

# When advertisements are disguised as news: the ethics problem in Indonesian mass media

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## **When advertisements are disguised as news: the ethics problem in Indonesian mass media**

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**Abstract** The practice of obscuring news and advertising is still a problem in the Indonesian mass media. This research aimed to unravel journalistic ethics problems, especially those related to advertorials (advertisements delivered in an editorial style). The clear separation between news and advertisements is one of the two pillars of journalistic ethics, apart from separating facts and opinions to maintain journalistic independence. The research approach used was qualitative-descriptive, with data collection techniques through interviews (to journalists), observation and document searches. The results showed that most of the printed mass media studied tended to blur the boundaries between news and advertisements through various means, such as removing or shortening advertorial information.

**Keywords:** advertorial; journalistic ethics; news; journalist

### **INTRODUCTION**

This study began with two premises about journalistic and advertorial ethics (one of the advertising variants). The dynamics between these two things often give rise to complex problems in journalistic practice. Conceptually, according to Iggers (1999), journalistic ethics rests on two pillars. First, the separation of facts and opinions. Second, the separation between news and business prevents advertisers or the economic interests of the mass media itself from interfering with news as a responsibility to the public. This second pillar is often associated with the issue of journalistic independence.

Traditionally, according to Conill (2016), journalistic ideals aim to keep editorial independence from commercial influences. This ideal has

historically been known as the separation of church and state. However, declining sales and advertising revenues have prompted news organisations to seek alternative sources of income as commercial pressures challenge journalists for more autonomy. The increasingly blurred line between commercial and professional logic of journalism can have severe implications for the normative and performative roles of journalists.

Therefore, to maintain the independence of journalistic practice from the pressures of profit-oriented businesses, journalists are protected by an ethical concept that is often referred to as a firewall (see Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007; Hanitzsch et al., 2019). With a journalistic firewall, editorial and business affairs are strictly separated and should not be exceeded for any reason. In other words, journalistic ethics provides a clear line to distinguish news and advertising material. This boundary line is crucial in journalistic practice because it reflects the professional autonomy of journalists in carrying out the journalistic practice.

On the other hand, the so-called firewall concept poses a severe problem in journalistic practice because it is closely related to the advertorial that many journalistic academics call a reputation for fraud. This topic has only recently become known because of the proliferation of advertising and mass media.

Initially, Advertorials were advertisements in print media that were displayed in an editorial style. In subsequent developments, advertorials are also used by other media, both electronic media (radio and television) and online media (Rayner et al., 2004; Stephen and Patra, 2015). Advertisers love advertorials for two reasons. First, advertorials are usually less expensive than display ads. Second, which then causes problems, advertorials can be disguised or disguised as if they are news. Thus, this practice has the potential to violate journalistic ethics. For example, through advertorials, certain businesses can be described as performing certain activities. A business or an inauguration event can be presented by highlighting certain advantages or testimonials from customers or business partners with the writing feature. Advertisers cannot get this advantage in conventional (display) advertising.

Several studies in several countries, such as that conducted by Duffy & Cheng (2020) in the United States, Van Cayseele & Vanormelingen (2019) in Belgium, or Ameer (2017) in Iraq, show potential ethical problems related to advertising and editorial issues. The editorial and commercial functions are described as always in conflict, although they are always trying to be separated. The contradiction between journalistic autonomy (ethically driven) and business interests (economically driven) has become a daily journalistic practice. The closer relationship between editorial and advertising aspects results in the emergence of psychological discomfort for journalists in journalistic practices and places them under pressure from media companies.

Advertorials are also very popular because of the diminishing effectiveness of conventional advertising methods. Conventional advertising itself is usually done through display ads which can be quickly recognised by readers as advertisements (Muela-Molina et al., 2016). This is the main reason why advertisers need new, more subtle promotional methods and techniques that are able to disguise the message. Since its inception, advertorials have sparked concerns about their ability to face the journalistic furnace. For example, Franklin & Murphy (1998) mention advertorials disguised as news and advertisements suggest truth claims because they are associated with news. Thus, advertorials are created to deceive readers and risk misleading readers because they feel they are reading the news (both straight news and features) rather than reading advertisements.

In their research in India, Stephen and Patra (2015) stated that readers (consumers of advertised goods) prefer advertorials to display ads. The most significant advantage of using advertorials is the added trust factor of readers. In 1991, still referring to Stephen and Patra, Kotler predicted that the position of advertorials would become increasingly important as consumers trusted editorial (news) scripts more than advertisements. Since then, advertorials have become the mainstay of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) practices and become the most developed marketing tool.

The most beneficial aspect of advertorials is that advertisers can increase the trustworthiness of the advertised product. Schudson (1984) even asserts that "*if an item appears as news, it has a legitimacy that advertising does not*". Furthermore, many other studies have shown that traditional advertising (display advertising) has lower credibility than advertorials.

Therefore, Stephen and Patra (2015) call advertorials a communication tool with a reputation for fraud. Due to the reputation of fraud, as part of criticism, as an effort to protect the interests or rights of readers, and, most importantly, to enforce the barrier between news and advertising (between editorial and business), professional journalist organisations and advertising agencies in the U.S., Europe and several other countries have developed and developed guidelines or markings of conduct to regulate advertorials, both in the context of journalism and advertising. The guidelines contain the obligation of news publishers to label or provide certain facial features in advertorials. Unfortunately, however, not all news publishers comply with these guidelines due to the absence of legal force. Even if explored further, this is where the dilemma of journalistic ethics arises, especially regarding the blurring of the line between news and advertising (Kim et al., 2001).

