



## Storytelling as a Way of Convincing Audiences in Environmental Journalism

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### Abstract

Indonesian Press will always continue to broadcast environmental news. In terms of journalism, the news must be clear, understandable, and complete. However, the result is not optimal at the meantime. The audience is still unsure with the environmental news they watch, even their emotion is untouchable, and so they can not give their contribution to solve this environmental problem. Based on the fact, it has brought the idea to make storytelling as a solution to convince the audience in environmental news. Before implementing the concept, the writer has conducted a research on storytelling practices concerning forest and land fires (*karhutla*) in *Riau Pos*. *Riau Pos* has received an award from the provincial government and has not made the practices of storytelling in their news. This fact has reinforced the writer to propose storytelling as a convincing purpose in environmental news. The concept leads to a narrative style that shall consider the nature of writing, target of writing, news angles and news languages by presenting the news from the perspective of journalist.

**Keywords:** environmental news, narrative style, journalist point of view, storytelling

### Abstrak

Media pers Indonesia akan terus menyiarkan berita lingkungan hidup. Dari sisi jurnalisme, berita tersebut harus gamblang, jelas, dan tuntas. Namun, sementara ini hasilnya tidak optimal. Khalayak tetap saja tidak yakin dengan berita lingkungan hidup yang sampai kepada mereka. Emosi mereka, bahkan, tidak tersentuh, sehingga tidak bisa berkontribusi dalam menyelesaikan masalah lingkungan hidup. Bertolak dari sini, muncul gagasan untuk menjadikan *storytelling* sebagai cara untuk meyakinkan khalayak dalam jurnalisme lingkungan hidup. Sebelum mengimplementasikan konsep ini, penulis melakukan penelitian tentang praktik *storytelling* dalam penyiaran berita kebakaran hutan dan lahan (*karhutla*) di *Riau Pos*. Ternyata *Riau Pos*, yang pernah memperoleh penghargaan pemerintah provinsi Riau, belum mempraktikkan *storytelling* dalam menyiarkan berita *karhutla*. Kenyataan ini semakin meneguhkan penulis untuk mengusulkan *storytelling* sebagai sebuah seni meyakinkan dalam jurnalisme lingkungan hidup. Konsep ini berujung pada gaya narasi yang mempertimbangkan sifat tulisan, target tulisan, *angle* berita dan bahasa berita dengan penyajian berita dari sudut pandang wartawan.

**Kata kunci:** Jurnalisme lingkungan hidup, *Storytelling*, Gaya narasi, Sudut pandang wartawan.

## Introduction

Agnes or by her complete name Agnes Aristiarini, was a *Kompas* journalist. In 1995 Agnes had expressed her frustration to the public, especially to the *Kompas* readers. Agnes did not see public's anxiety about this problem, even though she had reported the air pollution problem in *Kompas* since long time. "There is no concern, although this newspaper has presented the problem of air pollution for years," Agnes wrote in *Kompas* daily, March 26, 1995, documented in *When the Phenomenon of Journalism is Reflected* (Abrar, 1997: 95).

Agnes's statement to some extent, could be a problem for the journalist profession. Behind that statement, it seems as if it is implied that journalists have not given their contribution to the resolution of the environmental problems. If this is a case, it is obviously that journalists can not be compared with other professions that have given the contribution. The other profession, as written by Victoria J. Tschinkel in *The Rise and Fall of Environmental Expertise*, including those who are doctors, engineers, biologists, and lawyers. She said, "Physicians, engineers, biologists and lawyers have all contributed their talents and prejudices the cause (Tschinkel, 1989: 169). She did not mention the profession of journalists. Does this fact not surprise the journalist?"

