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Cultural Shock for Journalists Transitioning from Print to Online Media

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ABSTRAK

Munculnya budaya baru juga terjadi seiring era disrupsi digital. Media digital menjadikan jurnalisme mengalami transformasi. Dalam konteks tersebut, teknologi dapat mempengaruhi jurnalisme dalam empat hal yaitu: a) cara kerja para jurnalis dalam mencari informasi; b) sifat konten berita; c) struktur organisasi media di dalam ruang redaksi: dan d) sifat hubungan antara media, reporter dengan sejumlah publik seperti khalayak, kompetitor, sumber berita, sponsor, serta regulasi yang dapat mengendalikan pers. Selain kompetensi para jurnalis, kultur organisasi juga mengalami perubahan seiring upaya untuk beradaptasi dengan digitalisasi. Perubahan budaya dapat dialami oleh jurnalis yang berpindah dari media cetak ke media online. Para jurnalis tersebut harus beradaptasi dengan suasana, cara dan budaya kerja baru. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data menggunakan observasi dan wawancara tatap muka dengan informan. Subjek penelitian dipilih berdasarkan kriteria informan yang dibutuhkan dengan menggunakan sampling purposif, yaitu jurnalis di Kota Medan yang pindah dari media cetak ke media online. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian, ketiga informan mengalami perubahan budaya paling signifikan pada suasana kerja serta cara dan budaya kerja. Perubahan budaya dapat dilihat melalui dimensi culture shock; affective, behavior, dan cognitive. Proses ketiga informan dalam menghadapi perubahan budaya kerja, dapat dianalisis menggunakan 4 tahapan dalam culture shock, yakni: Honeymoon Stage, Rejection or Regression Stage, Adjustment or Negotiation Stage, Mastery Stage.
Kata Kunci: culture shock, media online, jurnalis, digitalisasi

ABSTRACT

The emergence of a new culture also occurs in the era of digital disruption. Digital media makes journalism undergo a transformation. In this context, technology can affect journalism in four ways, namely: a) the way journalists work in finding information; b) the nature of the news content; c) the organizational structure of the media in the newsroom; and d) the nature of the relationship between the media, reporters and a number of publics such as audiences, competitors, news sources, sponsors, and regulations that can control the press. In addition to the competence of journalists, organizational culture has also changed in line with efforts to adapt to digitalization. Cultural changes can be experienced by journalists who move from print media to online media. The journalists must adapt to the atmosphere, way and new work culture. This study used a qualitative descriptive method with data collection techniques using observation and face-to-face interviews with informants. The research subjects were selected based on the required informant criteria using purposive sampling, namely journalists in Medan City who moved from print media to online media. Based on the research results, the third informant experienced the most significant cultural changes in the work atmosphere and work methods and culture. Cultural change can be seen through the dimension of culture shock; affective, behavioral, and cognitive. The process of the three informants in dealing with changes in work culture, can be analyzed using 4 stages in culture shock, namely: Honeymoon Stage, Rejection or Regression Stage, Adjustment or Negotiation Stage, Mastery Stage.
Keyword: culture shock, online media, journalist, digitalization

1. Introduction

The rapid development of technology and communication creates a demand for understanding new cultures, accompanied by differences in language, customs, and communication styles. One of the reasons for "culture shock" among individuals who move to a new area is the difference in communication styles and a lack of understanding of the local culture (Nasrullah, 2012). Fundamentally, "culture shock" often occurs in individuals who migrate and start a new life in an area with a culture different from their own, where the cultural situation and conditions are distinct.

The emergence of a new culture also occurs alongside the advent of the digital disruption era. One of the challenges faced in this era, particularly in the field of journalism, is instant journalism. Instant journalism refers to the practice of quoting sources of information directly, for instance, from social media platforms. Another issue that needs to be mentioned is the emergence of hoaxes (https://www.liputan6.com/).

According to Marhamah & Fauzi (2021), digital media has led to a transformation in journalism. In this context, technology can influence journalism in four ways: a) the methods journalists use to gather information; b) the nature of news content; c) the organizational structure of media within the editorial scope; d) the relationship between the media and reporters with various parties such as the audience, competitors, news sources, sponsors, and regulatory bodies governing the media. One significant change affecting journalists' work is the digitization of content.

