

REVERSED AGENDA-SETTING AT XYZ.COM

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ABSTRACT

Agenda-setting theory has been challenged in the internet era. The assumption that the media agenda influences the public agenda does not always work. In the internet era, agenda setting is more done by the public to the mass media. This paper aims to explain the process of reversed agenda setting in online news media when social media and search engines are very dominantly used by audiences. The research subject is XYZ.com. The research uses a qualitative approach, case study method, and data mining techniques in the form of in-depth interviews with the chief editor of XYZ.com, making observations on several XYZ.com news stories, and conducting literature documentation related to research problems. The results of the research show that the media agenda formed by the public agenda through social media and search engines is quite dominant on XYZ.com. The media agenda that is formed based on search engine recommendations and social media always provides high traffic. In reversed agenda-setting, the first-level agenda-setting effect occurs in the form of issue selection, the second-level agenda-setting occurs in the form of issue attributes and intermediary agenda-setting influences each other reciprocally between social media and XYZ.com.

Keywords: *Reversed agenda-setting, XYZ.com, social media*

1. PREFACE

The internet has changed the way the media defines issues that are appropriate for audiences. In agenda-setting theory, there is an assumption that the mass media selects issues that are considered important to the public. The mass media does not only present issues that are appropriate for the public, but also issues that are appropriate for the public to think about (Valenzuela, 2019). This assumption places the media as gatekeepers when audiences do not have a choice of sources of information except the mass media (Nowak, 2016). However, the presence of the internet shifted the dominance of the role of gatekeeper from the mainstream media to the audience (Syahputra, 2018). In the internet era, anyone can become an information producer. Audiences are no longer passive but become active and interactive in the communication process (Naser, 2020).

Currently, audiences are no longer dependent on the mass media in determining important issues. The availability of various media and information channels on the internet allows audiences to freely determine issues that are important to them (Triputra, 2018). In addition, the agenda-setting theory deserves to be reviewed, bearing in mind that the assumption that the mass media chooses issues to present to the public no longer occurs frequently. The high use of social media causes the mass media to take up issues that are currently viral on social media (Rosemarwati & Lindawati, 2019). The media observes issues that are trending on the internet or social media and takes them as a media agenda. Nowadays it is not uncommon for the media to pick up viral content on the internet. The internet is an important source of news for media editors (Ninkovic-Slavnic, 2016).

Another assumption in agenda-setting theory is that the issues chosen by the media (media agenda) will influence what the public thinks (public agenda), which in turn influences the policy agenda formed by regulators (McCombs et al., 2014). However, these assumptions have changed. Public agendas can be formed via the internet without the interference of media agendas, and policy agendas can be directly affected by public agendas on social media (Skogerbo et al., 2015).

Kim and Lee (Triputra, 2018) put forward the terminology of reversed agenda-setting to formulate the phenomenon of reversing the direction of forming the agenda. Weimann & Brosius (2017) refer to this phenomenon as agenda-setting redirecting where the direction of agenda-setting influence in the new media era has changed.

Previous research on agenda-setting has been carried out, but only a few have examined the phenomenon of reversed agenda-setting. Several studies still assume the role of the media agenda in shaping the public agenda. Research conducted by Permana & Iffah (2021) describes the role of Narasi TV in shaping the public agenda that cares about preventing the spread of the Covid-19 outbreak through story programs. Likewise, the study from Pamungkas & Pramesti (2021) examines the role of the local media Harian Jogja and Tribun Jogja in carrying out their functions as sources of information that educate the public during the Covid-19 pandemic through their editorial policies. Kurniawan & Isnaeni's study (2021) examines the role of the RCTI editorial team in socializing new-normal policies through *Seputar Inews Pagi* dan *Seputar Inews Siang* programs. Syahputra's study (2018) examines the media relations strategy of tin mining companies in influencing the media-setting agenda in Bangka Belitung. This research places more emphasis on the public relations strategy in influencing the media agenda.