This assessment makes sense because writers contribute to arousing environmental awareness in the community. Look for example, Gus Sakai. In a short story entitled "*Kulah*" (small pool) in the collection of short stories titled "*Kaki Yang Terhormat*" (Honorable Feet), he wrote how humans produce waste that can damage the ecosystem of a village. At the end of the short story he wrote:

*Arriving in front of the small pool, he smell again the sting. Marni was frowning. This is like the smell I know, Marni thought. Rolling up her sleeves, she touched the reddish water with her both hands and held it close to his nose. It was only in a second, and Marni's memories flashed back. The professor said, "Humans are making achievements, Marni, stepping into the future. They call it man-made material, but I call it the age of artificial material.*

*Waste! Waste ... where is this?*

*Marny was very angry. She shrieked, "Imaaaa.."*

*Vaguely, cliff wall reflect: "Auntyyyy..." (Sakai, 2012: 7)*

Through the climax of the above story, readers will realize that the waste has gawned the village that was mentioned in the story to be a dangerous place to live in. Becoming dangerous that some of God's creatures have been vasnished, including humans. This awareness seems to be useful for public to give their contribution in solving environmental problems in their respective environments.

On the other hand, what Agnes has tried to broadcast the news regarding the problem of air pollution is at the same line with what the context Everette Dennis has mentioned in "Context: Environmentalism in the System of News", which is to proclaim massive and sustainable environmental problems (Dennis, 1991: 56).

What has happened to *Kompas* readers at that time? Apart from demographic and sociological characteristics of the said *Kompas* readers, it is obviously seen that can not be convinced by Agnes concerning logical consequences of the problem of air pollution. They consider it as a matter of "ordinary", which will be resolved by itself.

In such condition, Harry Surjadi, who is at the present time acting as the coordinator of Greenpeace Indonesia has been appeared. He was once a *Kompas* journalist. In his position, he often provides writing skills training in environmental news to several prospective journalists. His advice is often spread by the word of mouth. It was Acmad Siddik who has published Harry's advice in *Kompasiana*, entitled "Storytelling: An Important Skill for Environmental and Humanitarian Volunteers", Achmad quoted Harry Surjadi's opinion. He said:

*Harry's impressive achievement is when covering an infrastructure development plan that can threaten the environment and the lives of surrounding communities. Through this reportage, the community was moved to protest loudly until finally the infrastructure development was canceled (Siddik, 2017).*

Then what did Harry do when writing environmental news? Or what is the message about writing environmental news?

In the same article, Achmad Siddik quoted Harry's opinion directly: "The reportage is not as simple as 5W+ 1H. It must tell the stories and touch the readers. That is what we need for storytelling in the reportage, and that the writing is inspiring. There is a moral message that must be conveyed to the reader "(Siddik, 2017).

Starting from this reality, the idea arises that storytelling can be used as a way to convince the audiences about the consequences of environmental problems. Strictly speaking, storytelling can be a contributor on how to convince the audiences in environmental journalism.

Storytelling is simply conveying the story to the public. The story can be complemented by pictures and photos. The story must be interesting in order that the listeners love to hear it. Through the interesting story, they can receive moral messages in the story.

However, a story usually contain events. According to Acep Iwan Saidi in *Indonesian Symbolic Contemporary Art Narrative*, "there is no story if there are no events" (Saidi, 2008: 23). From the story, it is expected that the listeners and readers can capture the storyline and to get the moral messages.

Ideally, this way of storytelling can be used in reporting on forest and land fires in Riau. If this method shall be used, the audience logically shall understand very good of the chronology of karhutla in Riau and shall obtain its moral messages. From here, it is expected that the forest and land fires in Riau shall not occur repeatedly.

However, the reality shows that forest and land fires in Riau, according to Wininda Qusnul Khotimah in her thesis entitled *The Process of Environmental Journalism in Newspapers: Descriptive Studies in Editorial in Riau Pos About the Preaching of Forest Fires and Land in 2017*, is an environmental problem that has been existing since 1997 / 1998 (Khotim the audiences did not get moral messages from forest dan land fires news. If this is a case, there are certainly many things that need to be considered. One of them is how to report about forest and land fires in Riau Province.

According to Wininda Qusnul Khotimah, reporting on forest and land fires is an environmental issue which is the main concern of the *Riau Pos* newspaper. The attention of *Riau Pos* was obviously great that they have received an award from Riau Provincial Government as a media that plays importing role in supporting forest and land fires handling operation in 2016 (Khotimah, 2017: 9).

At this point, we are curious to know what *Riau Pos* has broadcasted concerning forest and land fires? How did *Riau Pos* convince their audience through their forest dan land fires news? The author will discuss the answers to these two questions in the following description.

