

# **INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING IN REVEALING CORRUPTION BY JOURNALIST OF INDONESIAN NEWSPAPER**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The application of investigative reporting by journalist of Indonesian Newspaper is not fully affected by sociopolitical condition of fear of political system applied by past regime, but mostly affected by the vision of the media and fully depends on work ethos of the journalist built as a system in the media institution. Technical writing ability or knowledge and understanding of the printed media journalist in investigative reporting must be acknowledged as very minimal. As a consequence, attempts to uncover the corruption cases through investigative reporting have not been done much by the journalist. The level of independency of the journalist is still weak especially due to pressure to media owners and policy of editing. In practice the work of the team is not a must in carrying out investigative reporting.

Key words: corruption, newspaper, investigative reporting

## **ABSTRAK**

Penerapan teknik investigasi wartawan di Indonesia tidak hanya dipengaruhi oleh kondisi sistem sosial politik rezim orde baru, tapi sebagian besar terpengaruh oleh visi media dan sepenuhnya tergantung pada etos kerja para jurnalis yang dibangun sebagai sebuah sistem dalam perusahaan media. Kemampuan teknis menulis atau pengetahuan dan pemahaman wartawan media cetak dalam laporan investigasi harus diakui masih sangat minim. Sebagai konsekuensinya, Usaha untuk mengungkap kasus-kasus korupsi melalui laporan investigasi belum dilakukan sebagian besar jurnalis. Tingkat independensi dari wartawan masih lemah terutama disebabkan oleh tekanan pemilik media dan kebijakan penyuntingan. Dalam praktek pekerjaan tim bukanlah suatu keharusan dalam melaksanakan laporan investigasi.

Kata kunci: korupsi, koran, laporan investigasi.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of the Problem

After the reform movement in 1998, Indonesian press has undergone a significant change especially in expressing freedom. This phenomenon is marked by the appearance of new media both printed and electronic with various types and segments. The courage of press to criticize authority also becomes the new characteristic of Indonesian press.

In an open political system today, Indonesian press tends to show diplomatic performance and attitude. In one side freedom obtained is in line with the fall of new order regime makes Indonesian newspaper free to develop its content. However, in the other side press freedom is often exploited by a part of media industry to earn a great deal of profits by ignoring its function as an instrument for community education and becomes an effective control function.

Press is born to become a democratic pillar to control, criticize, correct and provide a suggestion about many things related to public interest (Anggriani 2006: 2). In doing its tasks, the press functions to fulfill the need for public information to increase participation in the life of the nation. One of the kinds of press participation in the fulfillment of information need for the public to help achieve clean governance is to voice clearly the state financial abuse causing a loss to the state.

In this country corruption seems to be an acute disease hard to prevent. Years under the corruptive government makes corruption extend, rooted and systematic. The extensive corruption can easily be seen in almost all public services, as if corruption has been a part of the government system.

Pessimism that corruption cannot be eradicated in this country has been justified from day to day. Corruption does not decrease, but it becomes more and more extensive due to the institutions to eradicate corruption do the corruption themselves. That is the conclusion that can be made from the result of a survey done by Global Corruption Barometer in 2006 in 62 countries including Indonesia. The survey involved 62 thousand respondents or one thousand respondents in each country.

The survey shows that the House of Representatives, court and public prosecution, police, and political parties as the most corrupt institutions in Indonesia. What makes it worse is the corruption index at the House of Representatives, court and public prosecution in 2006 increased compared to previous year, and even at the scale 1-5 the corruption index of the court increased from 3,8 to 4,2.

The results of the Global Corruption Barometer survey conducted in 62 countries should make the government under the leadership of Susilo Bambang Yudoyono to be more tenacious to eradicate corruption. There must be determination and consistence of the law enforcers and public service sector. (Media Indonesia December 11, 2006).

Now the media have been shifted in news report in which they tend to follow the market demand compared to doing investigative reporting in revealing the cases. Besides that, cost is the main constraint for the media. The expensive cost of investigative reporting is often incompatible with the income received by the media. Investigative reporting is assumed as a supplement for the media to provide contribution. Thus the media are only used when they are needed (<http://hukumonline.co.id>).