From this condition, concerns arise regarding digital journalism's focus on speed, sometimes at the expense of information accuracy. The challenges in the digital journalism era are not limited to keeping up with technology that is increasingly integrated with journalistic practices. It is also about preparing journalists to be more technologically literate, competent, and skilled to seize opportunities in computational models where software plays a dominant role (Marhamah & Fauzi, 2021).

In addition to journalists' ability to adapt to digitalization, it is also important to consider changes in organizational culture influenced by media technology. Disseminating information through various platforms requires content to be continuously updated. This condition can increase the level of uncertainty among journalists in terms of information gathering.

The demand for a work rhythm that requires content to be continuously updated limits journalists' time to verify sources or facts obtained. This situation encourages collaboration between journalists from different companies to obtain news, which can simultaneously alleviate the level of uncertainty.

Cultural changes are not only experienced by individuals who move to new areas but can also be felt by journalists transitioning from print to online media. These journalists must adapt to new environments, methods, and work cultures. Based on the above explanation, the researcher is interested in examining how journalists experience culture shock and how they overcome it.

1.1.   Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to process and collect qualitative data through observations and face-to-face interviews. The data collection involved open-ended and unstructured questions, allowing the informants to express their perspectives freely. The research subjects, selected through purposive sampling, consisted of journalists in Medan who have transitioned from print media to online media. The purposive sampling ensured that the selected informants met specific criteria relevant to the study's objectives, enhancing the relevance and richness of the data collected.

The data analysis followed a thematic approach, which involved coding the transcribed interviews to identify patterns and themes related to the cultural shifts experienced by journalists. Initial coding was performed to break down the data into manageable segments, which were then grouped into categories based on recurring themes, such as changes in work environment, work culture, and perceptions of digital journalism.

Subsequently, these categories were refined into broader themes that provided a comprehensive understanding of the culture shock phenomenon.

Validity was ensured through data triangulation. The researcher cross-referenced interview data with observations and existing literature on digital journalism and cultural transitions. This triangulation provided multiple perspectives on the same phenomena, allowing the researcher to validate the findings through convergence of evidence from different sources. Additionally, member checks were employed, where key findings were shared with some of the informants to confirm the accuracy and resonance of the results with their experiences.

By integrating these strategies, the study maintained a rigorous approach to data analysis, ensuring that the findings reliably and validly represent the experiences of journalists transitioning from print to online media in Medan.

1.2. Results and Discussion

This study has three informants: Donny, Andika Syahputra, and Rahmat Utomo. According to the criteria, these informants are journalists who have recently transitioned from print media to online media. The first informant, Donny, is currently an editor at IDN Times. Donny moved from print media to seek better prospects. He felt that print media was struggling to compete, and his previous employer had not yet taken their online media efforts seriously.

Moving to online media introduced a new work environment for Donny. Whereas he previously had to go to the office, he now works from anywhere and no longer experiences the office atmosphere. He finds the work environment quieter now, with all communication and coordination conducted through WhatsApp or Zoom, including with the head office in Jakarta. Evaluations are conducted monthly, and weekly activity reports are sent via email every Monday, followed by a Zoom meeting with the head office.

This shift also brought changes to his working hours. Previously, Donny had a regular daily schedule, but now his working hours are very flexible, with a daily requirement to edit 15 news articles. Working in online media means Donny has to be on standby at all times and work faster. This was a challenge for him when adapting to the online media work system. In print media, Donny only edited five news articles a day, whereas in online media, there seems to be no limit. He once edited 25 news articles in one day, working from 6 AM to midnight. Occasionally, Donny also helps reporters if the target of 15 articles is not met.

Initially, Donny enjoyed the flexibility and ability to work from anywhere. However, he eventually felt bored with this work culture. He considered returning to an office setting with fixed working hours and a more relaxed pace of editing. However, Donny realized that this was just a fleeting feeling and not feasible in the digital age, which demands more mobility. Over time, Donny adapted to all the changes.

