



It is Hard for Journalists to Pray on Time: Commodification of Media Workers in the Digital Age

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A B S T R A C T

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This study aims to explain the commodification practices of media workers in the digital era, more precisely on iNews TV Semarang, Indonesia. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data collection techniques were carried out in the form of observations and interviews with people who work as journalists at iNews TV Semarang. This study shows that journalists experience commodification in the form of absolute exploitation and relative exploitation. Absolute exploitation is seen in the irregular working hours of journalists, resulting in chaos during their worship hours. At the same time, relative exploitation is in the form of intensification of the labor process for journalists, which is carried out by giving multiple assignments. Journalists also get another task: looking for clients for the company's benefit. The commodification that has occurred has also involved processes of alienation, mystification, naturalization, and reification.

Introduction

The rapid development of the internet has caused conventional media to take adaptation steps by building websites and developing digital formats. This is done so that the mass media can still be read, heard, seen, and noticed by people currently in the digital era. As the spearhead of media companies, journalists are required to find, collect and send it to various media platforms quickly so they can compete with other media. The demands experienced by journalists are a manifestation of the new capitalist culture, which advises everyone to achieve success and wealth by thinking in the short term, building personal potential, and not regretting anything (Sennett, 2006: 7). Karl Marx said that the economic nature of capitalism is the pursuit of maximum profit. The owner of capital always places profit in the process of exchanging it. This profit is even obtained by extracting what is referred to as added value, namely the value given by the worker forcibly beyond what he needs (Sindhunata, 1982: 45).

The presence of the digital era has made media competition even tighter, marked by the increasing demands on media workers to carry out their daily duties. This ever-greater demand leads to the interests of capital owners to pursue as much profit as possible. Under these conditions, journalists are placed as a means of production to maximize capital owners' profits. This practice of commodification of workers occurs in various types of media, both on a local scale (Sindy et al., 2018) and nationally (Wahyudi M Pratopo, 2017; Dian Sukmawati, 2020).

These facts interested researchers in researching the local TV station iNews TV Semarang. This local television was formerly known as Pro TV Semarang. In 2015, Pro TV Semarang changed to iNews TV Semarang (Muntafi'ah, 2021). Currently, iNews TV Semarang has 20 workers consisting of 14 permanent/contract employees and six outsourced workers. This television also implements the network station system regulation (SSJ), which relays iNews TV broadcasts in Jakarta. Research conducted by Indira Ayudhia Maharani (2020) states that the newsroom on iNews TV Semarang is also integrated with RCTI Network Central Java and MNC TV Semarang (MNC et al.). The iNews TV Semarang newsroom journalists also produce local shows for MNC TV Semarang and RCTI Network Central Java. These data make researchers want to do more in-depth research using political economy theory.

Research using political economy theory, especially in the commodification of

media workers or journalists, has been carried out a lot. Wahyudi M Pratopo (2017) examines commodification practices in the Tempo media titled *Commodification of Journalists in the Convergence Era: A Case Study of Tempo*. Pratopo found that commodification at Tempo occurred in the form of absolute exploitation in the form of additional working hours by instilling a false awareness that journalists are used to working without a precise time limit. Apart from that, there is also relative exploitation in the form of intensification of labor processes for journalists by giving them multiple assignments.

Sindy Amalia Putri (2018) examines commodification practices at local TV stations with the title *Commodification of Workers at the TVRI Bengkulu Public Broadcasting Institution*. This research shows that the existing worker system at TVRI Bengkulu shows the use of workers, especially freelancers. This starts with the workload of employees that needs to be balanced with the results they get, such as wages that do not match, no overtime pay, and no specified holidays, where workers also do not get salary increases or awards when they produce achievements at work. , to protests that were never responded to.

Another research was conducted by Dian Sukmawati (2020) regarding the *Commodification of NET Workers to Win Media Business Competition*. The results explained that journalists who serve as producers are responsible for the continuity of the program being managed, overseeing from pre to post-production, making program budgets, and designing strategies so that the programs they hold can continue to exist. However, since October 2019, the duties of the program producers have shifted to become the sales team.