One of the characteristics of advertorials is that they blur the line between news and advertising. In addition, news publishers tend to omit the markers that should distinguish between advertising and news in many cases. The marker is usually a different type and size of the news font, the advertiser's company logo, the fine line between the advertorial

and the news, the face style, or the advertorial label or ad clearly above or below the ad.

Several studies have shown how this separation of news and advertising is a crucial issue in many countries. Research by Ikonen et al. (2017) and Artemas et al. (2018) in the United States, for example, describes how the code of ethics governing the relationship between news and advertising is formulated. However, in journalistic practice and daily business practice, the code of ethics is still being violated. At some point, business and editorial staff in the U.S. media were simultaneously involved in negotiations to construct and reconstruct norms separating editorial and advertising or business functions. So, it can be said that journalistic ethics that guarantee journalistic autonomy are often under pressure and are constantly trying to be negotiated or compromised with economic or business interests.

The current research focused on advertorial issues related to the second pillar of journalistic ethics, namely the separation of business news (newsroom and business room). In the Indonesian context, the focus of this research is relatively rarely touched, or perhaps none of the research is considered significant. Research on journalistic practice is still more focused on the first pillar (separation of facts and opinions), or research that uses a cultural perspective (which looks at how journalistic practice is carried out by taking into account cultural factors) or political economy (which looks at how journalistic practice is carried out under the control of economic, social, and political forces). This tendency can be seen in research conducted by Dhakidae Dhakidae (1992), Manzella (2000), Budianto & Mabroer (2000), Eriyanto (2002), SK (2003), Ishadi (2002), Romano & Seinor (2005), Hanitzsch (2005), J. Steele (2010); J. E. Steele (2005), Manan & Danayanti (2012), (Sudibyo & Patria, 2013), Tapsell (2012), Armando (2014), Carpenter & Sosale (2019), Winarnita et al.(2020), and Simorangkir (2020).

In some countries, research focusing on advertorial phenomena has been done, for example, by Kim et al. (2001), Eckman and Lindlof (2003), Erjavec-Kovacic (2010), Baerug and Loit (2011), Stephen and Patra (2015), Attasran et al. (2015), Molina et al. (2016), Li et al. (2019), as well as Wilson and Baack (2019). This means that problematic journalistic and business practices have become phenomena that theoretically have implications for violations of journalistic ethics and impact journalistic independence. Moreover, recently, most of the advertising spending for mainstream mass media has shifted to social media. At this point, advertorials with a reputation for fraud and camouflage become a new alternative for the mainstream mass media to profit. In other words,

In Indonesia, a similar issue related to the journalistic code of ethics that is a reference for Indonesian journalists – both formulated by the Indonesian Journalists Association (PWI) and the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) – still has not explicitly regulated this issue. In contrast to professional journalist organisations in other

countries, such as the U.S., which have formulated strict rules regarding the line between news and advertorials. In Indonesia, the journalistic code of ethics focuses on setting the first pillar of journalistic ethics, separating facts and opinions.

This situation is one of the reasons why the practice of blurring the line between advertorials and news is a problem in Indonesia. In the context of print media, for example, the practice of blurring advertising occurs in various ways. For example, some publishers do not add the description 'advertorial' and instead replace it with the abbreviation 'adv' at the end of the article.

Sometimes, the word 'adv' is replaced with the asterisk code '\*.' The word 'adv' or the asterisk sign is considered an advertorial marker, but it is most likely not understood by the public only an agreement in the media concerned. In other words, blurring the line between advertorials and news is a common practice in today's print media.

At this point, this latest research becomes essential because it aims to uncover the deceptive practices (fraud or camouflage) operating in the mass media in Indonesia. To limit the scope, this research was conducted on some print media in Surabaya to get an idea of the extent to which this practice that threatens journalistic independence occurs as part of protecting the public interest.

## METHODOLOGY

This research used a qualitative-descriptive approach that places the researcher as a critical instrument. Data was generated through interviews, observations and documents, which were then analysed inductively (Lune & Berg, 2017). This research was conducted in Surabaya, considering its position as the second-largest city in Indonesia with the most significant number and media types after Jakarta, as seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Mass Media in Surabaya

Type of Mass Media	Number
National Television	12
Local Television	14
Local Radio	63
Newspaper	17
Magazine	18
Tabloid	19

Source: Indonesian Journalist Association of East Java (2021)

The numbers listed in table 1 do not include print media published with irregular frequency and online media, which in the post-New Order period were very numerous.

The sources of this research are print media journalists who are reporters or editors. The selected journalists came from leading print media in Surabaya, namely Harian Kompas, Jawa Pos, Surya, Radar Surabaya, Bhirawa, Memorandum, Duta Masyarakat, and Radar Jember which is also a subsidiary of Jawa Pos.

The research subjects were determined by purposive sampling method with the following conditions: 1) experiencing an event which is a phenomenon related to research; 2) able to retell the events they experienced; 3) willing to be the subject of research (Creswell, 1998). With ethical considerations, the names of the informants are presented in the form of initials in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Research Informant

<b>Informant Initial</b>	<b>Newspaper</b>
NWD	Jawa Pos
S.H.	Kompas
MB	
ASP	
FAE	Surya
L.N.	Radar Surabaya
MA	Bhirawa
DHA	Memorandum
BDM	
CB	Radar Jember
YN	Duta Masyarakat

Source: Researcher Data (2020)

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **When Advertising News**

An incident occurred several years ago (2012) at the Jawa Pos editorial office. Based on the narrative of NWD, a journalist for Jawa Pos, on that day, a 'news' appeared accompanied by a photo of the Special Staff of the President for Development and Regional Autonomy at the time, Heru Lelono. At that time, the President of the Republic of Indonesia was Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. The advertorial contained Heru Lelono's views on the political and economic conditions at that time.

