential clients to advertise into the media. In term of media dependency to advertising, the advertorials about the government activities are the important source of income for the media. The change of public's media choice, from printed media to online media, commercial advertising also moves from printed to online. It is important for media to create cooperation or network with local government, especially

about advertising matters. Local government will take responsibility easier toward the local budgeting (APBD) by placing the advertising in media. There is mutualism symbiosis between the media and the local government. Thirdly, the moment of local election is opportunity for media to gain bigger incomes, Local election is to harvest advertising. The high intensity of positive reportages toward potential candidates is assumed to be important variable to shape vote-behavior or to create the candidates' popularity and electability.

The regulation No 7/2015, issued by the Commission of General Election (KPU), has regulated the media advertising conducted by the candidates. Some regulations: (i) all the print, electronic, and online advertising must be facilitated by the Local Commission of General Election. Local Commission of General Election in every city or regency is also manage the frequency of advertising exposure, duration and time for every candidate. (ii) Advertising materials must contain only vision, mission, program, candidates' photography, and the picture of political party. (iii) The advertising is disseminated only during fourteen days before the campaign break-time.

However, there is a space in the regulation which gives opportunity for the candidates and the media to break the regulation by conducting hidden advertising. Media helps raising the candidates' popularity and electability through (a) informative and narrative news content which impresses the readers. It will be more effective rather than campaign advertising about vision, mission, candidates' photography and political party's picture. The news is more credible because the readers will think it is journalists' made. It is the principle of publicity: telling something about yourself through someone else. The news is also more detail in reporting activities. (b) From the campaign regulation, the candidates may state that they do not conduct campaign because news media do not contain the candidates's vision, mission, photography and political party's picture directly. News packaging is stronger than campaign advertising to impress the readers. Journalists give the story and photography about the candidates' activities which has ability to create proximity between the candidates and the readers. (3) The time schedule for Campaign advertising is more limited, it is only fourteen days, but news is more flexible. The media is able to cover the candidates' activities in any time, before, during and after campaign era, therefore, there is open opportunity to break the regulation by practicing hidden advertising.

DISCUSSION

From the findings, it can be explained that there is distortion toward the freedom of the press in Indonesia regarding the local election. The freedom of the press is press (media) freely to conduct its responsibility to fulfil the public right to get the truth information. When particular parties intervene into the media role, it will cause distortions toward the freedom of the press. Media practices in Indonesia have experienced some distortions: (1) Power distortion. It comes from government apparatus, both are formal regulation and apparatus behaviours. This distortion often happened in New Orde regime. In authoritarian system, the right to express opinion is

very strictly limited. The Ministry of information regulation no 1/1984 has arranged cancelation of the letter permit to publish of the press (SIUPP), although at the time, the Act no 22/1982 about press stated that there is no cancelation toward press publication.

The apparatus, civil or military, often phone mass media to ask not to repost particular events. They also often invited the media (editors or journalists) to attend special socialization about the government ideology regarding the media news. (2) Business distortions. The distortion happens when the media owner or other economic power intervene the news production. Example: competition among the media to support political candidate or political party, especially when the media owners are the candidates or the chief of political party. (3) Distortion from the society. Anarchism from the element of society threats the freedom of the press. It happens when group of people do anarchy to the office of the media as a protest because they are not happy toward the media news. (4) Media worker distortions. It happens when media workers cannot keep their professionalism in writing news. In this context, hidden advertising can be categorized in this kind of distortion. (Kriyantono, 2011).

The research contributes to socialize the idea that media workers themselves can threat the freedom of the press. It can happen if the media news is mixed by sponsor's interest. The research does not accuse media of having transaction in all news production, but, reminds that *hidden advertising* will likely to happen if the public finds it difficult to differ which one a news, an opinion, and an advertising. Media content is information and information can be categorized as news, opinions, and advertising. The deviation from the the journalistic function often happens, i.e. advertising practices appear in media in the guise of news (publicity). It is hoped that the results of this research is an effort to socialize *media literacy* to the society to be powerful media consumers as well as be aware of their right as media consumers.

Both media and news sources (the company, group or individual) should be honest. Mutualism symbiosis –media needs news source, news source needs media for disseminating information- should not reduce honesty (integrity) to the public. The public has a right to ask that media space and time are used properly for the public's interest because the public itself who gives media the freedom of the press (Kriyantono, 2012). Information is not the same as news. According to Wilbur Schramm, information is something that reduce uncertainty (Sendjaja, 1998). Not all information can be called news. Advertising, opinion article, and novel, for instance, are information because they help the public knowing something. Information can be called news if it fulfil some criterias: objective (balance, factual, opinion separates with fact, completeness, neutral/cover both sides, credible news source, and having news values (McQuail, 2010). Refers to chapter 6 the Act no 40/1999, the clear distinction between news, opinion, and advertising is part of the public's right to know.

If it is advertising it should be written "advertorial or adv" at the end of news or it can appear in special page or column. If it is not, it will be hidden advertising, it is like a news but

advertising. For some media workers take a short cut to gain additional income and an idealism as journalists is offered in sacrifice. The Indonesia Board of Press found that, during reformation era, 30% only of the press institution had healthy financial. It is no wonder that Suryandaru (2010) dan Novenanto (2009) found that media has not maintained properly its idealism, independence and critical power.

Conclusion

The study has described the phenomenon of hidden advertising conducted by the media and the political candidates in the local election in Malang Regent Indonesia. It also revealed that the hidden advertising occurs due to a mutualism symbiosis between the media and the candidates. The local election is a moment for media to earn bigger incomes and a moment for the candidates to earn popularity and electability. Hidden advertising is undertaken by reporting in regular media news the candidates' activities without any public notification that the media receives some payment from the candidates for using the media time and space. It is advertorial but there is no sign that it is advertorial, so that the readers assume it as a news not advertising. Hidden advertising is also called as the practice of breaking the campaign regulation but it is difficult to prove it. The research findings have confirmed that not all hidden advertising practice can be revealed due to scope of research limitation. It does not aim to make generalization so the results cannot be extrapolated to other context and it depends. However, the research findings can be assumed as phenomenon that is likely happen in other Indonesia region when conduction local election.

In addition, the current research has contributed to develop knowledge about hidden advertising phenomenon which has threaten democracy in Indonesia. The public's right to get information cannot be fully fulfilled. This summary is created based on the fact that the media system in Indonesia has created the media industry that focuses only to gain economic profit. Hidden advertising, therefore, has reduced the media ability to control and to criticize because media report only positive things about the candidates who give money contribution to media. In order to gain significant result whether the hidden advertising is proven in any regions in Indonesia, for future research, deep case study with many data sources, such as observations, focus group discussion, intensive interviews, and combined with quantitative methods, such as an experimental and a survey research, can be conducted to investigate the correlation between government and the media not only in local election but also in the national election.

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