This research complements research related to the commodification of workers in existing media by reaching out to objects that have never been discussed. Researchers have yet to find research on the commodification of workers on local television iNews TV Semarang. The researcher only found research on iNews TV Semarang conducted by Indira Ayudhia but regarding *Commodification of News in iNews TV Semarang's Integrated Newsroom*. For this reason, researchers want to know how workers are commodified, in this case, journalists in the digital era on local television iNews TV Semarang. If commodification practices are found, this research will confirm that these practices occur in various media, including local media.

Method

This research is a descriptive type of research using an intrinsic type case study method. According to Robert E. Stake, the focus of research on intrinsic types leads to the case itself because it provides an unusual or unique situation (Cresswell, 2007: 74). Yin (1994: 1) suggests that case studies are empirical research that investigates contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear. Case studies can utilize various sources in data collection, such as documents, archives, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. This study uses data collection techniques through observation and interviews.

In this study, informants or research subjects were people who worked as journalists at iNews TV Semarang. Three journalists will become informants, namely Taufik Budi Nurcahyanto, who serves as a field reporter for both television and online; Septy Wulandari, who serves as a news producer and coordinator of coverage; and Riska Nova, who serves as a news presenter at iNews TV Semarang, MNC TV Semarang, and RCTI Network Central Java. The three subjects were chosen because they had worked for a long time, so they knew about companies before and when they entered the digital era. In addition, they also represent journalists stationed in the field, editorial offices, and broadcast rooms. Meanwhile, data collection techniques in this study used in-depth interviews and field observations.

In this study, researchers conducted descriptive data analysis. Robert E. Stake (in Cresswell, 2007: 163) describes four forms of data analysis and their interpretation, namely category collection, direct interpretation, pattern setting, and naturalistic generalism. It is collecting categories, namely looking for examples of data to find meaning relevant to the issues that will arise. Direct interpretation is looking at one example of data and taking meaning from it without looking for other examples. Pattern determination seeks correspondence by creating a table showing the relationship between categories—naturalistic generalistic, namely developing generalizations that can be used as students from the cases studied.

This research has limitations in selecting informants; only three journalists worked for quite a long time. So that choice causes alienation, mystification, naturalization, and reification quite strongly for them. For this reason, future research can compare the processes of alienation, mystification, naturalization, and reification for journalists who have been around for a long time with journalists

who have just joined in order to find out how far the processes of alienation, mystification, naturalization, and reification occur in the two groups of generations.

Findings and Discussion

Researchers have dug up information from three journalists at iNews TV Semarang and found a form of commodification. Mosco (2009: 129) conveys that commodification transforms use values into exchange values. Commodification occurs through a production process in which capitalists buy labor power and the means of production to produce surplus value that can be used to develop even more significant capital accumulation. During the process of capital development, there is a process of exploitation. Commodification in television newsrooms occurs starting from the status of employment relations, setting working hours, giving multiple assignments, requests to find clients, giving targets and pressure, to giving wages. For this reason, researchers will describe the results of research findings which show the commodification of media workers at iNews TV Semarang, as follows:

Unclear Employment Status

iNews TV Semarang TV Station has 14 permanent and contract employees and six outsourced workers. iNews TV Semarang also uses freelance workers for journalists who appear in front of the screen as presenters/news anchors and reporters. Freelance status or as a freelance worker is also used for journalist positions in the field or contributors. Of the three informants, only Septy Wulandari has been a permanent employee since 2012. Meanwhile, Taufik Budi and Riska Nova are freelancers contracted annually through the Specific Time Work Agreement (Perjanjian Kerja Waktu Tertentu/PKWT) system. Taufik Budi has been contracted as a contributor since 2008, when iNews TV acquired Pro TV Semarang. While Riska, even though she joined in 2010, will only get work contract documents as a presenter in 2022.

“I entered iNews in 2010 before the name was still Pro TV Semarang. I was only a freelance without a work contract from the first time I entered. Only this year, 2022, after a new Head of Bureau, there is a work contract, but it is valid for a year and will continue to be extended like that.” (In-depth interview with Riska Nova, 33 years)

Even though, according to Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower and Law Number 11 of 2020 concerning Job Creation, PKWT is a work agreement between workers/laborers and companies to enter into an employment relationship within a specific time for a particular job. PKWT is based on the period or the completion of a particular job and cannot be held for permanent jobs. So journalists are not a job that can be contracted because they are not seasonal workers but core workers in the media industry. With the status of a contract work relationship, the company does not provide benefits, health insurance, or old age insurance.