Unfortunately, NWD claimed not to remember the details of the advertorial's publication in the newspaper. He only remembered the possible years, which were between 2012 and 2013 and did not remember the date and month at all. He only confirmed that the ad appeared more than once before the 2014 presidential election and contained relevant views on various matters. Jawa Pos itself also does not have a printed edition archive, so the authors could not investigate the article itself. Meanwhile, digital archives in the form of pdf files could only be accessed within the last three months since this research was conducted.

At first glance, the half-page column looked like news. However, it turned out that when the editor checked the page, the material was not news but an advertorial written by a copywriter who was a writer who is in charge of writing advertorial material at Jawa Pos. At a leadership meeting attended by all departments, including the advertising department, in the afternoon, this material caused a heated debate. The main problem was that the presentation or format of the

advertorial was too similar to the news. In addition, there was no sign or ad marking or advertorial in the material, or at least a limiting sign in the form of a thin line and a title starting with the word 'Communication,' as Jawa Pos usually does in an advertorial.

"The material is too similar to the editorial writing, so the editorial staff themselves cannot tell the difference. Furthermore, as a note and evaluation, we took turns reading the advertorial with the speaker for everyone to hear, including the commercial department crew. 'Today there is this ad,' and so on. We also provide written records for partner advertising" (NWD, interview, 2020).

The results of interviews from researchers also show that a similar incident also occurred in a newspaper at the level of Kompas newspaper, namely in one of the columns published every Friday, Kompas Klass. Based on the narrative of SH, a journalist from Kompas, this rubric published in 2004 is managed by the business department and contains texts written by outside writers. Kompas Klass itself was created to attract the advertising potential of premium products. However, at the beginning of its publication, Kompas Klass was considered too similar to the editorial rubric. Although there is an 'advertising' sign at the bottom, the face design of Kompas Klass is too similar to editorial and also uses editorial-like fonts. Therefore, complaints and pros and cons also often arise from the internal of Kompas newspaper, especially from the editors.

"Since its publication, many people have asked about Kompas Klass, both from internal and external circles. Often outsiders ask, whose product is Kompas Klass? News or advertisement? In fact, the journalism that Kompas develops is a journalism that is committed not to confuse editorial matters with business, news, and advertisements. We are deeply committed to maintaining the barrier between editorial and business. Therefore, the editors often complain in joint meetings that Kompas Klas appears in a format that is too similar to the editorial staff. However, now the pros and cons have died down because the Kompas Klas rubric has been known as an advertorial" (SH, Kompas journalist, 15/09/2020).

The problems faced by Kompas and Jawa Pos above are complications from the emergence of a relatively new phenomenon in the world of advertising, especially in print media, namely advertorials. Today, however, the line is not the only thing seen as the sacred divider separating advertising and news. In addition to thin lines, there are still types of letters and markings in the form of advertising or advertorial writing (can be at the end of the manuscript or the top of the

manuscript). As a thin line, typeface and script code are also a problem in newspapers, even for newspapers at the level of Kompas and Jawa Pos.

Regarding discipline in using advertorial markings, Kompas is disciplined, and editors tend to be tough on this matter. For example, MB, a journalist from Kompas, said in his interview:

"There must be an advertorial writing. There must be. If there is not, it is not possible. If there is no advertorial article, we can argue about that for a week. The leader can be reviled" (MB, interview, 2020).

Despite the advantages provided by using ad markings, problems often occur in Kompas. The layout and style of the advertisement section are handled by the section that creates advertising. The advertisement column also features identical fonts to those used by the editorial.

"I dare say, currently Kompas is the only newspaper in Indonesia that is most disciplined about separating advertising and news. This is Kompas journalism. In Kompas, the advertising division is afraid of the editorial team, and the editorial position is strong. That is, what is dominant is the position of wanting to defend the firewall. Nevertheless, indeed in advertorial writing, sometimes there are problems with the typeface. Sometimes ad sections are using a similar type. So, if that happens, the editorial team always protests. Editorial complaints to advertisements are usually always related to this matter" (MB, interview, 2020).

These events reflect Franklin & Murphy's (1998) claim about manipulative advertorial suggesting a truth claim associated with news. Advertisers want to use an editorial-like presentation format to trick readers and ask the newspaper ad department to write and design it just like editors design news. This can be seen as one of the most severe attack forms against journalism's firebird.

The case of the column in Kompas Klas is just one of the attacks on the journalistic firewall in Kompas. The attacks from within the newspapers themselves tore down the barriers of long-standing and persistent journalism.

"In the past, advertising markers were written at the top, now at the bottom. The reason is that the client wants to be written there. In the past, typefaces were very similar to the editorial staff, only with different spacing. Because of this, the editors often protest. Why is this, why is that? Constant complaints. When there was the Kompas Klass case, we complained. The editor asked for the rubric to be discontinued, but, in fact, it was published even though the frequency was reduced. So basically,

the advertising mix never stops. They will keep trying" (ASP, interview, 2020).

The problem is that if a newspaper as big as Kompas continues to be attacked to break down the journalistic firewall, what about other newspapers that are not as big as Kompas? Jawa Pos does not seem to be able to escape the pressure of advertisers or advertorials. Therefore, Jawa Pos seems to compromise in terms of advertorials. For example, this daily does not explicitly use ad markers or advertorials. Instead, Jawa Pos implicitly creates a rubric title that begins with the words 'Communication' or 'Info' and is followed by words that reflect the advertorial content. Later, various names emerged, which were then understood internally as advertorials, such as 'Business Communications,' 'Educational Communications,' 'Legislative Communications,' 'Government Communications,' etc. The title is written in capital letters, usually in blue, and is placed in the advertorial text. However, Jawa Pos also opens up opportunities for other titles according to client requests, such as 'Jalin Kesra' (a full-page regular advertorial by the East Java Provincial Government), 'Banyuwangi Festival' (Banyuwangi Regency Government advertorial), 'PP Properti' (advertorial by a property developer), etc. In Jawa Pos, advertorials are managed by a division called the Creative Division. Internally, the product is referred to as an ad creator.