## Theoretical Framework

All this time, the narrative, academically is in the realm of literature. When journalism borrows narratives to produce more human news, journalism borrows the concept of narration. As a result, the 5W + 1H element morphed into: (i) storyline, (ii) character, (iii) story setting (iv) story sequence, (v) motive, and (vi) narrative. Narrative is a substitute for "how" in 5W + 1H. These six elements, said Ana Nadhya Abrar in *How to Write Biography: Journalism Perspective*, is a modification of standard journalistic questions, including what, who, where, why, and how (Abrar, 2010: 76).

Instead of "how", the narrative certainly must explain how the focus of the event occurred. Narrative, taking the opinion of Chris Barker in *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, is storytelling. Further he said: Narrative is arranged and sequential narrative that claim themselves as an event recording. Narrative is a structured form that a story is used to propose an explanation of how the world works. Narrative gives us a framework of understanding and rules of reference about how social order is formed and by doing this, shall give us the answers to the questions: how we should live (Barker, 2005: 41).

In the context of forest and land fires news, narrative must provide answers about how it should prevent forest and land fires. Until here the problem arises, does an answer like this shall not interfere with the objectivity? The answer can be seen through the writing of Veronica (quoting Capella & Jamieson) entitled "Politics of Journalism, Not Political Virgin" in the *Response Journal*, Volume 11, Number 01, July 1996:

..... ..the emphasis on the narrative style of journalism is not to make mistakes or accuse someone with mistakes but it is crushed by accomplished news makers (Veronica, 1996: 23).

The quote shows that journalism's narrative style is legitimate. It remains now how to lower the narrative style in the form of a more operational concept. For this reason, the author borrows the characteristics of the news. The characteristics of the news that support the narrative, as written in *Editorial Politics: Reporter Work Guidelines*, include: (i) the nature of writing, (ii) writing targets, (iii) angle, and (iv) language (Azis, 1992: 55). Evaluating these four traits in the forest and land fires news in *Riau Pos* allow the author to make a critical

reflection on how to convince the audience that is practiced by the newspaper.

### Material and Methodology

In evaluating, the author made three news items in forest and land fires news, broadcasted by Riau Pos on 11, 12, and 13 January 2017 as research objects. The news includes: (1) "Restorasi Gambut Tahun 2017 Seluas 400 Ribu Hektar" (400,000 hectares of 2017 Peatlands Restoration,), (2) *Pangdam Instruksikan Mulai Pencegahan* (Commander of the Military Regional Instructed to Start Prevention), and (3) *Gunakan Pesawat Tempur Pantau Hotspot* (Use a Fighter Jet to Monitor Hotspot). These three news items deliberately chosen by the author starting by the recommendation of Wininda Cusnul Khotimah. She said, "This news is interesting to study as it is written in accordance with the books related to environmental journalism" (interview, June 20, 2017).

The three stories above were appeared as a result of collective work in the newsroom. To produce the news, reporters only gather the facts and write news. The results of their work are assessed by the editor, and are decided to be published by the managing editor or deputy editor in chief. Reporter has no power to determine the news which is worth

to broadcasting or not. If then an assessment appears on how to convince the public concerning forest and land fires problem in the relevant news, it shall be the concern of *Riau Pos* as a whole. It shall no longer the convincing way that reporters personally should take. Strictly speaking, the convincing way that reporters go to melt becomes the way taken by *Riau Pos*.

### Results and Discussion

Referring to the characteristics of the news that supports the above narrative, the author conducted a content analysis of the three research objects. The author made the four special characteristics of the message. This is in accordance with the opinion of Ole R. Holsti in *Content Analysis for Social Sciences and Humanitis*, which says that content analysis is "a technique for drawing conclusions by identifying various specific characteristics of a message objectively and systematically" (Holsti, 1969: 2).