The activity of investigative journalism is not something new in Indonesia. Investigative journalism practice has been done by the daily Indonesia Raya led by senior journalist, Mochtar Lubis, in the 1970s. At that time the daily Indonesia Raya revealed the corruption case at Pertamina (Indonesian Oil Company) involving Ibnu Sutowo who was then the director of the oil company.

Investigative journalism once made Indonesian community opened their eyes when Bondan Winarno revealed the sinking of the Tampomas II in Masalembu, Java sea in the early 1980s. Bondan then published a book entitled *Neraka di Laut Jawa* (Hell In Java Sea). Bondan Winarno also investigated the gold exploration case in Busang, East Kalimantan explored by Bre-X Company of Canada. The investigation results were composed as a book entitled *Bre-X: Sebungkah Emas di Kaki Pelangi* (Santana 2003: xv).

Report on investigation had not become an institutionalized tradition in Indonesian press (Armanda 1993: 156) in the 1990s. Report on investigation has not had a broad effect and has not been prominent. Indonesian press workers still conduct investigation as a temporary approach and still very few in numbers. Without providing data and samples, Armanda points out several causes hampering the coverage of investigation: (1) the report is costly, (2) the coverage needs a very long time, (3) uncertain final result, and (4) great risk due to the coverage. Besides that, strong capital, perseverance, and patience that must be possessed by the journalists had no place yet among the journalists at that time.

## **B. Problem**

The main problems to be studied in this writing are as follows:

1. Why does the investigative reporting by Indonesian journalist less develop, whereas the sociopolitical condition which also affects the press freedom today is better than the previous era
2. Does the writing of investigative reporting by Indonesian journalists not distribute evenly in each printed media (newspaper), so that attempts to reveal corruption cases through investigative reporting have not been done much
3. Why is the journalist independency assumed as a main thing in carrying out investigative reporting of extraordinary crime such as corruption
4. Does the coverage of investigative reporting need team work supported by journalists

5. Why do editorial policy and management policy of media owners provide less freedom and less extensive opportunity to their journalists to write investigative reporting?

### **C. Professionalism and Journalist Competence**

#### **1. Journalist Professionalism**

Journalist professionalism is an ability of journalist to realize, understand, and is skillful in carrying out his job. The journalist is insisted to be aware of his social responsibility, understand the vision and mission of media and mastery of technical matters related to media (Siregar in Luwarso 2005: 18).

#### **2. Journalist Competence**

Journalist competence is an ability of a journalist in doing journalistic activity showing his knowledge and responsibility according to demand of professionalism required. The competence includes mastery of skill supported by knowledge and is based on awareness in doing the task and function of journalistic. The competence is determined according to work guide developed by media education and training institute required by media institution and is recognized by the association of journalist profession (Luwarso 2007: 21).

## **I. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **A. Investigative Reporting**

Robert Greene of *Newsday* is often called as the Father of Modern Investigative Journalism, limits the coverage of investigation as a work of someone or several journalists for an important thing for public interest but it is kept secret by those involved. The coverage of this investigation is minimally has three basic elements: 1) that coverage is an original idea of the journalist, and not the result of investigation of other parties, 2) that subject of investigation is a common interest which is reasonable to affect social life of the majority of newspaper readers or television audience, and 3) that there are parties try to conceal this crime from public (<http://www.pantau.or.id>).

### **B. Corruption Review**

As an extraordinary crime, corruption according to Patrick Glynn, Stepen J. Korbin and Moises Naim (Pope 2005: 35) occurs due to a systematic political change so that it weakens or destroys not only social and political institutions but also legal institution.

Sociologically, corruption is a non-socialization act that is an act which does not care relationships in social system (Suyatno 2005: 16). Ignorance to social care is one of the characteristics of corruption. The doer does not care

about other's right. The most important thing of this is how to fulfill the individual right although it must sacrifice other people interest.

## **II. RESEARCH METHOD**

### **A. Approach and Type of Research**

The aim of the study was to know and get profound data on the application of investigation coverage in revealing corruption cases by the journalists in Indonesian newspaper. Based on the aim, the approach used in the study was a qualitative research paradigm. The type of the study was descriptive qualitative.

### **B. Research Location**

The study was conducted in Makassar and Jakarta.