The second informant is Andika Syahputra, an editor at Detik.com. Before joining Detik.com and becoming an editor, Andika was a reporter for a print media outlet and several online media platforms. Thus, Andika can provide perspectives from both the reporter and editor roles. Andika left print media because it showed no intention of transitioning to online media, despite his offer to manage it. This misalignment of visions led to his departure.

Unlike Donny, Andika did not feel a significant difference in the work environment. Detik.com has an office and regular working hours, similar to print media. As an editor, Andika no longer has to go out into the field. A stronger sense of camaraderie also developed because his colleagues were former fellow reporters.

As an online media editor, Andika's speed is crucial. However, he did not experience significant difficulties because there are enough editors and a proper division of working hours. Andika works with four other editors, and the working hours are divided into two shifts: the first from 8 AM to 5 PM and the second from 1 PM to 9 PM. The sufficient number of editors and good camaraderie make work division easy.

Although they have an office, communication with reporters is conducted via WhatsApp, as reporters are not required to come to the office. Evaluations are done face-to-face once a week, usually on Fridays.

Andika did not take long to adapt to the online media work culture, only one to two days. He experienced a culture shock when he first became an online media reporter. In print media, he had ample time to write, whereas in online media, for event news, for example, he only had a maximum of 20 minutes to send the news from the start of coverage.

The third informant is Rahmat Utomo, a contributor to Kompas.com. Before joining Kompas.com, Rahmat was a reporter for a print media outlet and an online media platform. The need for new challenges and the evolution of online media drove Rahmat to leave print media. One change Rahmat noticed was the loss of the family-like atmosphere he previously experienced in print media. He used to enjoy activities like pooling money for sick colleagues, going on outings, and having coffee together. However, he no longer experiences these in online media.

Like Donny and Andika, Rahmat had set working hours and job responsibilities in print media. He was required to arrive in the morning, leave in the evening, and produce one feature story daily, with ample time to work on it. In his previous online media job, Rahmat was asked to produce 5-7 news articles daily, with a maximum of 30-45 minutes for event news. This caused Rahmat to experience culture shock. Previously, he worked according to the media's projections and agenda, but when he moved to his first online media job, Rahmat had to handle all issues in North Sumatra alone. He had never dealt with the police or chased news before, and now he had to gather news for an entire province quickly. This led Rahmat to leave that online media job.

After moving to Kompas.com, Rahmat no longer experienced these difficulties. Kompas.com has an ideal number of media personnel, so the division of coverage areas among reporters is proportional. Moving to online media also taught Rahmat to expand his network. Building communication with senior reporters and PR officers helped Rahmat adapt and eventually ease his work.

Rahmat took 6-12 months to adapt to the online media work rhythm, which he considers relatively quick for a print media reporter with limited field experience. The work environment also affects work militancy. Working without going to the office and meeting colleagues face-to-face made Rahmat take the initiative to build communication with seniors for discussions and closeness.

Donny, Andika, and Rahmat did not have difficulty adapting to the devices used to support the speed of news production. Moreover, all three were able to dispel the stigma of online media as instant media. Despite the demand for speed, the three informants adhered to journalistic ethics and the discipline of verification, which is a journalist's obligation.

The three informants also do not condone copying news solely from social media. At IDN Times, according to Donny, if they want to use photos or videos from public figures' social media accounts, they must still request and obtain permission from the person concerned. They all hope that journalists will adhere to journalistic ethics and not merely chase clicks and traffic. The challenge, according to Andika, is how the media can enlighten and correct the information circulating in society.

Discussion

Based on the research findings, the three informants experienced the most significant cultural changes in their work environment, as well as in their methods and work culture. Theoretically, these cultural changes can be analyzed through the dimensions of culture shock according to Ward (2001), known as the ABCs of Culture Shock:

a. Affective

This dimension relates to feelings and emotions, which can be positive or negative. In this study, the affective dimension concerns the changes in the work environment experienced by the informants. Two informants felt that the work environment in online media was quieter and lacked the strong sense of camaraderie found in print media. In contrast, one informant did not notice a difference in the sense of camaraderie because his current colleagues were former fellow reporters.

b. Behavior

This dimension relates to cultural learning and the development of social skills. In this dimension, the informants adapted to changes in work methods and culture. The informants learned to report, write, and edit news more quickly, producing a minimum of 3-5 articles per day.

c. Cognitive

This dimension is the result of affective and behavioral aspects, which is the change in an individual's perception of ethnic identity and values due to cultural contact. While working in print media, the informants had or heard negative stigmas about online media, such as the belief that online journalism work is easier than print journalism. However, after joining online media, this perception changed. The informants realized that online journalism work is also challenging because it requires speed.