After identifying these four special characteristics, the author obtained the following data:

**Table 1: Research Results**

	First News	Second News	Third News
<b>Nature of Writing</b>	<b>Informative</b> , told about facts of the limited meeting of the President of Indonesia and some of his ministers <b>Persuasive</b> , trying to influence the audience by expressing its attitude about restoration of peatlands	<b>Informative</b> , told about the working visit of the Bukit Barisan Military Commander I General Lodewyck Pusung to Pekanbaru <b>Persuasive</b> , trying to influence the audience by expressing his attitude about preventing forest and land fires	<b>Informative</b> , told about the contents of the press release issued by Roesmin Nurjadin Airport Commander, Marsma TNI Henri Alfiandi. <b>Persuasive</b> , trying to influence the audience in order that they shall not be worried concerning forest and land fires. The problem is, his subordinate shall always do the patroly to monitor hotspots of forest and land fires
<b>Writing Target</b>	Expressing views on peatlands restoration.	Expressing opinions on how to prevent forest and land fires.	Expressing the attitude that shall be taken to prevent forest and land fires.
<b>Angle</b>	Single	Single	Single
<b>Language</b>	Thrifty, clear, with a fast description	Thrifty, clear, with a fast description	Thrifty, clear, with a fast description

Data shows that all news is informative and persuasive. However, persuasive efforts are closer to "orders". There is no visible intention by *Riau Pos* to empathize the audience who shall feel and experience negative effects of forest and land fires every year. The sensitivity of *Riau Pos* was not seen concerning environmental riots emerged from forest and land fires. This environmental riot, in fact, has been long pointed out by some experts. One of them

is Teuku Jacob. He, in 2001, in *Difficult Years: Lets Love Indonesia* has written as follows:

Since April 97, Indonesia has slowly but surely held a "smoke confrontation" against Malaysia and Singapore, even Brunei Darusalamam, the Philippines and Muang Thai, friends of Asean. This ecological confrontation seems to be "successful", because they are forced to close the

airport, cancel the flights, reduce trade and factory activities, and education and travel (Jacob, 2001: 35).

The above data also shows that the target of the three articles is similar: expressing opinions about preventing forest and land fires and restoring peatlands. Their opinion is correct. However, there is no comprehensive explanation of that. Even though, the truth shall appear when it has been explained.

The above data also shows that the angle of all news is a single angle. There is no intention for *Riau Pos* to display more than one angle. Even if the "information package" is broken down into two or three angles, the audience shall be able to obtain comprehensive information about the importance of forest fire prevention and peatland restoration. Moreover, every major resource person who appears in every news is an important individual at the national and provincial levels. As a result, the audience feels mediocre. It is impossible that they are confused. Isn't that the forest and land fire in Riau has been already happening every year since 1997/1998?

The above data also shows that the language of the said three news is a frugal, clear language, with a quick description. Language like this is not able to bring the audiences to involve in reported events. This language model actually encourages the audiences to immediately finish their reading and switch to other news or other work.

This fact shows that it is not easy for the three news to touch the emotions of the audiences. Indeed, all the above news centers on the figures involved in the reported events. News is managed to focus on the characters in the events. However, the narrative is not as revealed in the explanation above: it provides an explanation of how the world works and provides a framework for understanding, and how social order is formed.

If this condition has been achieved, the forest and land fires news actually has been considered to educate the audiences. Educating the audiences becomes the orientation of almost all disciplines when discussing environmental issues. Engineers, said Sheldon K. Friedlander in a paper entitled "Environmental Issues: Implications for Engineering Design and Education", have learned about the environment as part of its engineering education so that later it can participate in community environmental education (Friedlander, 1989: 180).

However, with the above three news, it is hard to expect things to change for better. It is hard to avoid forest and land fires. The problem is that those involved in preventing forest fires were not only government officials. The ones who have to

play more roles are the people who will be negatively affected by the forest fires. They have, so far, been the victims of forest and land fires. It is time for them to get enlightenment for example about what they can do to reduce forest and land fires.

Up to this point, the problem arises that presenting forest and land fires by *Riau Pos* is not only a matter of following a handbook in environmental journalism, but also about communication with its audience. The forest and land fires news must touch the emotions of the audiences. To touch their emotions, *Riau Pos* needs to fight for storytelling with all the above followings description.