One of the studies that have examined the reversed agenda-setting phenomenon was research from Prabowo and Irwansyah (2018) which uses a quantitative approach and content analysis methods to find out the effect of trending topics on Twitter on Metro TV's editorial policies. This research proves that Metro TV editors follow political issues on social media to be taken as news material. This research is different from previous research because it aims to explain the process of reversed agenda setting at the XYZ.com editorial team using a qualitative approach and case study method.

Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-setting can be interpreted as a process in which the mass media places some issues and events that are considered important for society (McCombs et al., 2014). This theory assumes that the media has the power to influence public perception because the public is a passive audience (Valenzuela, 2019). In this theory, the media is considered to have the ability to convey what audiences should think, and not what audiences should think (Valenzuela, 2019).

Agenda-setting theory states that the mass media can transfer its agenda (the media agenda) to become the public agenda. This stage is called the first-level agenda setting, the media agenda which focuses on certain objects (problems, events, public figures) to influence what is considered important by the public (Valenzuela, 2019).

The second level of agenda-setting is when the issues published by the media not only affect what is considered important by the public but more than the attributes and elements of the issue or object that shape the public agenda (McCombs et al., 2014). This second level focuses on the salient attributes or elements of an issue or object.

The next level is intermedia agenda-setting, namely how important issues by one media influence the agenda of other media. Vonbun (2016) says that intermedia agenda-setting is a dynamic and routine process of news diffusion, in which the coverage of one media outlet is influenced by the agenda of other outlets. In the era of the internet, intermedia agenda-setting is certainly much more complex, considering the various sources of information from various types of new media (Nowak, 2016).

Weimann & Brosius (2017) believe that the understanding of agenda-setting theory has undergone a shift since the arrival of the internet. The internet makes it easy for audiences to create their media (blog or social media). The audience is no longer passive but becomes active and interactive. They can search, produce, manipulate, commodify, and distribute the information they choose (Syahputra, 2018).

It must be admitted that agenda-setting theory existed in the era before the internet was born and research using this theory is more on traditional media objects. Weimann & Brosius (2017) indicated that what is happening now is no longer what issues the media conveys to the public to think about, but what issues the audience conveys to the media they want to think about. Prabowo & Irwansyah (2018) argues that changes in the flow of information due to the emergence of new media have reduced the power of influence of the mass media on the public agenda.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. A qualitative approach according to Bogdan and Taylor (Yoedtadi et al., 2021) is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behavior. According to this definition, this study aims to get an overview of the reversed agenda-setting process at XYZ.com in the form of written data, and sentences on observable editorial behavior.

While the case study method, as said by Neuman (2013) is to examine the various characteristics of a few cases. These cases can be individuals, groups, organizations, movements, events, or geographic units. According to this definition, this study examines organizations or institutions, namely XYZ.com, in conducting reversed agenda-setting.

The research subject was the Editor in Chief of XYZ.com Suwarjono. The object of research is the process of reversing the agenda setting at XYZ.com. XYZ.com was chosen as the object of research because it is still relatively young, founded in 2014 but has been successful in the top five Indonesian news portals based on Similarweb.com. In addition, XYZ.com was successful in business because, at the age of four (2018), it managed to gain new capital by selling its shares on the Indonesia Stock Exchange.

Data collection techniques were carried out through interviews, observation, and documentation. Researchers conducted interviews with informants to get an explanation of reversed agenda setting at XYZ.com. Observations were made by observing the work process of the XYZ.com editorial team. While the documentation is done by analyzing some news from XYZ.com and literature that supports this research.

The validity of the data in this study was carried out by triangulation. The triangulation used in this study is data triangulation, which is a description of data that is combined from various

sources and at different times, in different places, and comes from different people (Zamili, 2015). Interview data were compared with observational data and documentation data.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The agenda-setting at XYZ.com is largely determined by the size of the crowd's conversation on the internet. This is unavoidable considering that XYZ.com requires a certain amount of traffic to meet its business goals. The larger the number of audiences, the more advertisements on XYZ.com. Therefore, every day the XYZ.com editor observes what is trending on the internet, on search engines (Google), or social media.