The use of the word 'Communication' can be seen from two sides. From the Jawa Pos side, the word is a sign that the text is an advertorial text. However, on the other hand, ethically, the use of the word can be seen as an attempt to disguise advertising so that readers perceive it as news. Moreover, if the typeface used is the same as news, as shown in the example below.

In the context of firewall journalism, the use of the word 'advertisement' or 'advertorial' is something that cannot be negotiated as a marker and separator between news and advertising. In terms of the use of letters, Jawa Pos still tends to be inconsistent. In one publication, this inconsistency was found frequently. In cases like this, it is the advertiser who decides. The use of typefaces or advertorial titles completely follows the wishes of the advertiser. In response, the Jawa Pos editorial team differed from the Kompas editorial staff, who tended to be rude.

"One of the considerations is advertisers. Big advertisers usually do not want any description or marking as an ad at all. We cannot force it, though that is the ideal. The advertising department was concerned that advertisers would switch to other newspapers. Therefore, we then give a special mark, with the word 'Communication.' What is clear, when the reader reads, the editorial friends will know an article is an advertisement or not. Here we are always in the process. Even though we know this is

an industry, our editors still care. Moreover, those who produce advertorials are not from the editorial staff. The advertising department has its own photographer, layout manager, and writer" (NWD, interview, 2020).

Document and interviews with journalists from various newspapers in Surabaya or those based in Surabaya show similar data. Apart from Kompas, the writing format in almost all newspapers in Surabaya shows the vital importance or intervention of advertisers and describes the violation of the journalistic firewall. This fact is also reflected in the involvement of journalists in the practice of writing advertorials. In short, the data shows a strong indication of an advertorial disguise that is deliberately done so that readers can understand it as a news story. This practice can be seen in table 3.

From table 3, it can be seen that there is a trend in the way of writing advertorials carried out by the studied newspapers. All newspapers, except Kompas, do not provide writing the word 'advertisement' or 'advertorial' as a marker so that readers recognise the text as an advertorial, not as news. Instead, for camouflage, most newspapers use the marker 'adv' (short, or rather disguise, of advertorial) or asterisk '\*' for their advertorial text. This practice is sometimes followed by code writers working on or even getting advertorial deals (if newspapers allow journalists to be ad seekers).

The problem is that in Indonesia, there are no rules or ethical guidelines that specifically regulate advertorial practice so that each newspaper (media) can interpret these boundaries according to their respective interests and conditions. In fact, several other countries, such as the United States, already have guidelines or regulations published by both the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) and the American Society of Magazine Editors (ASME). The editor's and publisher's guidelines set out explicitly and explicitly the relationship between editors and advertisers. To quote McChesney (2004), this organisation was basically formed to strengthen the separation between editorial and business (which is likened to the separation of church and state) and protect journalistic practice's purity from business or advertising interests.

In terms of layout, design, and choice of letters (typography), for example, based on ASNE rules, advertorials must be clearly distinguished from the layout, design, or typography of editorial content. In addition, when an ad appears on a page containing editorial content, the two must also be clearly distinguished, including by including the words 'advertisement,' 'advertorial' or 'promotion' placed horizontally or directly above the ad with font size and thickness equal to at least used by editorials (Bivins, 2004).

**Table 3.** Editorial Policy On Advertorial

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Writing Format</b>	<b>Author</b>
KOMPAS	There is an ad marking at the end of the article. Different fonts and layouts with the news. Given the title of a rubric that impresses the news.	Copywriter
JAWA POS	There is no ad marking, but it is marked with a line and a column title starting with the word 'Communication' according to the advertiser's wishes Font choices and layout are inconsistent, sometimes the same, sometimes different from the news. Creating 'creative ads' with a similar presentation style to light news.	Copywriter
SURYA	No ad marking. The writing markings can be negotiated with the advertiser, usually given the marking '*' or adv without or by adding the reporter's code who worked on the article. As a disguise, given the rubric title 'Infotorial.'	Journalist Copywriter
MEMORAN DUM	No ad marking. Given a marking '*', or adding the code of the reporter who wrote the article. The form, layout, or typeface is up to the reporter and advertiser.	Journalist
RADAR SURABAYA	No ad marking Marked with the reporter worked on the article. News-like layout, typeface, and placement. The format can be made creatively according to the client wishes.	Journalist Copywriter
RADAR JEMBER	No ad marking Marked with the reporter worked on the article. News-like layout, typeface, and placement. Create a special advertorial program with coverage, writing, and placement that is the same as the news.	Journalist Copywriter
DUTA MASYARAKAT	No ad marking. Marked with the reporter worked on the article. News-like layout, typeface, and placement.	Journalist
BHIRAWA	No ad marking Given the marking 'adv.' News-like layout, typeface, and placement.	Journalist

**Source:** Research Data (2020)

The fact that the newspaper does not use advertorial markers and instead uses the same typeface as the editorial text is also a form of pressure from advertisers who do not want their readers to perceive

their advertisements as advertisements. Advertisers tend not to want ad markers or advertorials in their scripts, while editors also do not want ads to be recognised as news. In other words, there is a struggle among the editorial staff regarding journalistic independence and advertisers' wishes in determining advertising markers. At this point, using the 'adv' marker or the '\*' code could be seen as a compromise between the advertiser and the editor. On the one hand, editors want to maintain their independence, but on the other hand, they have no choice but to accommodate the client's desire not to use ad markers.