### **C. Informants of the Study**

The number of informants was 11 people consisted of key informants and expert informants. Key informants were journalists from several newspapers selected as objects of the study including chief editors, managing editors, editors, and journalists who covered desk news about corruption or investigation desk.

### **D. Research Instrument**

The main instruments used in the study were (1) limited observation, and (2) in-depth interview.

## **III. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Law No. 40 of 1999 on press says that press freedom is a realization of popular sovereignty based on the principles of democracy, justice, and legal supremacy.

Press freedom is a level that can be achieved to carry out the function of effective supervision of the public officials. Like legislative that has to control the executive every day, the media also control carefully the legislative and executive (and other parties related to public area). Because the elected government is chosen democratically and although it is loyal, it can easily be a corrupt government if the authority is not controlled by free press.

History has proven that only at the beginnings of his power the government always has a nice attitude to press, so that it can be said democratic government by giving freedom to press to carry out its function freely. But at the same time if the control function is used to warn the government of the existence

of deviation and criticizes it through report, then the government will return to attitude against the press by closing down the newspaper.

Press freedom is not automatically followed by freedom of newspaper to freely reports or contains corruption cases by investigative reporting assumed to be able to reveal and expose extraordinary crimes. If this is compared to a disease, then it is assumed to be chronic. The results of the study indicate that most of the newspapers at present are no longer fear to curbing but more to the capitalist group controlling the capital that can affect the sustainability of the newspaper.

However, there is yet newspaper that has an idealist attitude to keep reporting the corruption crime by forwarding objectivity and is not affected by the power of capitalist group or pressure group although it will collapse as long as it remains to its principle as the achievement of vision of the media concerned.

Besides that, there is also a newspaper that does not make investigative reporting to reveal or report corruption cases. This kind of newspaper only accepts reports and gets data from official institutions to avoid error of data made by its journalist which can result in objections from related parties concerning the report. This kind of newspaper is likely to choose a secure and quick way to report the corruption case, but the weakness is the accuracy of data is not sufficient, one sided, and the source is more on censoring before giving it to the journalist. At the end, the report written is very superficial and does not satisfy the readers' curiosity.

Such a condition is worsen by the journalist's attitude who feels satisfied by hunting for corruption cases with various reasons such as to be printed immediately for its actuality and the readers are waiting for it. This phenomenon occurs to newspaper journalists in Indonesia.

The other problem is many of the printed media assign their young journalists without having formal and non-formal education, but only experience as a capital to cover corruption cases. However, corruption report is not an easy problem to report since it involves many things and the journalist cannot easily write a person who corrupts without profound investigation from various sources.

One of the causes of the less coverage of investigation corruption cases by the journalist is his inability or his lack of skill to write report using investigation technique. This inability is due to lack of training or courses about investigative reporting.

Lack of competence of the journalist in investigative reporting is fully related to education, knowledge in general field and journalistic, specialization in certain fields especially law, social politics and economics, systematic reasoning, strong sensitivity, perseverance, never give up, ability to look for direct information by revealing various facts and accurate data, broad network, and ability to disguise. Of course, these abilities are an ideal thing that not all journalists can possess them, nor it means that all journalists are investigative journalists. But at least, if the journalist wants to be professional in his field, he must have minimum standard such as the one mentioned above.

Professionalism can be achieved if the standardization to become a journalist is agreed and implemented in the process of selection. Attempts to achieve competence must be done continuously by media or professional organization in which the journalist affiliates. The way is to give awareness, knowledge, and skill. If this attempt is not done, the journalist will never be a professional worker like other profession.

The journalists can serve the community well when they have an independent attitude to parties they cover: independent from political institute, business, social, religion, media, etc. This attitude is important because if the government in power wants to sustain his power, the most fearful thing for the regime in power is if the press put forwards its independency.

For newspapers in Indonesia, it can be said that their independency is still far from expectation. The main reason for the lack of independency in carrying out the journalistic job is his inability to refuse editorial policy and media owners. This is very deplorable. The editorial policy and media owners must support the independency of the journalists to achieve the press's partiality to the community to voice the truth.

A solid team work of the journalist to cover investigative reporting is badly needed because the investigation coverage is not an ordinary coverage. The media should prepare their journalists if they want to work seriously and want to get maximum results for this kind of coverage.