Google is becoming an important search engine for online media. Unlike the pattern of traditional media publications, online media is highly dependent on Google. The large use of the Google search engine by the public makes Google the most important information search site. News is a form of information that is often sought by the public through Google referrals. The majority of XYZ.com's audience comes from Google referrals. Therefore Google recommendations are very important. "What happens is, we study the distribution of the latest content, what mediums are most accessed by the public. Where are the crowds, that's where we entered. So we come to these new crowds, then we sell there, sell content there. Google is the most powerful source for people looking for referrals when looking for content, that's the term, so in the end, we had to study how Google works, how Google's engines work." Suwarjono, Chief Editor of XYZ.com.

According to Suwarjono, Google has a very large contribution to the number of reader visits. It's not wrong if all online media in Indonesia rely on Google as their reader's referral platform. As a result, editors must understand the keywords that are trending on the search engine. This process is known as search engine optimization (SEO). The guide in choosing what news to produce is no longer based on journalists' ability to choose issues, but on journalists' skills in using trending keywords. Trending keyword data can be monitored every hour and every day. These keywords will help news content be easily found or recommended by Google.

Another crowd that should be monitored is social media. Facebook and Twitter are social media that are always monitored by the editors of XYZ.com. What issues are being discussed by netizens, information, or events that are viral on social media are worthy measures to be made the news. To find out the behavior of Facebook and Twitter users, the XYZ.com editor specifically studies the data in the algorithms of the two social media. The analysis is carried out mainly on data related to content consumption. The following is Suwarjono's explanation: "Social media is very powerful, like it or not if our target is looking for traffic, we will look for social media that gives us links. It turns out that not all social media provide links to the media, only Facebook and Twitter provide links. So we studied Facebook's algorithm, then we also studied Twitter's algorithm, what's trending, what's liked, what's disliked, they have a complete database, which we can open, so we opened the dashboard, social media analytics dashboard to study content trends. which many people see, many people seek."

Based on observations and explanations from informants, the XYZ.com social media team observed the most popular news rankings on Facebook and Twitter every six hours. The most popular news ranking information becomes the input for the editor to determine the next news agenda. The social media team also observes conversations or debates that are currently hot on social media to be used as material for developing a news agenda. Several public figures, according to Suwarjono, have official social media (Twitter) and often express opinions that

provoke public debate. Tweets from figures and public tweets on an issue become input for XYZ.com to determine the media agenda. The form of curation of the Twitter account by XYZ.com is to see a blue tick as proof of the authenticity of the account owner. Apart from that, the large number of followers is also a consideration for XYZ.com to choose which accounts are worth quoting.

One of the considerations for XYZ.com to pay attention to social media is to capture public voices in the form of comments and responses to an issue. An example is when XYZ.com made news by taking tweets from netizens in response to a speech by the Chairperson of the PDIP, Megawati Sukarnoputri, about the face of a meatball seller, who according to her was inappropriate to be her future son-in-law. XYZ.com does not randomly select Twitter accounts. Curation is still being done by selecting Twitter accounts that have a large number of followers.

Figure 1

Netizens' Comments on Megawati's speech



Figure 1 is the news from XYZ.com containing comments from netizens on Twitter in response to Megawati's speech which was considered to be demeaning to the profession of a meatball maker. The comments quoted in the news were mostly against Megawati.

Suwarjono acknowledged that the agenda-setting exercised by the mass media has now changed. Journalists are no longer free to determine what issues are newsworthy for the public. As a result of the widespread use of search engines and social media, media agenda-setting is controlled by Google and social media (Facebook and Twitter). Therefore, it is imperative that a journalist not only has technical journalistic skills (covering, interviewing, writing), but also knowledge of Google and social media user behavior data. Readable data in the form of trending keywords. The following is Suwarjono's explanation: "Agenda-setting is now controlled by the Platform, by the machine. The machine provides us with data based on visits or visitor characteristics or visitor habits. So now agenda-setting is a machine. Some say, for example, Google trends. Keywords that are being searched for by many people."