"The solution is 'adv' or asterisks '\*.' This is also one of the security measures so that advertisements are safe so that they are transparent, recognised as legitimate by internal parties. But, of course, we also need to play nice, ha-ha..." (FAE, interview, 2020).

"The 'adv' code is to give a signal to the office management. So if there is ADV, there will be a bill of its own. Clients usually do not want ads written directly, so just pass in the code 'adv.' So it is like news, but actually advertising" (MA, interview, 2020).

"Memorandums use an asterisk '\*', sometimes 'adv.' But more often I use a star with a slash, then there is my code. That is a sign from the office that I got an ad deal" (DHA, interview, 2020).

From the statements above, it can be seen that the choice of using asterisks and advertisements is not at all related to the interests of the public or readers. Instead, the use of the code is intended for internal purposes (recognised as part of financial transactions). That is why, in some instances, when advertisers do not even want their advertorials to be tagged or asterisk, newspapers often do not mind.

"There are some who do not want to be marked because they are still considered too promotional. Yes, we are fine. After all, there is a fee. What matters is the order in which the adverts enter. So it is up to the advertiser to give the 'adv' marker or not" (LN, interview, 2020).

This decisive rejection of advertising markers confirms some studies in various countries that state that the use of an editorial style with an advertorial format is indeed more effective than display advertising. In a study that took place in India, Stephen and Patra (2015) stated that readers (consumers of advertised goods) prefer advertorials over display ads. The most significant advantage of using advertorials is the added trust factor of readers, as (M Schudson (1984) has pointed out, "when something appears in the form of news, it has the legitimacy that advertising never has." On the other hand, several

studies have found that distinguishing markers are not effective enough to make readers aware of the difference between news and advertising.

Research by Kim et al. (2001) found that readers' responses to advertorials that were tagged and not were insignificantly different. In other words, readers still have difficulty identifying the difference between advertorials and news stories with or without distinguishing marks. Thus, even though they both regard it as an advertisement (not news), most of the readers still fail to remember the existence of these advertorial markers. The research also shows that advertorial-formatted ads succeed in deceiving readers and fail to remind readers of advertorials' "basic character".

Therefore, Stephen and Patra say that advertorials are communication tools that have a reputation for fraud. Because of this reputation for fraud, professional journalists and advertising agencies in the US, Europe, and many other countries have developed and developed guidelines or codes of conduct to regulate this, both in the context of journalism and advertising. For example, in the U.S., the American Society of Magazine Editors (ASME) compiled a series of guidelines in 1989 and later updated them to regulate online media. The guideline contains an obligation to give certain labels or typefaces in advertorials. However, in reality, not all publishers comply because these rules have no legal force. If publishers follow, their advertorial labels are usually very vague and do not attract readers' attention (Kim et al., 2001).

A number of international organisations also view the practice of blurring the boundaries of news and advertising as unacceptable. For example, the International Chamber of Commerce Code of Advertising Practice, which in 1997 required clear identification of advertisements so that they could be quickly recognised as advertisements. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) also has a code of ethics that regulates this issue. The problem is that the code does not contain explicit, direct guidelines to distinguish news from advertising, although they have also released many resolutions regarding "the pressure to integrate advertising and commercial objectives into editorial work." In the context of television, regulations are also issued by the European Convention on Transfrontier Television (2002) and the Directive of the European Parliament (2007) (Erjavec & Poler Kovačič, 2010).

An interesting case occurred in Slovenia. Erjavec & Poler Kovačič (2010) note that mixing advertising and news in Slovenia is not only seen as a practice that is contrary to the code of ethics, both in the context of journalism and advertising. In this eastern European country, mixing news and advertising is an ethical issue and a legal one. However, the law governing the mass media in Slovenia considers this practice illegal, and its enforcement is rigorous compared to other countries. In addition, the code of ethics compiled by the Slovenian Association of Journalists (2002) and the Slovenian Advertising Chamber

(1999) also shows how this matter is trying to be regulated and controlled.

Therefore, referring to the description above, the use of advertising tagging can explicitly negate the legitimacy factor, as Schudson calls it, or the additional trust as emphasised by Stephen and Patra. This argument also explains why all the newspapers studied (except Kompas) tend to use an advertorial design that is similar to the news produced by the editor. This is usually seen in the selection of typefaces and layout styles. This fact was expressed by one of the sources:

“When I got an advertorial from the East Java Provincial Government, they asked for a special column. So I contract half a page. So we were the ones who do the shapes, layouts, and faces. However, they want it to look like news because they also do not want their readers to think about advertising” (DHA, interview, 2020).

Also of interest is the struggle within the editorial offices of newspapers to decide who does the job of finding and writing advertorials. Unlike the advertorial markers and designs (in this case, only Kompas is disciplined in enforcing the separator), it is not only Kompas newspaper that provides a clear separation in terms of writing advertorial scripts. Jawa Pos also adheres to the code of ethics by handing over the writing of the script to a copywriter (a staff specially assigned to handle advertorials). Jawa Pos journalists are prohibited from writing advertorials and are prohibited from looking for advertisements (both display and advertorials). However, this strict regulation in Jawa Pos does not apply to its subsidiary, Radar Group. Apart from being allowed (even encouraged) to participate in the search for advertisements, the Radar Group also accepts and justifies writing advertorial scripts by journalists.

“Now, at Radar Jember, apart from having an advertising department, there are also journalists who are specially assigned to assist the advertising division. There is a unique phenomenon at Radar Jember, where the marketing staff is taught or trained to write advertorials. Some marketers can write, but not many. Some marketers ask journalists for help writing advertorials. I just had to ask the editor-in-chief about which journalists could help write the advertorial. Last year, an advertising marketing staff was smart and could even write better than journalists, we finally transferred him to the editor. For the time being, the staff focused on advertorials. So if there is an event that has the potential to be advertorial, the staff will be assigned” (CB, interview, 2020).

