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Technological Determination on Digital Mass Media Consumption in Marginalized Communities

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Abstract: Purpose – The research aims to observe the preferences and decisions regarding the consumption of digital mass media within marginalized communities and the adaptation process of communities concerning digital communication technology.

Design/methodology/approach – This research is a qualitative approach, specifically using the phenomenological method. The primary data is collected through observations while interviews used as secondary data. Subsequently, all the data is carefully selected, processed, and analyzed within the framework of technological determinism theory.

Findings – Lower-cost cellular and Android devices offer a potential solution to accessibility barriers in the market, despite their minimal quality. However, significant challenges persist, including knowledge gaps, technological inadequacies, and limited digital literacy skills become obstacles to broader technological usage.

Research limitations/implications – This study specifically targets marginalized communities in Bekasi, recognizing their restricted digital access and reliance on fishing as a livelihood. However, it does not extend its scope to encompass marginalized groups across Indonesia as a whole.

Practical implications – The results obviously offer ideas in practical digital media literacy for similar communities and government to improve community capabilities in consuming media information.

Originality/value – this research contributes the digital media literacy formula and encourages the pursuit digital technology for marginal community, through consumption of good news.

Keywords: Technological Determination, Digital Mass Media, Media Consumption, Marginal Community

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of digital communication technology has significantly reshaped the global mass media landscape. Conventional mediums like radio, television, and printed publications must now adjust their methods to distribute content through online platforms and accommodate changing audience preferences. With the internet's extensive user base and broad outreach, mass media entities are

compelled to transition into cyberspace to stay relevant and engaged with their readers and viewers, lest they risk being overshadowed by competitors (Haqu, 2020).

Media convergence is a global phenomenon that spans across the globe, encompassing both developed and developing countries like Indonesia, where digital communication technology has been extensively applied beyond conventional publishing and broadcasting sectors. This fact can be found when newspapers like Kompas and Media Indonesia started digital formats in the form of e-paper alongside their traditional printed editions, bolstering their presence in both realms. Similarly, radio and television broadcasts in Indonesia followed suit by adopting internet streaming models. This convergence has expanded the range of information sources available to audiences, alongside existing online media outlets like detik.com or satunet.com (Madonna, 2020).

Conventional mass media companies are extending beyond digital platforms like e-paper or e-magazine websites. Many publishers and broadcasting institutions are now venturing into social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These platforms, which encourage audience participation, represent a niche market for mass media producers. The move to social media isn't just about expanding market reach; it's also about cultivating relationships with readers or viewers who actively engage with media content online (Oktariani, 2018)

Several trends indicate that convergence and multi-platform media are integral components of communication evolution and information dissemination in the digital age. Factors such as widespread internet access, the proliferation of digital communication devices, as well as people's consumption of information via mobile phones, Androids, and smartphones are driving forces behind this evolution. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as mediamorphosis (González-Neira & Quintas-Froufe, 2020; Winanti et al., 2023). The emergence of a digital society necessitates changes in how information is produced and distributed by mass media.

Despite the ongoing digital transformation in Indonesia has not yet reached all levels of society. Some areas, particularly in the Frontier, Outermost, and Disadvantaged (3T) regions, still lack internet connectivity. Geographical challenges such as rugged terrain, mountains, and forests hinder the construction of Base Transceiver Station (BTS) towers, making it difficult for people in these areas to access the internet (Handayani, 2017; Mubarak, 2021; Mubarak & Mujab, 2023). Additionally, certain demographics continue to struggle with adopting internet technology due to limited resources and knowledge.

Marginalized communities, encompassing individuals dealing with poverty, disabilities, and aging, encounter difficulties in utilizing internet technology, even when possessing appropriate equipment. Occasionally lacking access to digital telecommunication devices, these groups signify segments of society not fully integrated into the digital transformation era. This situation highlights an existing disparity in information accessibility and technology ownership across different segments of society.

Previous studies have offered limited insights into the information consumption behaviors of marginalized communities through digital devices, primarily focusing on interactive and business perspectives. For instance, Madonna (2021) explored the resilience of women and housewives in Bekasi who engage in trade via social media platforms. Similarly, Mubarak (2023) highlighted the necessity for digital media campaigns in boarding schools to prepare students for future endeavors. Additionally, another study by Mubarak (2021b) delved into virtual enmity and online mockery. In contrast, the present study is centered on investigating the internet-based information consumption process among marginalized groups residing in the outskirts of Jakarta.