Timeless Working Hours

Absolute exploitation (additional working hours) of journalists is carried out by instilling a false awareness that journalists are used to working without a precise time limit. In practice, iNews TV Semarang journalists cannot know their exact working hours, but they admit that they have to be on standby all the time if needed by the company. On duty in the field, Taufik Budi must be ready from morning to night if there is exciting coverage. Septy Wulandari must also be on standby from morning to night to coordinate with journalists in the area. Meanwhile, Riska Nova must also be ready to go home later in the evening if the broadcast tapping schedule is delayed because the news production process still needs to be completed.

“Reporters do not have working hours. They stay on standby if there is news. News programs have morning, afternoon, evening, and night deadlines. If there is news at midnight or early morning, you have to be ready because that is the job of journalists. Especially now that I am asked to manage an online portal, it is almost 24 hours of work.” (In-depth interview with Taufik Budi, 38 years)

This condition contradicts the provisions regarding working time stipulated in Article 77 and Article 78 of Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower, which regulates working hours of 8 hours a day or 40 hours a week. The work of journalists or media workers is not included in the excluded sector as regulated in Article 77, paragraph (3) and paragraph (4).

Double Assignment

Relative exploitation (intensification of labor processes) of journalists is carried out by placing a double burden. Journalists are required to carry out various tasks at once (multitasking). Taufik Budi, who is a field journalist, must interview, take photos, and record videos, then write reports and send photos and video recordings to be broadcast on iNews TV Semarang or the national television networks of the MNC Group (RCTI, MNCTV, Global TV, and iNewsTV) and online media portals, such as Okezone and iNews.id. In fact, since March 16, 2020, he has also been asked to manage joglosemar.inews.id, an online media portal that aims to strengthen iNews.id branding in the region.

Relative exploitation was also experienced by Septy Wulandari and Riska Nova, who received multiple assignments. Septy, a producer of iNews TV Semarang since 2013, works on news content for iNews TV Semarang and local news content for MNC TV Semarang and RCTI Network Central Java. Septy also carries out his duties as coverage coordinator for journalists in the regions. Not only that, but she also still serves as a reporter and field presenter and talk shows in the studio. Septy also carried out other duties as presenter coordinator and person in charge of internship at iNews TV Semarang and was asked to manage Instagram and YouTube social media with several other producers. Meanwhile, Riska was not only broadcast on iNews TV Semarang for the Central Java iNews program but was also asked to broadcast on MNC TV Semarang for the Lintas Jawa Tengah program and RCTI Network Central Java for the Seputar Jawa Tengah program. Besides that, Riska also got the assignment to be a field reporter for paid content.

“I am a producer, but I do many things, especially after the integrated newsroom. I also produce local news for MNC TV and RCTI. I also coordinate contributors/presenters and interns. When I had Instagram and YouTube, I, together with several other producers, have until now managed the digital format of iNews TV Semarang.” (In-depth interview with Septy, 37 years)

Whereas ideally, journalists work by the company decree (Surat Keputusan/SK) they get. If they become a producer, the producer's duties, namely being fully responsible for producing news programs aired on television channels, should be done. Meanwhile, if they become a presenter, broadcasting news should be done.

Finally, if they become a television journalist, television journalistic tasks such as taking videos and writing scripts should be done.

Request to Seeking Clients

The commodification of journalists also occurs through their involvement in company promotion and marketing. Journalists are encouraged to promote the products of iNews TV Semarang and its network in order to attract clients in advertising. Journalists who can get clients will be given a compensation fund as a form of appreciation. Taufik Budi currently manages the online media portal joglosemar.inews.id admitted that he was given full authority, including in financial matters. Taufik has a team of 3 people to fill out content for the online media together. Existing content is monetized in order to get money from Google through incoming advertisements. In addition, they are also looking for clients who want to advertise in various forms of journalistic products. The financial results from joglosemar.inews.id will be shared with the company. The share is 40 percent for the company, while 60 percent is for Taufik and his team.