"Usually they are marketers who can write (advertisements). But sometimes there is a request for the advertisement to be written by journalists, so journalists will be assigned to write advertisements" (L.N., interview, 2020).

From what happened with Kompas, Jawa Pos, and the Radar Group, it can be concluded that there is a gradation in the level of compromise regarding advertorial writing. Kompas and Jawa Pos reject the practice of writing advertorials by journalists, while other newspapers are still compromising. Not only Radar Group, Harian Surya, which is a subsidiary of Kompas, also takes a compromise route, even providing opportunities for journalists to participate in writing advertorials (including finding clients). However, the newspaper also has a copywriter who is specifically in charge of writing advertorials.

"The advertising department has a copywriter, but journalists can also be asked to write. But it is more often journalists who are asked to write. Informants also prefer journalists who write because their writing can be in the style of news. It is not just writing; those who do not write can take photos of journalists. Meanwhile, the editorial team is designing the layout" (FAE, interview, 2020).

In newspapers such as Bhirawa and Duta Masyarakat, the writing of advertorials is almost always done by journalists. Moreover, more and more advertisements (both display and advertorials) are obtained by journalists so that journalists also carry out their execution (including the writing of advertorial scripts).

"Journalists write advertorials. First, we interview advertisers; what do they want? Then we write, and the client will correct the results. Is it appropriate or not? If it is appropriate, we will immediately publish it" (MA, interview, 2020).

The implication of this kind of practice, according to McChesney (2004), is the emergence of a very crucial problem because the wants or needs of advertisers can change the content of mass media dramatically. As a result, the public interest that should appear in the media has to face control or filter from advertisers. In other words, news that reflects the public interest must be compromised or even often sacrificed if it conflicts with the interests of advertisers. As a rule, McChesney writes, "Advertisers do not wish to associate with controversial social or political topics. Even slight opposition by an audience is enough to keep most advertisers away from such content"

Traditionally, news and advertising functions are expected to be separate because advertising can threaten the objectivity of journalists. According to Schudson (2011), this concept of objectivity has been

regarded as "the epitome of American journalism." This symbol is the ideal assumption of journalists to convey a neutral message to the public. Therefore, the boundary between the news and advertising departments must be maintained to maintain the integrity of the news and avoid conflicts with journalistic values or norms.

However, the media business (including newspapers), citing Eckman & Lindlof (2003), is no longer a black and white world. The newspaper business (print media) is currently experiencing a significant decline in circulation and profits due to electronic media, internet media, and social media. This phenomenon is then responded to with content and promotion strategies that play in the 'grey' area between the newsroom and business, and advertorials are one strategy to play in the 'grey' area.

The practice of advertorials, still referring to Eckman & Lindlof (2003), also triggers internal conflicts in media organisations between editorial departments and businesses. Conflicts constantly arise over the decision to publish news and journalistic autonomy. Therefore, the study of advertorials is very important because of its very significant role today in shaping organisational culture and targeting the news industry. In newspapers in many countries, the line between the editorial department and business is blurred. Editors and business people are now accustomed to sitting together discussing solutions to various business problems.

### **Blurring Page Sales with 'Smart Reporting'**

In addition to the practice of blurring news with advertorials, research data also shows the practice of selling news or pages and images to certain businesses. For example, researchers found several cases in Jawa Pos subsidiaries based on document searches, namely Radar Jember and Memorandum.

Although Jawa Pos does not practice this kind of journalism, a number of its subsidiaries, namely Radar Jember and Memorandum, do. Radar Jember continues this practice today, even though it is seen as an effective marketing strategy to increase circulation and advertising. Radar Jember has a special column, namely "Sekolah Kreatif," which is one-page wide F.C. (full colour). This column is offered to schools in Jember Regency (from kindergarten to high school) in exchange for a minimum purchase of a thousand copies.

SMPN 6 Jember and SMPN 11 Jember have used this program. News about SMPN 6 Jember appeared in the January 25, 2016 edition on page 12. In a full-page FC, SMPN 6 Jember is written in four stories, eight photos, plus a graphic about the school's profile and achievements, which, although highly promotional, are still written as news in style. Journalistic writing. The news headlines were also very positive, such as "*Junior High School 6 Jember, Towards a School of Arts and Sports,*" "*Many Graduates Enter Favorite Schools,*" "*Many Produce Professional Models,*" and "*Cooperating with Suryanaga-Smash Jember.*" A similar

style of reporting and writing was also carried out for SMPN 11 Jember, which also appeared on the same page and area on February 1, 2016.

The Radar Jember program relies on journalists' networks and lobbying. The tender process, reporting, writing, and distribution to schools are all carried out by journalists. In return, journalists enjoy the difference in prices set by management. The official price for one copy of the Jember Radar is Rp. 6,000, but specifically for this program, the fee is Rp. 5,000. This means that journalists get a commission of Rp. 1.000.000 per copy. With a minimum purchase of 1,000 copies, it means that journalists will pocket a minimum of Rp. 1 million per contract with the school.

"Pretty good, right? Journalists were covering, writing, and distributing. How the newspaper gets to the client is the reporter's business. All written in the form of news plus photos on a special one-page colour page. It is not an advertorial; it is news. The layout style, typeface, everything is the same as usual news, made more in demand. The difference is that the page header is somewhat promotional. In fact, advertising friends also criticised this. Usually, one page can sell for a minimum of Rp. 11 million, but it is cheap for us. That is why we pack it like news, with journalistic standards that are still used, starting from the angle, the way of writing, and so on. I am also glad that it was not written as an advertorial, because it seemed like a journalist's coverage with objective journalistic standards" (CB, interview, 2020).