Based on several problems above, the research questions are structured as follows: (1) What options do marginalized communities have for accessing information during the digital transformation era? (2) How do marginalized communities navigate the process of consuming online information?. The objective of this study is to examine the choices and strategies employed by marginalized groups in accessing information through internet-based mass media. Additionally, the research seeks to elucidate the information consumption process within internet-based mass media among marginalized communities, specifically focusing on impoverished families, individuals with disabilities, and the elderly.

METHOD

The study adopted a qualitative approach, employing a phenomenological research method aimed at exploring the experiential meaning of a concept as perceived by individuals (Auliyah, 2014). Data collection involved observation and interviews with purposively selected key informants, chosen based on their backgrounds as members of marginalized groups, including impoverished families, individuals with disabilities, and the elderly residing in Jakarta and its environs. Data analysis utilized the Technological Determinism Theory proposed by Marshall McLuhan (1962), which posits that societal patterns of life and social interaction are influenced by the development and usage of technology within that society (Febriana, 2018).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Marginalized communities are individuals or groups of people who do not have access or are even neglected in urban and rural development processes. They often face barriers preventing their involvement in these processes and hinder their ability to benefit from development outcomes. These barriers are not solely attributable to regulations or governmental behavior, but also stem from internal factors within marginalized communities themselves. Limited skills and knowledge pose significant obstacles for these individuals in adapting to changes within social, economic, and political systems, including advancements in information technology, thereby impeding their ability to keep pace with, let alone participate in, development efforts (Qodriyatun, 2013).

The marginalized communities who were the research subjects were purposively identified as residents of Dasawisma who usually only hold domicile certificates, namely residents with dasawisma, disabilities and elderly people residing on the outskirts of South Jakarta and bordering Depok, West Java. Dasawisma residents are newcomers to settlements, usually they do not hold a Resident Card (KTP), relying solely on domicile certificate from the local neighborhood chairman. They are also referred to as seasonal residents. As defined by the Yogyakarta Special Region Health Service, individuals with disabilities are those experiencing long-term physical, intellectual, mental, or sensory limitations hindering full participation in societal interactions and equal rights (dinkes.jogjaprovo.go.id, 2018).

Preferences on Digital Communication Technology Devices Among Marginalized Communities

Observations and interviews with three Dasawisma individuals indicated that they originated from different areas outside South Jakarta. They rely on irregular sources of income and face challenges in accessing high-quality digital communication devices. Ironically, they revealed that they lacked Identity Cards (KTP) because they come from places outside South Jakarta, such as USM (52) Dasawisma from Majalengka (West Java), ANI (60) Dasawisma from Jatinegara (East Jakarta), and OLA (50) Dasawisma from Depok (West Java), all informants lacked steady employment or income. They relied on sporadic sources of income, such as selling tofu or working as on-call drivers, while also depending on social assistance from the government and residents. For example, informant OLA (50) Dasawisma, who is a widow, relies heavily on such support. Consequently, it can be inferred that these three Dasawisma individuals face limitations in acquiring digital communication devices with high-quality specifications.

For instance, an individual with a disability, HD (50) prefers to use a conventional GSM mobile phone to a digital device, relying on a second-hand Android provided by others. Due to difficulties in operating the device independently, they require assistance from others, resulting in minimal internet usage dependent on immediate caregivers. Similarly, the elderly like TIN (64) and TAS (73) encounter challenges with internet-based Android devices. Although individuals with disabilities and the elderly possess SIM cards as prerequisites for various registrations, ownership, and operation of related applications are delegated to close acquaintances.

The reality confronting marginalized communities reveals that individuals facing financial constraints often opt for low-quality and affordable digital telecommunication equipment. Similarly, for people with disabilities and the elderly, ownership of an Android device or smartphone is not the primary concern; instead, possessing a cellular line user card number for administrative or data collection purposes takes precedence. Operating these devices requires assistance from close associates due to

limited skills, knowledge about the device and its applications, and a preference for interpersonal, face-to-face communication over technological advances.