Septy Wulandari and Riska Nova also admitted that they had gotten clients to advertise on iNews TV Semarang and its network. The form of advertising obtained is through special coverage or particular dialogue.

“We are encouraged by companies to be able to help marketing to find advertisements. However, it comes back to us because we get benefits from the advertisements we get, aka we get bonuses if we succeed in getting advertisements. We are also advised to approach agencies and institutions, for example, the Provincial Government, the Police, and others. Because I also manage the online portal, I am also asked to find clients, and later the results will be shared with the company, so the comparison is 60 for the team and 40 for the company.” (In-depth interview with Taufik, 38 years)

Finding clients is a task that journalists should refrain from doing. In the Journalistic Code of Ethics (Kode Etik Jurnalistik/KEJ), journalists' role is related to their duties. Journalists need a moral foundation and professional ethics as operational guidelines in maintaining public trust and upholding integrity and professionalism. For example, Article 1 of the KEJ states that Indonesian journalists are independent and produce news that is accurate, balanced, and not in bad

faith. Then in, article 6, it is stated that Indonesian journalists do not abuse their profession and do not accept bribes. This is clear, and if companies ask journalists to approach agencies or institutions for the sake of advertising, then the resulting news may be inaccurate and misused for other purposes.

Giving Targets and Pressure

Along with the development of digital technology and the digital product market, and the decline in the conventional television media market, iNews TV Semarang is also making various adaptations to develop digital products to compete with online media, which are now increasingly mushrooming. One of the things iNews TV is also pursuing is rating data and TV program shares. Septy, a producer, admits that she received an appeal from the leading network in Jakarta that regions must be able to manage attractive programs to obtain a good rating and program share. Apart from appealing, iNews TV in Jakarta is also helping the target of increasing the local watch's rating by denying the national program "Lapor Polisi," which has received quite a good rating and share nationally. Meanwhile, because of his contributor status, Taufik Budi made his coverage targets so that he would get a decent fee at the end of the month. Meanwhile, Riska, who served as a presenter, was also required to participate in increasing the rating and share so that it could be sold to clients.

"Right now, what the central government often emphasizes in the regions is the matter of ratings and shares because local rating shares greatly affect the average rating share nationally. So we were asked to pay attention to local programs by highlighting existing issues and linking them to social media. Even so that the local share rating is good. The head office is forced to fill in a national program, namely "Lapor Polisi" to boost local rating share so that it can be sold to clients." (In-depth interview with Septy Wulandari, 37 years)

The target and pressure given to journalists by the company boil down to the profit of capital owners to make as much profit as possible. Rating and share of good broadcast programs will be sold to advertisers. Under these conditions, there is an exploitation of media workers or journalists, which places them as a means of production to maximize the profits of the owners of capital.

Inadequate Wages

Even though they work beyond regular working hours, journalists do not get overtime pay or other compensation. Long working hours are also different from high wages. Because of Taufik Budi's status as a contributor, his salary results from coverage in the field broadcast on television and online. Even though his coverage was broadcast on national and local iNews TV Semarang, he only received a one-time national broadcast fee of IDR 300,000. Even so, Taufik admitted that it was an opportunity. With so many MNC groups, the chances of broadcasting are even more significant. Even though ideally, each television pays for the aired coverage because it also gets advertisements in every program it runs.

Meanwhile, Septy admits her salary from iNews TV Semarang is relatively low. That makes the company more flexible and allows its employees to seek additional income from outside activities. Septy, for example, even though she already works as a producer and has many assignments, she still has to teach at Satya Wacana Christian University (SWCU), sell clothes and household items online, and be a host or moderator outside. Although Septy also works for RCTI Network Central Java and MNC TV Semarang, she only gets one salary from iNews TV. Riska also acknowledged the same thing. She admits that her salary at iNews TV Semarang is far less than other jobs such as hosts, moderators, and gymnastic instructors. Riska even has to sell clothes to get extra money.