"Sekolah Kreatif" is not the only column or page packaged for sale to others. The vital point of the idea lies in the possibility for anyone to receive some of the positive news, regardless of the frequency, breadth or amount of news, with a controlled choice of angle or writing method, as long as the person concerned is willing to enter into a sales agreement. That is, "Sekolah Kreatif" is just one rubric or page created for it. Columns or pages with other names can be easily created according to the client's requirements.

Whereas in the Memorandum, this practice usually occurs by granting authority to regional offices to manage their pages with advertising revenue and monthly circulation. Under this model, regional bureaus are responsible for the provision of news and advertising revenue and circulation. Since the agency's office does not have a marketing or advertising staff (account executive), it is the journalists who do it. To meet advertising and distribution targets, bureau offices usually enter into official contracts or MoUs (memorandums of understanding), especially with local government agencies, such as district/city governments, police stations, prosecutors, or certain agencies. The MoU contains an agreement to provide periodic news slots at a certain rate.

"In local news listings, there is usually advertorial information, which is usually half a page. I guess it is called a news ad. If it can be called news, the news is *cangkeman* news (Bullshit News); police check guns, police safety test, that is all. However, the packaging is real news, not like an advertorial or advertisement, even though the editor lists it as an advertorial. The sign, the article is prioritised to enter the page. I have a calculation, only with this collaboration, per year the bureau can benefit, even without incidental advertisements, such as media anniversary moments, city anniversary, Eid al-Fitr, new year, independence day, and so on. Plot pages can run out without news. Full all. For regions, this income can cover business operations in the area concerned for one year" (BDM, interview, 2020).

"(The agreement) can be through an MoU, it can also be retail, it can be freelance news. It all depends on the approach of policy-making officials. If it fits, we know their need to be notified that the division is successful, so we will. Better yet, play like this, bright" (DHA, interview, 2020).

This study found that this kind of practice is often found in bureaus or regional representatives. In many newspapers, representative offices or bureaus in the regions are burdened with news targets and business targets (advertising development and circulation). To meet these targets, they usually approach certain agencies, such as local government, police, prosecutor's office, Regional House of Representatives, Political Parties, State-Owned Enterprises or Regional-Owned Enterprises, political parties, or other private companies, using networks from the journalist.

Based on the interview data, it appears that the 'harvest period' of this practice generally occurs during the general election (both regional heads and legislatures). Newspaper publishers usually approach candidates using journalists, not only for advertising or advertorials but also for binding news contracts. This model is very popular recently (after the 1998 reform), especially since the General Election Commission (KPU) took over campaign activities through print and electronic media advertisements. Through KPU Regulation Number 7 of 2015, the KPU has implemented that candidate advertisements in print and electronic media are facilitated by funds from the APBD. Candidates may no longer advertise themselves in the mass media as before. This regulation automatically reduces the income of mass media and advertising agencies, because for them the election moment is seen as a kind of 'harvest' period. This model of buying and selling pages or news makes the candidates unable to control the KPU because the material about the candidates does not appear in the format of display ads or advertorials but the format of news.

Generally, this kind of practice is also carried out through a contract agreement (Memorandum of Understanding or MoU) with a medium term (in months) or long term (usually per year) with the candidate participating in the election. This bond will bind the newspaper - which will be part of the editorial duties - to plan, report, edit, and publish positive news about clients and integrate the news with other journalistic reports without any discrimination. A case like this was discovered by researchers in the newspapers Duta Masyarakat and Surya.

“When I was still the managing editor, the Regional Head Election was crowded. Yes, we help the region maximise its potential. We sell pages titled ‘Democratic Party’ or whatever, where the news is facilitating or promoting candidates. Not an advertorial, but a page or news. Then, we offer the page or story to the candidate as part of the branding. Usually the agreement uses Mou, pays or buys newspapers, that sort of thing. Then, the newspaper will write the news with such areas. So the contents of the page selection are mostly the results of the MoU, but sometimes there are also those that are not. If there are two candidates, then there is only one contract, the others still have to be loaded for balance. In other words, cover both sides” (YN, interview, 2020).

The 'anomaly' in this trend of practice is the Surya newspaper. FAE, a source, said that this practice was carried out in the 2013 East Java gubernatorial election and the 2015 Surabaya mayoral election. In the 2013 gubernatorial election, Surya signed a contract with one of the candidates. This election was followed by the pair Soekarwo-Saifullah Yusuf, Khofifah Indar Parawansa-Herman Sumawiredja, Bambang DH-Said Abdullah, and Eggi Sudjana-Muhammad Sihat. Meanwhile, during the 2015 Surabaya Mayoral Election, Surya signed a contract with all pairs of candidates, namely Tri Rismaharini-Wishnu Sakti Buana and Rasiyo-Lucy Kurniasari.

“Contracts like this usually take ash. The money was put in a plastic bag haha... So, at that time, I returned to the office with two black plastic bags filled with money. That was my first time buying money bags and plastic bags, haha... But from Bu Risma I didn't get much, because their funds were not big. The big one was from Pak Rasiyo. The writing was even good, in the news Surya only writes about the superior program of each candidate. So it was not too conflicted. There were only two candidates. What was interesting was the East Java gubernatorial election, especially when Pakde Karwo and Khofifah competed again after the 2008 gubernatorial election. Surya's official position is not to participate in reporting on the black campaign to avoid conflict” (FAE, interview, 2020).