Examining through the lens of technological determinism theory, it is evident that marginalized communities face challenges in both owning and operating digital telecommunication equipment. Nonetheless, various regulations pertaining to social and administrative aspects compel marginalized groups to engage with technology. The utilization of internet-based digital telecommunication equipment among marginalized communities includes:

1. Facilitating registration of *Data Terpadu Kesejahteraan Sosial* (DTKS) at relevant government departments and ministries,
2. Disseminating program and policy information through local environmental administrators, and
3. Providing access to information related to business, employment, and
4. Tutorials on application procedures tailored to the needs of marginalized communities, such as registration with the *Badan Penyelenggara Jaminan Sosial* (BPJS), telemedicine services, and DTKS enrollment.

The Process of Searching and Consuming Mass Media Information Via the Internet.

All key informants share a common enthusiasm for accessing credible mass media news. In the pre-digital era, individuals, regardless of age, could easily enjoy physical newspapers and magazines through subscriptions or borrowing. However, with the transition to the cyber world, accessing and enjoying such media became more challenging. Similarly, the shift from analog to digital radio and television broadcasts, including live streaming via the internet, further distanced marginalized groups from the latest news updates.

Before the digitalization era in the 2010s, primary sources of information for Dasawisma individuals like USM, ANI, and OLA were daily newspapers such as *Pos Kota*, *Warta Kota*, and *Lampu Merah*. They purchased newspapers sporadically, based on their income and the relevance of current events. For instance, they would buy newspapers when they had extra funds for household shopping and when there was significant news or events piquing their curiosity, such as shortages of essential goods, fuel price hikes, or notable accidents or crimes.

Print media consumption patterns, which were once determined by available funds for household shopping and trending topics, have become increasingly sporadic with the advent of media digitalization. The three Dasawisma individuals struggled to adapt to reading e-papers, e-magazines, or online mass media on Android devices due to limited digital literacy skills. Moreover, they prioritize using mobile credit or internet data for family communication rather than news consumption. In recent years, they have relied more heavily on social media for information, often encountering news while engaging in chat activities.

Similarly, individuals with disabilities and the elderly exhibit a preference for consuming information from electronic mass media, particularly radio and television. Individuals with disabilities spend significant time listening to news broadcasts from radio stations like Elshinta, RRI, and MGN, as well as religious broadcasts such as Roja FM. Meanwhile, elderly individuals prefer watching infotainment and news programs on TV channels like MNC News, NET, Trans TV, and Metro TV. While there is no fixed pattern in their consumption habits, both groups tend to keep their radio and television sets on throughout the day. They typically engage in concentrated news consumption during lunch breaks or before bedtime.

The transition from analog frequency radio and television broadcasts to the digital spectrum presents challenges for individuals with disabilities and the elderly in accessing information and news through electronic mass media. This shift, driven by technological advancements, has led to the digitization of radio and television broadcasts, creating a barrier for the three informants due to their lack of familiarity with internet-based digital telecommunication equipment. Physical limitations and difficulties in navigating live streaming applications have resulted in decreased information consumption among these individuals. However, despite these obstacles, the three informants remain interested in staying informed and seek assistance from their children or neighbors to activate digital broadcasts on Android devices. These efforts represent an initiative by individuals with disabilities and the elderly to remain engaged in the information society, albeit with reduced intensity compared to before the digital transition.

CONCLUSION

Technological determinism, as articulated by Marshall McLuhan (1962), plays a significant role in driving social change by shaping perspectives, attitudes towards reform, and modern societal behavior. The advent of the electronic era, marked by inventions such as telephones, computers, and the internet, has revolutionized communication and information dissemination on a global scale. Mass media outlets, leveraging convergence, have expanded their reach through multi-platform strategies encompassing traditional, online, and social media channels. However, certain segments of society encounter challenges in keeping pace with advances in digital communication technology. Marginalized groups, including individuals experiencing homelessness, disabilities, and the elderly, often face financial constraints in acquiring and operating digital devices, as well as limited technical digital literacy. To bridge this gap, concerted efforts are required from local communities and individuals close to marginalized groups to assist them in effectively accessing verified mass media information. This collaborative approach is essential for fostering an inclusive information society that supports social change and progress on a global scale.

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