On average, Riska's salary at iNews TV Semarang is the smallest, below the Semarang Regency/City Minimum Wage (Upah Minimum Kabupaten-Kota/UMK) of IDR 2,835,021. While Septy and Taufik were reluctant to say for sure, they only stated above the UMK of Semarang City. Septy said that even though it was above the UMK, her salary was still relatively small. Meanwhile, Taufik admitted that his salary could not be ascertained because it was calculated per news broadcast but could reach the UMK monthly. Even so, the three informants accepted these conditions, and it was proven that for dozens of years, they have survived to this day. They admit that they get many opportunities from their profession as journalists.

“Since joining to broadcast on the Central Java iNews program, Lintas Jawa Tengah MNC TV and Seputar Jawa Tengah RCTI, in 2014 until now, the salary is still the same, 100 thousand iNews, 125 MNC and 150 RCTI, even though every year there is an increase in the UMK. That amount of honor

is minimal; you get a schedule at least two or three times a week. Continue to wear your clothes, and makeup yourself too. That is why we are told to sell, too, to get incentives. Ultimately, I also took on being an MC, teaching gymnastics, being a hair stylist, selling clothes, being a media consultant, etc. I did anything to find extra besides salary from the office.” (In-depth interview Riska Nova, 33 years)

In a survey on the living wage of journalists conducted by the Alliance of Independent Journalists (Aliansi Jurnalis Independen/AJI) in 16 cities in Indonesia, including Semarang City, in 2011, it was stated that the living wage journalists in Semarang City should receive is Rp. 3,240,081. Meanwhile, Central Java Province’s minimum wage was only Rp. 675,000. If this nominal is a living wage for 2011, then a journalist’s living wage in 2022 will certainly be much higher.

Chaotic Worship Hours

Working as a journalist who must be on standby under any circumstances also impacts worship activities, especially the obligatory worship for Muslims, namely praying five times daily. Septy Wulandari, who received an assignment in the editorial room, admitted that sometimes he had to be late for prayers because there was work to be completed to meet the broadcast deadline. Riska Nova, in charge of the broadcast room, also conveyed the same thing. However, Riska has a trick when she has to broadcast on a program that airs in the morning and requires her to leave before dawn, so she will take ablution water first, then makeup; only then will she perform the dawn prayer before starting the broadcast.

Meanwhile, even though Taufik Budi admits that his work as a journalist in the field affects the time of worship, he quotes the letter An Nisa verse 103, which means, “Surely, prayer is an obligation that is set at a certain time for those who believe.” (The Qur’an, An Nisa: 103). In the letter, he interpreted that prayers can be done according to each time. Taufik says prayer times are pretty long, and he can still adjust. In certain moments, Islam also allows prayers to be performed in *jama’* (combining two prayers) and *qashar* (cutting off prayer cycles). On the other hand, Taufik interprets that journalistic products that contain moral messages and information about Islam are also part of religious activities that a journalist can carry out.

“There is evidence that prayers are performed on time, and the prayer time is very long. So when it is time for prayer, you do not have to rush because you can do it according to the time. Even in Islam, there is convenience in certain matters, and prayers can be plural or recited.” (In-depth interview with Taufik Budi, 38 years)

Although the three informants admitted that they could still carry out religious activities, it was often challenging to perform the obligatory prayers recommended at the beginning of the prayer. They are forced to worship according to the time and often not at the beginning of prayer time, which is highly prioritized in Islam.

Alienation, Mystification, Reification, and Naturalization

According to Marx, some dimensions show that a worker has experienced commodification, namely exploitation, alienation, mystification, reification, and naturalization (Poespowardojo & Seran, 2016: 16). For this reason, the researcher will also describe the dimensions which show that there has been a commodification of journalists at iNews TV Semarang, as follows:

Alienation is a form of alienation of workers after experiencing exploitation. Exploitation that occurs to journalists makes them confined to the work that must be completed. With a high workload and uncertain working hours, journalists are stuck in the capitalist production system and alienated. This confinement to work makes journalists unable to fully pay attention to and care for themselves, their families, and their social environment. This creates more profound alienation (Poespowardojo & Seran, 2016: 16).

