Haze, climate change, and media brand responsibility: how *Republika* calls for public action in saving the environment through smoggy photojournalism

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**Abstract.** When the haze disaster struck several regions in Indonesia (especially Kalimantan and Sumatra) in 2015, various parties tried to get involved in saving the environment and preventing the effects of climate change. *Republika* Daily, as a leading media brand in Indonesia, showed its social responsibility through news photo of the smog that adorned its front page. By interviewing the editor-in-chief of *Republika* in-depth and searching for documents online, we identified the reasons why *Republika* concerned on the haze disaster as part of the impacts of climate change, why using smoggy photojournalism, and how *Republika*’s social responsibility regarding the environmental disaster arose. Pathetic facts in the field related to the natural conditions, victims of local communities who had suffered the health problems, and economic losses caused by the haze disaster prompted *Republika* to not only call-for-public-awareness but also call-for-public-action in overcoming the problems and helping the victims. Therefore *Republika* used smoggy photojournalism to make the public ‘feel’ the conditions on the ground. This research can inspire other media to participate in saving the environment and increasing climate change awareness through creative and impactful ways.

1. Introduction

In the New York Times, 1932, 4, it was written that "The earth must be inevitably changing its aspect and its climate. How the change is slowly taking place and what the result will be has been considered...". This statement marked the beginning of the outbreak of media coverage on climate change [1]. The media do have an important role in raising public awareness about the impacts of climate change [1,2,3,4,5,6]. Media representation can translate and bridge science and policy, as well as form perceptions related to environmental, technological and risk issues [2].

At present, in the United States, for example, major national newspapers are starting to pay more attention to reporting on climate, even though local media and TV news are not as enthusiastic as national media. Major broadcast networks also, such as ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX, only provided a 142-minute slot for broadcasting on climate change last year, according to Media Matters research, as reported by The Guardian. Not surprisingly, a survey by the climate communication program at Yale and George Mason universities shows that about half of Americans know about global warming in the media once a month or less [7].
In reporting climate change issues, the media tends to involve three parties namely scientists, policy actors, and the public that are mediated by such news packages [3]. In another research, Painter [5] found that through the media, more and more politicians, scientists, and policymakers are using risk concepts and language in the context of uncertainty to frame news about climate change caused by humans. From 350 articles in three newspapers in the six countries he observed, it appears that the dominant message that emerged was a disaster (80%), while uncertainty after the disaster frame was almost 80% and the opportunity frame around 27%. This reinforces the alleged lack of media framing about concrete actions to prevent the impacts of climate change, for example by reducing greenhouse gas emissions or opportunities to switch to a low-carbon economy. Therefore, it is needed to educate and empower more scientists and journalists to be more effective in communicating about the complexity of climate science and the social and economic impacts of a warming climate [6].

Weingart et al. [2] identify discourses about climate change in several phases. The first is the discovery of anthropogenic effects on climate, which is accompanied by increasing concern among many scientists. The second phase brings a new level of politicization of the climate change hypothesis and leads to the closing of the scientific debate, and the third phase, marked by the institutionalization and diversification of scientific advice in the field of climate change, as is currently rife in the climate change discourses.

Climate change discourse has also penetrated Southeast Asia, especially concerning haze disasters that often hit the region, particularly Indonesia, which caused Indonesia in the 1999 period to suffer an economic loss of US$3.7 billion, it was much higher than Malaysia and Singapore [8]. The health costs including medical costs, productivity, and indirect impacts amounted to US$924 million or 22.62% of total losses, while losses related to the tourism sector, including tourism impacts, airline impacts, and airport closures were US$87.89 million or 2.15% of the total damage [9].

The loss in the region is not only economically, but also ecologically threatening to biodiversity and transboundary haze pollution, while the societal consequences comprise regional tension, health risks, as well as food insecurity [10]. Frequent fires of forests and haze disasters, make Indonesia is currently the third-largest emitter of carbon dioxide in the world [11]. Climate Homes News reports research from Harvard and Columbia universities that estimates that more than 100,000 people may have died from exposure to smoke when fires struck several regions of Indonesia in 2015. This phenomenon is one of the deadliest environmental disasters in the modern era [12]. The Jakarta Post estimated that in 1997-1998 the same disaster killed 527 people. In 2013, haze disaster caused by forest fires, which mostly occurred by clearing oil palm plantations, caused nearly 50,000 Indonesians to have suffered from respiratory infections, eye diseases, and coughs, where children became easy targets of this hazardous haze. In 2015, the haze arising from forest fires in Kalimantan and Sumatra caused over 409,000 cases of respiratory ailments, in which 19 people died [13].