In addition to keywords, search engines, and social media also provide data in the form of information or news themes that are currently trending in society. These themes can be developed by XYZ.com editors to enrich their news content. For example, the issue of soaring cooking oil prices has a theme that is being sought by the public, namely the anxiety of the Minister of Trade. XYZ.com took this theme to be developed as news.

Figure 2

News About Soaring Cooking Oil Based on Trends on Google



In figure 2 the news is about the Minister of Trade Muhammad Lutfi who was angry when he inspected the sale of cooking oil. The Minister of Trade's anxiety due to rising cooking oil prices is a theme recommended by search engines and developed by XYZ.com.

Suwarjono said nearly 70 percent of the XYZ.com media agenda was formed based on recommendations from Google, Facebook, and Twitter. Nevertheless, XYZ.com continues to shape the agenda resulting from the editorial's thinking, because platform recommendations cannot represent the editorial's attitude toward an issue. It's a shame that news based on editorial agendas rarely generates large traffic. Investigation coverage, for example, can be ascertained by a small number of readers. Making investigative coverage requires relatively expensive costs and large resources. Even so, according to Suwarjono, news resulting from the editorial agenda-setting is still done as a form of idealism and public service.

Online media has a distinctive and different character when compared to traditional media. Online media such as XYZ.com use the internet as a distribution channel for their content. Therefore they are very dependent on search engines like Google. The high use of Google by the public has caused it to become the number one search engine platform in the world (Catherine, 2021). The dominance of online news content distribution through Google has undeniably dominated readers' access directly to news portals. Several studies show that more than 70 percent of internet users access news portals directly through the Google search engine (Sudibyo, 2019). It was also acknowledged by Suwarjono that Google made a big contribution to bringing visitors to XYZ.com.

Distribution of news content through search engines will produce an index of the number of visitors (traffic) (Lewandowski et al., 2021). The high traffic will increase the number of advertisements in online media. The digital advertising system in online media does not use human intermediaries but is controlled by Google's algorithm. They become intermediaries or advertising agents that bridge advertisers and online media through the Google AdSense service.

This model of advertising is referred to as programmatic advertising (Sudibyo, 2019). The higher the amount of traffic, the more advertising.

Such a large dependence on Google ultimately encourages online media to form a media agenda based on Google's recommendations. The first level of setting agenda occurs when Google is used as a guide in determining the XYZ.com media agenda. As Suwarjono said, the majority of his media agenda was formed based on Google's recommendations. This is consistent with the statement from Nowak (2016) that search engines will become actors forming the media agenda because what the public seeks through search engines indirectly represents public opinion. Nowak's opinion is in line with Naser's view (2020) which says that the level of search on search engines can be equated with a hierarchical form of public agenda. The more often people search for an issue, the more important the issue is in the eyes of the public and is placed at the highest priority.

Sudibyo (2019) said that what people often search for in search engines will be very valuable user behavior data. The data is embodied in keywords that are trending on search engines and social media. Online media expect to get a large amount of traffic if they use the right keywords. The Utilization of keywords is an SEO (search engine optimization) technique. SEO techniques are ways to optimize web pages to increase ranking in organic search results on search engines (Lewandowski et al., 2021). XYZ.com editors pay attention to the keywords of each trending issue on search engines and social media. Using keywords as an important element of the news produced. For example, in the title and sentence in the body of the news. Researchers argue that the process of using keywords is the formation of a second-level agenda. That is, agenda-setting is not only on issues but focuses on highlighting the attributes of objects. As stated by Yunjuan et al (2019) that the second level of agenda formation focuses on attributes rather than issues and the assumption that the attributes associated with objects in the media are mentally related to objects by the public.