There are several cases about corruption revealed by individual journalist assumed to be successful, but this is not assurance that each journalist is able to do the same thing. Each journalist has different ethos and performance for the same journalistic job.

Indonesian newspapers are still very difficult to have investigation team because of some constraints: the journalists lack of skill in investigative reporting, and they have several things to cover. Besides that, this coverage team has greater financial risk for the newspapers owners.

The financial risk is not the only reason for the media owners to not carry out the investigative reporting, but there are many more reasons besides editorial policy which has a strong share in it. Duration, solid team, data support, and complete document, trustable information, avoidance of legal offence and external pressure in the form of mass mobilization and strength of capital owners.

The shift of excessive fear that is from closing down to capital strength and legal offence must be faced smartly by not eliminating the identity as a means to defend the truth. Intellectuality does not only stick to the newspaper owners, but also to their journalists. The ability to perform logic and intuition should be strong to carry out the journalistic profession based on Law No. 40 of 1999 on Press and Ethic Code of Journalism 2006.

It seems that legal sanction incriminating the media does not only cause material losses, but also moral loss which is more inflicting. This makes the media to be very careful in reporting corruption, collusion and nepotism cases and violation of human rights. They always fear for the court and therefore the

journalist chooses the safe way and peace in reporting the news about corruption by way of getting information from official sources only. The other way is to choose cases which have little legal risk and mass intimidation related to the sustainability of the newspaper media.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the research that has been conducted and in accordance with the problems investigated, the conclusions of the research findings can be formulated as follows:

1. The application of investigative reporting by the journalists in Indonesia is not fully affected by sociopolitical condition or fear of political system applied by the past regime. It turns out that investigative reporting is much influenced by vision of the newspaper, and fully depends on work ethos of the journalists built as a system in media institution. For media (newspaper publisher) oriented to merely business interest, of course, choose a safe way and do not demand their journalists to make investigative reporting, especially for corruption cases. For such media, the news is easy and quick to get compared to investigative reporting news. Whereas the media which choose popular attitude of which their corporate vision is oriented to public interest and high journalistic values, assign their journalists to carry out investigative reporting especially to events which become public attention such as corruption cases assumed to bring losses to state are regarded to have a priority for investigation.
2. Technical ability of writing or knowledge and understanding of printed media journalists in Indonesia especially in the field of investigative reporting must be acknowledged as still very minimal. As a result, attempts to reveal corruption cases, for instance, through coverage results of the present investigation have not been done much by journalists. This is due to the fact that many journalists assigned to cover at related institutions such as government, police, public prosecution or court are still young and lack of experience and do not fulfill the requirements for an investigation journalist. Low competence as an Indonesian journalist is due to the recruitment system in some newspaper media have not met the standard, so that it fully affects the journalist job toward professionalism.
3. In the application of investigative reporting by newspaper journalists in Indonesia it can be said that the independency of newspaper journalists is still weak due to such factors as structural relationship between journalists and media where they work, welfare, friendship culture, and emotional relationship. These factors make the independency of the journalists weak to make investigative reporting. Moreover for the journalists who still lack of experience and do not want to take risk concerning press criminalization

- both for the journalist concern and media where they work by certain parties feel unhappy with the publication of investigative reporting.
4. The assumption that investigative reporting by journalists needs team cooperation is not always true. Even the reform era at present, journalists can make investigative reporting tend to work individually. As long as the journalists have a will, knowledge and experience, competence and professionalism, they can make investigative reporting seriously and periodically. It is also affected by the scope of the problem or impact to the public when it is not investigated.
  5. Editorial policy, management policy, and media owners factors at this era of press freedom has been enjoyed by the present community is still regarded to not provide freedom and opportunity to journalists to carry out investigative reporting. This condition is caused by editorial policy of the media concerned. The reason is the implementation of investigative reporting needs a process and takes a long time, great fund, and must be motivated by the availability of experienced journalists, have knowledge and good understanding in investigative journalism. This policy is for the existence or sustainability of the press company. It is also related to many people or groups which become the object of investigation sometimes are unhappy with the publication or report on investigation. As a result, the journalists or media often become the target of violence or anarchy and criminal and civil offences through court as a response or result of investigative reporting assumed to bring losses.

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