Regarding the haze disaster in Indonesia, on October 8, 2015, Republika Daily presented unique photojournalism through headlines on the front page of the newspaper. In contrast to the headlines of most newspapers which feature verbal titles (words), Republika relies instead on visual power, like the appearance of a magazine. More than that, Republika not only displays visual images or photos like most magazines but relies on the power of strong message concepts with a high touch of creativity like creative advertising.

Republika's October 8, 2015 photojournalism visual work featured a schoolboy pedaling a bicycle through the haze. The smoke not only seemed to disturb road users caught in the photograph but also blocked the display of other news on the Republika’s front page, making it seem difficult to read, including breaking news about the latest popular policy on decreasing diesel prices.

At the bottom of the page and the picture is written: "When covered with smoke, all news becomes difficult to read". Republika's concern about the haze disaster that has the potential to increase public awareness of the impact of climate change has succeeded in becoming a viral on social media that sparked conversations between citizens and the general public, thereby increasing Google's search for news about the Republika haze issue to 1,550% in the September-November 2015 period.
This paper discusses further this topic by revealing: 1) why did Republika care about the issue of haze disasters in Sumatra and Kalimantan? 2) why did Republika use 'smoggy' photojournalism in reporting on the issue of the haze disaster? 3) How does Republika see the responsibility of the media brand in solving social issues, including environmental issues?

2. Methodology
To get insights about the background behind the phenomenon of smoggy photojournalism made by Republika, we interviewed Republika's editor-in-chief, Irfan Junaedi, who was also one of the teams involved in making smoggy photojournalism which appeared on the October 8, 2015 edition of the Republika Daily, about reporting on the haze disaster in Sumatra and Kalimantan. The interview with duration 112 minutes focused on three aspects, namely 1) the reason Republika raised the topic of the haze disaster, 2) the reason Republika used smoggy photojournalism, and 3) Republika's view of media responsibility in social issues, including environmental issues.

From the results of the interview, we then coded statements related to the issue under study, then categorized by grouping on certain themes that had the same meaning. The results of this analysis were then discussed by dialoguing with previous studies and relevant theories or concepts. From the results of the previous discussion, we conclude in a conceptual statement related to this research issue, along with suggestions for further relevant research.

3. Results and discussion
3.1. Republika, climate change and haze disaster
As explained earlier, climate change has become a widespread issue in several media [1]. Haze disaster as part of the impact of climate change is also an issue that adorns the media in Indonesia [13], including the Republika Daily, as one of the well-known newspapers that still survive. The issue of climate change and haze disaster was reported by Republika for weeks since the first time the haze disaster struck forest areas in Indonesia, especially Sumatra and Kalimantan. Various types of reports, ranging from hard news, soft news and feature news in the form of investigative reporting were released by Republika to arouse the awareness of various parties to be concerned about the impact of climate change, especially the haze disaster. The climax is a striking visual show on the front page of the October 8, 2015 edition of Republika which features smoggy photojournalism. Why did Republika care about the impact of climate change in the form of this haze disaster?

From our reporter's investigation, the facts on the ground show that the haze disaster is so extensive, not only damaging the natural ecosystem, wild animals losing their homes, but also causing health problems for the surrounding community, as well as economic losses due to the disruption of the community's normal activities (Irfan, 18/08/2019, Jakarta).

From this statement, it is known that Republika does not only have journalistic instincts by prioritizing news values but also that Republika has a high concern on social and environmental issues, especially the haze disaster from burning forests which causes loss and casualties for local people and wild animals. Research of Eskjaer [4] and Tolan [14] states that media awareness on the issue of climate change usually arises if the issue is related to the interests of local and regional communities because it probably has a high proximity value. Not surprisingly, with this principle of proximity, Republika enthusiastically reported on the haze disaster that occurred in several regions of Indonesia. In addition to awareness of environmental issues and climate change, humanitarian issues related to victims of haze disasters are also becoming a media concern in Indonesia [13], including Republika. This is not only because human interest has high news value, but also it opens wide public awareness to be involved in helping to deal with victims' problems.
3.2. Republika and smoggy photojournalism

Meanwhile, the visual chosen on the front page of Republika is a picture that has a value of human interest, namely school children riding a bicycle in the haze, with the message 'when covered in smoke, all news becomes difficult to read'.