The process of the three informants in facing cultural changes can be analyzed using the four stages of culture shock:

1. Honeymoon Stage

Individuals who have just entered a new culture feel amazed and enthusiastic about their new situation. In this phase, the informants were happy to join online media, fulfilling their desires.

2. Rejection or Regression Stage

In this stage, fatigue from the previous phase begins to be felt physically. Individuals experiencing this stage start to notice the differences in the new culture they are facing. In this phase, the informants felt more intense fatigue when they first moved to online media. Previously, they had regular working hours and more extended writing time, but in online media, working hours became flexible, and writing time shorter. The informants also occasionally felt nostalgic for the methods and work culture of print media, though this was only a fleeting desire.

3. Adjustment or Negotiation Stage

This stage is when individuals slowly begin to adapt to their new culture. They still recognize the differences between their original and new cultures, but by meeting new people and learning about the culture, they start to adapt. In this phase, the informants began managing their time and expanding their networks.

4. Mastery Stage

The mastery stage is when individuals fully understand and settle into their new culture. Not many people reach this stage.

The informants' adaptation process can be analyzed as follows:

- Donny: Initially enjoyed the flexibility of online media but later felt bored and nostalgic for the print media culture. However, he adapted over time, learning to manage his flexible schedule and high-speed work demands.
- Andika: Did not feel a significant difference in the work environment due to the structured office setting at Detik.com. His experience as both a reporter and editor helped him quickly adapt to the online media culture.
- Rahmat: Experienced culture shock due to the high-speed demands of online media, which differed from his previous experience in print media. However, after joining Kompas.com, he adapted by expanding his network and learning from senior reporters.

The ABCs of Culture Shock and the four stages of adaptation illustrate the informants' experiences and adaptation strategies in transitioning from print to online media.

These experiences align with findings from similar studies in different contexts, such as those by Sue Robinson (2011) and Nikki Usher (2014), who explored the impacts of digital transformation on journalism practices and organizational structures.

In this study, the affective dimension highlighted changes in the work environment, with informants noting a quieter, more individualistic atmosphere in online media compared to the camaraderie of print journalism. This mirrors observations in Robinson's (2011) research, where the shift to participatory online news has disrupted traditional newsroom dynamics, leading to more fragmented work environments. Similarly, Usher (2014) found that journalists at The New York Times faced emotional challenges such as anxiety and frustration due to the rapid pace of digital news production, which parallels the affective experiences of the informants in this study.

The behavioral dimension in this study reflects journalists' adaptation to new work methods, including faster reporting and editing. Robinson's (2011) analysis of participatory online news found that journalists had to acquire new skills such as multitasking and managing real-time audience interactions, requiring significant behavioral changes. Usher (2014) also documented the shift towards mastering digital storytelling techniques and increased engagement through social media, indicating a broader trend where journalists must continuously adapt their behaviors to meet the demands of digital journalism.

The cognitive dimension in this study describes shifts in journalists' perceptions of online media, moving from viewing it as an easier alternative to print journalism to recognizing its unique challenges, such as the need for speed and technological proficiency. This cognitive realignment is similarly reflected in Robinson's (2011) work, where journalists had to redefine their professional identities in response to evolving roles that integrate more dynamic, audience-driven processes. Usher (2014) observed that journalists at The New York Times had to reconcile traditional journalistic values with new digital practices, reshaping their understanding of what constitutes quality journalism in the digital era.