Apart from search engines, social media is the dominant digital platform monitored by XYZ.com. XYZ.com's use of social media as a source of news is a finding that is in line with research Rosemarwati & Lindawati (2019) which concluded that social media is the most potential news source, especially in the news production process. The research shows that Indonesian journalists use social media 92.2 percent, much higher than the United States (81%) and Ireland (55%).

On the other hand, according to Nair & Sharma (2017) social media is important because social media gives freedom to opinion leaders such as public figures, politicians, and policymakers to express their opinions in gaining public support or creating public debate. This view is supported by Skogerbo et al (2015) who say that for public figures and politicians, the use of social media can aim to divert journalists' attention (dodging). This means that to gain public attention, they are no longer dependent on the mainstream mass media. Social media is an effective medium for involving the public in discussing an issue (Nair & Sharma, 2017). Public involvement in an issue on social media can be seen from the act of sharing, and giving likes and comments (Yoedtadi & Rahman, 2022).

According to Suwarjono, as part of monitoring public opinion, XYZ.com often takes people's tweets on Twitter as news material. This is following the statement Lee (2015) that Twitter and other social networking sites have created a participatory news ecosystem that connects journalists, audiences, and news sources. Nair & Sharma (2017) said that with social media, the

political and public spheres are more easily connected. Feedback from the public is received directly by the politicians who represent them. Social media platforms arguably enable the public to set their representative agenda by pressing the like, sharing, and commenting buttons. This phenomenon can be described as redirecting agenda-setting.

Vonbun et al (2016) state that in forming an agenda, the media does not work alone, but is influenced by the agenda-setting of other media. Intermedia agenda-setting occurs between social media and online media. As stated by Naser (2020) that the internet makes audiences active and interactive in the communication process because audiences become consumers as well as content producers. Between social media audiences and mass media, there is an interaction of exchanging content. This can happen due to the use of social media by the mass media as another outlet for broadcasting news content. Thus, according to Wang et al (2021) mass media news content is often used as content by social media audiences. According to Buturoiu & Voloc (2021), the interaction of online news media with social media in the exchange of content is a symbiotic relationship. That is a mutually beneficial relationship. There is a relationship between mutual sharing and support in content distribution. Online media takes the public agenda from social media, on the other hand, social media makes news productions from online media viral which cover topics that are currently being discussed on the internet.

Intermedia agenda-setting where social media participates in spreading the news that benefits online media. According to Hermida (Yoedtadi et al, 2021) news from online media spread by social media has a greater strength of public trust than that promoted by online media. Hermida said that social media recommendations by users on social networks would strengthen the credibility of the news. This is because recommendations on social media are made by people who are already known to the public, such as friends, relatives, or family on social media networks.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Agenda-setting theory has been challenged in the internet era. Now it is no longer easy for the media agenda to influence the public agenda due to the many new media information channels. The audience in the internet era is no longer passive, but active. Not only as a consumer but also as a media producer. The internet makes it easy for audiences to create their content with social media, distribute it themselves, and shape the public agenda. The increasing number of social media users causes changes in the agenda-setting process. The public agenda on the internet influences the media agenda (reversed agenda-setting).

Apart from social media, the Google search engine is another major factor influencing the formation of the media agenda, especially online media. The reason is the huge dependence of online journalistic media on Google in terms of bringing in traffic and advertisements.

Search engine optimization (SEO) techniques cause online journalistic media to follow keywords that are familiar to search engines (Google Trends). Using keywords and citing Twitter users' tweets can be classified as forming a second level of agenda.

In the reversed agenda-setting process, intermediate agenda-setting occurs. Namely, the mutual influence between media agendas. Likewise, the mutual influence of agenda setting between social media and online media.

This research uses a qualitative approach, the case study method. This research should be continued with a quantitative approach, the method of analyzing news content, so that quantitative data can be obtained about the effect of reversed agenda-setting on the media agenda.

Online media need to think further about their huge revenue dependence on programmatic advertising. This condition causes online media to be shackled by the agenda-setting of search engines and social media. As a result, the quality of journalistic products will be further sacrificed.

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