This data is essential because this practice can be seen as a very compromising response from a newspaper. In this case, the pursuit of advertising and advertorials at the expense of editorial content seems no longer significant. The Radar Jember case shows that news is no longer treated as a commodity to sell other commodities. In the hands of Radar Jember, news is a commodity that can be sold, just like a newspaper that sells an advertisement column or page. Like the issue of journalists' involvement in advertising, this phenomenon is rarely detected in the journalistic experience of Western countries. McChesney (2004) considers making news to attract advertisements as an attack on the journalism firewall, let alone selling news or pages directly like selling columns or advertising pages.

Schudson (2003) notes that this kind of practice also occurs in the US. As one of the implications of the commercialisation and corporatisation of the media world, many press companies hire business executives to manage their newspapers. For example, in 1995, an executive with experience in food packaging, Mark Willes, was recruited to become Chief Executive of the Los Angeles Times (L.A. Times). Willes openly stated that he would tear down the guardrail that limits the editorial side and the business side (journalistic firewall), if necessary, with a bazooka (a rocket with a close-range target). Willes also campaigned for the need for editors to be involved in formulating marketing strategies with advertising managers and circulation managers and developing projects aimed at pursuing profit, not for journalistic purposes.

This controversy stemmed from the L.A. Times with Staples Corporation. The LA Times has agreed to publish a special edition dedicated to welcoming the building's opening. As compensation, L.A. The Times and Staples Center will share the profits made from advertising sales. Few people inside L.A. The Times knows that a deal has been negotiated between management and marketing. Journalists know nothing and consider it "business as usual"—however, L.A. The Times had to pay the price when this transaction was leaked to the public. The 'heroic' resistance ensued. Journalists argue, how can readers believe that L.A. The Times does balanced reporting on companies it has business relations with? Subsequently, more than 300 LA Times reporters signed a petition demanding the publisher apologise and promise not to do so again. Not only that, L.A. The Times even published a 30,000-word article by media critic David Shaw entitled "*Crossing the Lines*." In his writings, Shaw sees this scandal as the tip of the iceberg of ethical ignorance that threatens journalism's quality, integrity, and reputation (Basen, 2012).

The case of selling pages or news stories can be seen as a direct attack on journalistic ethics. Referring to Altschull (1990), ethics is the formation of moral values and principles about right and wrong. Meanwhile, Altschull conceptualised journalistic ethics as a service to

humanity rather than pursuing journalists' goals. However, Altchull also recognises that what journalists believe to be ethical conduct will affect media content.

This theory explains the actions of Radar Jember and Memorandum, which in the context of journalistic ethics can be seen as journalistic practices that pursue the economic interests of journalists or newspapers rather than the interests of many people, without taking into account the aspects of right and wrong. At this point, the practice of journalism is carried out in a very extreme way and hits the journalistic firewall. Such practices include selling news as well as selling ad columns. In other words, the news is treated as an advertisement.

This case also reflects the emergence of a new pattern of press publishing in maximising revenue by leveraging news operations. At some point, advertorials – although they have the advantage of being able to blur the line between news and advertising – are considered no longer able to meet the needs of advertisers who want their products or interests to be broadcast in the form of news ads. Therefore, what happens is selling advertorials, but going further: selling pages or selling news, as happened in Indopos. Advertisers' products or interests are no longer disguised through advertorials but are treated exactly like news.

This phenomenon can be seen as a sign of the emergence of a time when advertorials - which are already so manipulative - are no longer considered sufficient to pursue profit. No longer disguised as news through advertorial scripts, newspapers now sell news directly without the need to disguise advertising messages through advertorials. This also confirms what was written by Schudson (1984) that "when something appears in the form of news, it has a legitimacy that adverts never have."

Theoretically, this phenomenon strengthens the assumption of the media's political economy perspective, which always sees news as a commodity and places journalists as 'puppets' for media owners. Journalists are always seen to be in the midst of tension between media owners' economic and political interests and the ideological interests of journalism that is oriented to the public interest. This political economy tradition also underlines market and technology acceleration factors, which McChesney (2004) sees as a trigger for the transformation of capitalism into the media world that leads to media conglomeration or centralisation of media ownership.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research shows that the practice of blurring news with advertisements (through advertorials) is quite prevalent in the mass media in Indonesia, or at least in the mass media (newspapers) studied. For economic purposes, in general, mass media managers tend to be permissive (compromise) towards this practice and even tend to consciously use the reputation of advertorial fraud or camouflage as a means of seeking economic gain. Almost all the newspapers studied

demonstrated this trend in some way. The research also points to a practice that goes far beyond simply ignoring the boundaries of news and advertising, namely selling pages under the pretext of smart reporting.

On a macro level, this phenomenon shows how the second pillar of journalistic ethics, namely the separation of news and advertising, or the separation of bulletins and business spaces, has become a crucial problem in journalistic practice in Indonesia. Moreover, this issue is not explicitly regulated in the journalistic code of ethics formulated by various professional journalists and mass media journalists in Indonesia. The journalistic firewall, a concept imagined as a clear barrier between the newsroom and the business space, is not strong enough to contain this practice of obscurity. In the end, a situation like this will hypothetically also impact journalistic independence, which should be positioned as a bulwark to protect the public interest.

Several things are then essential to note in future research on this issue. First, it is related to the type of mass media. Although hypothetically, the same phenomenon is very likely to occur in other types of mass media such as television, radio, or the internet (online media), it is still important to conduct a study or research to find out the extent of the phenomenon issue of journalistic ethics. Second, it relates to the daily journalistic practice of journalists when faced with the tension between the economic interests of their own media organisations and the journalistic ethics that guide their professional behaviour. The complexity of journalistic practice related to this issue is interesting to study further because it is related to various issues such as journalistic independence, public interest, or even the future of journalism in Indonesia.

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