The message was explicitly indeed [because of the smoke] other news became difficult to read, but implicitly we would like to say that it is useless to raise other issues if the smoke problem is not resolved immediately (Irfan, 18/08/2019, Jakarta).

The disaster not only affected the immediate victims but paralyzed almost all aspects of the community's life around the disaster area, ranging from health problems to the economic wheels that were stuck. As a media that has the function of providing information related to the public interest, Republika feels that it is not enough to 'only provide information' but 'how can that information also have a solution impact'. This is in line with Wihbey and Ward's observation [6] that the news media are now increasingly aware of audience dynamics including how citizens respond to pessimistic reports, or "doom and gloom," versus solution-oriented reports.

Unfortunately, information through the news that had been delivered intensively for weeks by Republika had not produced significant results, so the idea emerged to change the reporting strategy by 'appearing different', which then gave birth to the concept of 'smog' smearing the face of the October 8, 2015 edition of Republika. This creative communication technique is commonly used as an ambient media strategy [15] in Komunikasi Berasa perspective [16].

3.3. Republika and media brand responsibility

Republika's concern over the issue of the haze disaster and the tragedy of forest fires is not only stimulated by the experience of live coverage on the ground so as to create empathy for journalists, but organically it is a form of social responsibility of Republika as a media brand that positions itself as a media which is carrying the Islamic values and humanity.

We always emphasize that news created not only has news values but also [contains and] provides benefits (Irfan, 18/08/2019, Jakarta).

This thought, according to Irfan, was inspired by the example set by Prophet Muhammad SAW in carrying out his prophetic duties.

The prophet's task is almost the same as that of a journalist, delivering revelations [or news from God]. But the prophet not only delivered but also practiced, set an example and helped the people (Irfan, 18/08/2019, Jakarta).

Journalists too should be like that. Not only delivering the news but having the responsibility to play a role in solving social problems [17]. This is because the media has a responsibility not only in producing ethical and logical news for the readers to consume [18] but also in increasing social awareness and concern [19, 20] due to the media has a central role in shaping public opinion and perception [21] and its capacity to influence the society [20], which in turn has an impact on corporate social responsibility of the media related to credibility, usefulness, and fairness [10].

The responsibility of the media for social issues, thus, is not just about reporting the problem, then it is finished. However, how to make what is reported, in this case, the issue highlighted, can have a broad impact, not only on the awareness of the issue and a sense of concern or sympathy for the victim, but also on the actual actions that should be taken both by the community and by the government. In this context, solution-oriented news becomes important, as noted by [6] that the news media are now increasingly aware of solution-oriented reports. Republika has not only raised the issue to the surface to make the public aware but also at the same time arouse the sense of the humanity of
various parties to intervene to help victims and overcome the problem of haze disaster caused by forest fires in Sumatra and Kalimantan.

4. Concluding remarks

Republika has taught us several things. First, the problem of climate change impacts such as the haze disaster caused by forest fires is a shared problem between the community (including the industrial community), the media, and the government, so various parties should work together to overcome it. Second, the media has an important role in raising awareness of the impacts of climate change, especially forest fires that cause haze disasters, not only in call for awareness through the news, but also in call for action, so that the news presented has an impact on efforts to solve problems, not raises new problems by provoking citizens to act irrational and anarchist. Third, in terms of presenting news, creativity and sensitivity to the issue are important to make news have an impact and have high stopping power, as exemplified by the smoggy photojournalism shown by Republika. This is very significant in the current era of hyper-mediated where information traffic is so crowded and congested every day that passes before our eyes so that innovation in presenting news that can intercept, arouse and invite the public to participate in the issue is very urgent. Republika has demonstrated its ability in terms of creativity, social responsibility, and publicity that impact real solutions in dealing with climate change and environmental issues.

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