The adaptation processes outlined in this study, which follow the four stages of culture shock—Honeymoon, Rejection, Adjustment, and Mastery—are consistent with findings in other contexts. Robinson (2011) noted that journalists' adaptation to participatory news required embracing new workflows and collaborative practices, often involving initial enthusiasm followed by challenges and gradual adjustment. Usher (2014) highlighted the resilience of journalists who, despite initial culture shock, learned to thrive in digital environments through continuous learning and adaptation. This adaptability is crucial, as it allows journalists to navigate the complexities of digital transformation while maintaining their professional integrity and effectiveness.

The findings from this study, when compared with similar research, underscore the global nature of cultural shifts in journalism as the industry moves further into the digital age. These comparisons highlight the need for journalists to engage in ongoing skill development and for news organizations to foster supportive environments that facilitate adaptation. Recommendations include the implementation of formal training programs, the promotion of collaborative work cultures, and the integration of ethical guidelines that balance the demand for speed with the need for accuracy and quality in reporting.

In conclusion, the parallels between this study and similar research in other contexts reveal that while the specifics of cultural change may vary, the overarching challenges and adaptation strategies are widely shared across the journalism industry. By embracing these insights, media organizations can better support their journalists through the transition, ultimately enhancing the quality and resilience of digital journalism practices worldwide.

The cultural changes experienced by journalists transitioning from print to online media have significant implications for journalistic practice and the quality of reporting in the digital era. As journalists adapt to a faster-paced work environment with flexible hours and increased output demands, there is a risk of prioritizing speed over accuracy, leading to a potential decline in reporting quality. The shift from collaborative newsroom environments to more isolated, remote work settings can also impact the depth of editorial oversight and peer review, crucial elements for maintaining high standards in journalism.

Moreover, the emphasis on audience engagement and real-time updates can pressure journalists to produce content that caters to clicks rather than in-depth, well-researched stories. This trend may result in a focus on sensationalism or the rapid dissemination of unverified information, undermining public trust in the media. To counter these challenges, media organizations need to reinforce journalistic ethics, invest in training that

emphasizes accuracy alongside speed, and create workflows that support thorough fact-checking and editorial collaboration even in digital formats. These measures can help maintain the integrity and quality of reporting as journalism continues to evolve in the digital landscape.

Conclusion

Journalists transitioning from print media to online media in this study experienced culture shock in three areas: changes in the work environment (affective), changes in work culture (behavior), and changes in perceptions and values (cognitive). Specifically:
1. Affective: The work environment became more individualistic.
2. Behavior: The work culture became faster-paced.
3. Cognitive: The perception that being an online journalist is not easy, contrary to the existing stigma among journalists.

However, the most significant cultural changes felt by the journalists were in the work environment and work culture. The culture shock experienced by the journalists in this study followed four stages:
1. Honeymoon Stage: Journalists were happy to join online media, feeling excited and enthusiastic about the new opportunity.
2. Rejection or Regression Stage: Journalists began to feel fatigued with the new work rhythm and the faster pace required by online media.
3. Adjustment or Negotiation Stage: Journalists gradually adapted to the new work culture, managing their time better, and learning new skills.
4. Mastery Stage: Journalists eventually mastered the online media culture, becoming proficient and comfortable in their new environment.

To support journalists and media organizations facing similar transitions, the following concrete recommendations are offered:
1. Implement comprehensive training that equips journalists with digital skills, including multimedia storytelling, data analytics, and social media engagement, while reinforcing the importance of journalistic ethics and accuracy.
2. Establish mentorship programs and peer support networks to help journalists navigate the emotional and professional challenges of transitioning to online media, fostering a sense of community and collaboration.
3. Create flexible work policies that accommodate the diverse needs of journalists, such as remote work options and flexible hours, while also ensuring that editorial oversight and quality control are maintained.
4. Invest in technology that aids in fact-checking, content management, and collaborative workflows to streamline processes without compromising the quality of reporting.
5. Develop clear ethical guidelines and best practices that balance the demands of speed with the need for accuracy, ensuring that journalists are equipped to produce reliable and trustworthy content in the digital era.

By implementing these recommendations, media organizations can better support their journalists through the transition to online media, enhancing both the quality of reporting and the well-being of their teams in the evolving digital landscape.

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