In contrast to the above results, Melisa Indriana Putri, in a paper entitled "Environmental Journalism in Online Media Main Stream and Citizen Journalism in the Digital Age: Framing of Flood Coverage in Indonesia at *Detik.com* and *Suarakomunitas.net*" has tried to compare how coverage of environmental journalism in mainstream online media with community media. The results of this study indicate that reporting on mainstream online media tends to package environmental news in order to carry out the supervisory function, while citizen journalism tends to try to provide environmental care education efforts to its audience (Putri, 2017). Similarly, this research also emphasizes the position of journalists in packaging environmental journalism as the dissemination to determine whether the writing is able to arouse audiences or not. The results also show that the mainstream media of *detik.com* tends to maximize the function of environmental supervision, while *suarakomunitas.net* focuses on the educational function of citizens.

We maybe need to learn about applying a more personal but objective style of environmental journalism. A study of environmental journalism in the Chinese context, for example, mentions that journalists who are participants in research have a strong standing point when reporting on environmental news. According to Jingrong Tong (2015) in the article entitled "Being Objective With a Personal Perspective: How do Environmental Journalists at Two Chinese Newspapers Articulate and Practice Objectivity", journalists feel that it means nothing if they make reports and only present facts without making personal interpretations. Reports related to the environment must be able to notify readers not only about what is happening, but also to understand what is happening. In other words,

journalists have an educational role as well as environmental guards at the same time.

One way to educate the public without intending to patronize them, can be done in the style of storytelling. With this technique, audiences will not only feel the importance of environmental problems, but also shall understand what has really happened.

## Conclusion

The way of broadcasting forest and land fires news by *Riau Pos* certainly can not be generalized as the way all Indonesian press media broadcast environmental news. However, *Riau Pos* method coupled with Agnes Aristiarini's concern about the attitude of *Kompas* readers about the problem of air pollution at the beginning of this writing seems to be a momentum for the Indonesian press media to improve. For what objectives? To reformulate the ways to convince the audiences about the negative impacts of environmental damage and degradation.

This attitude is in line with the attitude of the state to reflect the direction of its future development. This question was observed by Surna Tjahja Djajadiningrat and Sutanto Hardjolukito in *Demi Bumi, Demi Kita* (For the Sake of the Earth, For Our Sake) as follows:

*We need development that prioritizes human dignity, which is centered on human growth and provides convincing answers to the problems we face, namely the complex social, economic and environmental aspects. We need new indicators to direct development and new measures for development progress. Sustainable growth must be inclusive, socially just and protect the ecosystem and climate on the face of the earth (Djajaningrat, 2013)*

The community deserves the results of development that prioritizes human dignity. They also deserve information as a convincing result in environmental journalism. Last but not least, it is necessary for press media to consider broadcasting news from the perspective of journalists in broadcasting environmental news. This method is unusual in Indonesian press media. However, this method can better guarantee the implementation of the idea of storytelling in broadcasting environmental news.

At this point, there are questions about the objectivity of the news, how will the objectivity of the environmental news be broadcasted in the press? To answer this question, it is necessary to cite the

opinion of Meenakshi Gigi Durham in the May 1998<sup>th</sup> issue of the *Journal of Communication Theory*: Journalistic objectivity has always been a slippery notion; its definition has a variety of years and continues to be the locus of considerable debate (Durham, 1998: 118). This quote shows that we do not need to worry too much about the objectivity of the news. The thing is, the objectivity of the news shall change according to the passage of time. Moreover, the debate about objectivity shall never be finished. As long as the news can convey ideas about how the audiences can participate in solving environmental problems, that is more than enough.

The practice of storytelling in environmental journalism shall not only touch the people, but also increase the presence of journalists. The audiences shall assume that journalists have contributed maximally in solving the problem of living environment. People shall get other stories about reporters: contribute positively to solving environmental problems. Their works obtain the appropriate appreciation.

In this context, it is necessary for the higher education of journalism institutions to teach their students about the practice of storytelling in preparing environmental news. The author believes that they shall not have difficulty to do this. Are they not used to "borrowing" the concept of science or other techniques to develop the journalism they teach?

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The author also wants to thank to Pamela Clare for the contents of the story in her novel entitled *Strong Evidence*. In the story, she has explained the position of a journalist who broadcasted the news from the first person's perspective. It turned out that the position made the news not only touch the emotions of her friends in the newsroom, but also touched the emotions of the police investigating a murder case. The success of this journalist motivates the writer to propose a journalist's perspective in broadcasting

environmental news. It is an integral part of storytelling practice as a convincing art in environmental journalism.

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