“I wake up until I want to sleep to make the news. Starting to make news online in the morning before 6 o'clock, continuing to cover everywhere, you must bring a laptop to work on news from anywhere. Until midnight, between 12 o'clock, I was still uploading online news, and after that, until early in the morning, I used it to edit TV news. So the time for me and my family is reduced, although it is still possible.” (In-Depth Interview with Taufik, 38 years)

Seeing the interview results, journalists are very confined to the work that must be completed from morning to early morning. Even though there is still

time for family, the quantity and quality are clearly reduced because journalists always carry laptops to work on news. The process of alienation that occurs shows a loss by being exploited.

Meanwhile, according to Karl Marx, mystification is a false appearance or meaning. Mystification or enchantment is created when a commodity is disconnected from the workers who produce it and from the use function of the commodity so that in the process of exchange, the commodity is enriched with specific meanings which are more than use values (Rahmiaji, 2016).

“When I was in college, seeing magazines was cool, smart; I felt proud when I met magazines. When the parameter was a newspaper reporter, there used to be Pak Sucipto Hadi Purnomo as a lecturer, and I felt thrilled. Now being an employee is also proud of being able to be close to the lowest level of society to the rulers.” (In-Depth Interview with Taufik Budi, 38 years)

Pride in their profession, because they feel they are intellectual and creative workers, is a form of mystification. The special meaning of journalists who have positive values like that is continuously being glorified. The predicate makes workers forget their position as workers or laborers.

Proceed to reification. Reification can be interpreted as an assessment of success measured from several objects or ambitions to get awards. (Rahmiaji, 2016).

“Even though the honor I receive is small, I can still count because my house is close, taping time is not long, and being able to use the big MNC Media flag, I can become an MC, get an award, or get another job with that flag.” (In-Depth Interview Riska Nova, 33 years)

From the interview results above, reification is carried out through the development of meanings that are identified with the status of journalists; moreover, the MNC Group’s journalists have many networks and are claimed to be the most extensive media network in Southeast Asia.

Moreover, finally, naturalization is an attempt by workers to assume everyday, ordinary, and natural relations between workers and owners of capital. From a capitalist point of view, naturalized social relations are a form of exploitation

of workers, so the result of naturalization is acceptance of this exploitation (Poespowardojo & Seran, 2016: 16).

“Because now is the digital era, many media have to adapt, like iNews. My salary is relatively small, but the company provides flexibility. So we were given the freedom to seek additional opportunities, for example, to become lecturers, etc., the important thing is that the work is done.” (In-depth interview with Septy Wulandari, 37 years)

Naturalization is carried out through the obligation of journalists to adapt to the existing system in the newsroom as well as the development of information and communication technology and the media industry environment. The exploitation is made heroic so that they consider the journalistic profession to have a strong mentality, can do many things, and is flexible.

Conclusion

This research has found the commodification of media workers (journalists) in the digital era on local television iNews TV Semarang, an MNC network. Commodification occurs through absolute exploitation and relative exploitation. Absolute exploitation can be seen in the irregular working hours of journalists. This is done by raising false awareness that journalists are used to working without a precise time limit and must be on standby 24 hours a day. At the same time, it is relatively exploited by intensifying labor processes for journalists, which is carried out by giving double tasks by managing social media. Journalists are also getting other assignments, namely being part of the sales team to find clients whose bottom line is profit.

The commodification of journalists on local television iNews TV Semarang has also involved alienation, mystification, naturalization, and reification processes. The alienation experienced by journalists occurs because of the high workload and uncertain working hours that are different from the working hours of other workers. Reification occurs through the meaning of prominent media symbols to obtain other benefits such as other jobs and awards. Naturalization occurs when journalists adapt to developments in the media industry and information and communication technology. Mystification occurs through the development of meanings that are identified with the journalist profession. Journalists are proud

of their profession because they feel they are intellectual and creative workers. The exploitation is made heroic so that they consider the journalistic profession to have a strong mentality, can do many things, and is flexible.

From an implicit point of view, this study shows that the commodification of journalists on local television iNews TV Semarang has also involved alienation, mystification, naturalization, and reification processes. The special meaning of journalists who have positive values is continuously being glorified. The predicate makes workers forget their position as workers or laborers. The flexibility afforded to journalists makes them less aware of the things that hurt their company, such as the involvement of journalists in company promotion and marketing, which is considered reasonable. Apart from that, they also have to adapt their prayers to their work as journalists. They do not have space to perform prayer services at the preferred time.

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