Managing Social Media Contents as the Digital Journalism Practice in the Indonesian EFL Students Context

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ABSTRACT

Technological developments in this digital era have changed the way people get information, both formal news and entertainment. This affects the nature of journalism which was previously asynchronous into real-time. The rapid flow of information demands English department students to be proficient in processing information and produces news content especially through digital platforms such as social media. This study seeks to answer a question: How did students manage social media as the practice of digital journalism? Experiential qualitative research method was applied to gather the data and its results were presented qualitatively. It was found that there were five steps in managing social media as the practice of digital journalism, namely: (1) deciding kind of timeless or real time news, (2) determining the news columns, (3) presenting the institution identity through color theme and layout, (4) distributing tasks and (5) implementing the news production.

1. Introduction

Human communication has been revolutionized in this 21st century. The process has hastened and propelled forward at exceptional pace. People are now walking around with devices capable of connecting them with anyone in the world in a matter of seconds. Over the last two decades, there has been a massive increase in mobile communication devices capable of sharing information in the form of multimedia, resulting in the democratization of digital content production or digital journalism. As the twenty-first century progresses, different types of journalists and media outlets evolve in response to this digital journalism trend.

According to Jones & Salter (145), digital journalism is a modern style of journalism in which editorial information is provided over the internet rather than through print or broadcast. It disseminates information such as current-events news and features. Further, Steensen & Westlund (136) stated that digital news enables interaction and conversation on a scale that paper cannot offer. People may leave comments on articles and create discussion boards to discuss certain issues. Before the emergence of the internet, it was hard to have a spontaneous debate amongst readers who had never met. People may now add to the story and connect with others who wish to debate the

issue. Young people in this digital era needs to equip themselves with this digital literacy in order to adapt in this information era. The rapid flow of information demands English department students to be proficient in processing information and produces news content especially through digital platforms such as social media.

Digitalization, which is marked by technological advances in various aspects, demands higher education to respond positively to the adoption of technology in learning activities that can improve the learning to be relevant with the advances (Kim, et al, 11). Students these days, who are frequently referred as "digital natives" (Prensky, 45), are highly engaged with the latest apps, social networking sites or social media, and other communication tools that take advantage of this shift and the multimodality of these modern, always-on, instant communication options. According to Galvin & Greenhow (143), young people are prolific writers in social media and access it multiple times daily, and some of them even appear to be citizen journalists (Yoanita, Hadi, Aritonang, & Setiawan, 25) reporting flash news through their digital media. This digital media is considered a multipurpose medium for education because it can be used "anytime and anywhere" (Garrison, Anderson, and Acher, 453). This practice has strengthened language learning (Gavenila, Wulandari, Renandya, 147).

Although some researches have addressed negative impacts of the use of social media for students such as cyber-bullying, depression, reduced academic achievement (Kelly, at al., 23; Chen et al, 56), recent scholars in various fields also emphasize some possible benefits of integrating social media into the learning process. Therefore, a training or coaching to assist students in producing valid and reliable contents through digital platform are required. When they are equipped with decent skills in writing contents using digital platform, young people can gain access to more engaging and authentic writing opportunities. One example by Chen (45) who conducted a study in which he recruited a group of teenage Taiwanese learners to act as citizen journalists and create news stories on themes of interest to them. The affordances and restrictions of this multimodal writing assignment were assessed using an open-ended questionnaire that students completed at the conclusion of the semester. Students perceived structuring material to generate a news and conducting interview as the top two affordances from this practice.

In Indonesian context, scholars highlight the benefits of incorporating journalism practice in the EFL context (Azhar, 45; Aritonang, Yoanita, Hadi, Setyawan, 56). However, the practical application of this model is limited to the use of blog-type platform and long writing form such as Kompasiana, or Blogspot, and the use of social media as a platform to conduct journalism practice is still under researched. Responding to that issue, this project aims at transforming conventional student magazine production run by a group of English department students into digital format through social media feeds. This study seeks to answer a question: How did students manage social media as the practice of digital journalism? The digital contents created using social media serve to provide information to three parties, 1) prospective students, 2) active students, and 3) alumni.

2. Method

This research is experiential qualitative research. An experiential qualitative method investigates the data's meanings, views, perspectives, experiences, and/or practices (Clarke & Braune, 451). Instead of being used as a foundation for analyzing something else, participants' interpretations are prioritized, accepted, and focused on. Researchers envision a world waiting to be discovered within this framework, and language provides a window into this. According to Farquuhar (3), this approach is considered as a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible".

Participants were selected by using the convenience sampling method, which consists of a selection of a non-random sample of members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria. Six English department students between 20-22 years old took part in this project by joining as university student journalists and were given training on digital journalism. Their tasks are divided into two: content writers (CW) and content layouter (CL). They need to collaborate well in order to produce news contents in the official Instagram account (@pbisanatadharma).

The data for this research were gathered from January-May 2022. An FGD was conducted to gain in-depth information on how the social media was managed and how the EFL students' progress in creating news contents via social media. The researchers acted as supervisors in this program. Data in the form of narrative were analyzed qualitatively. The qualitative data generated was analyzed with focus on the themes connected to their experiences in joining the digital journalism program. Further, to enrich the exploration of the task's implementation, online records in the form of Instagram archives (screenshots) were also presented in this study.

3. Findings and discussion

The research question was focused on the process of managing social media and content creating as a practice of applying principles of digital journalism, which are truthful, reliable but visually attractive and also fast. The findings in this research suggested that the participants experience several steps in conducting this project. There were five main steps in the process of managing social media, in this case, it refers to an official Instagram account of the study program. English was used as the main language of social media content writing. The steps include (1) deciding kinds of news (2) determining the types of news columns, (3) deciding the color theme & layout, (4) distributing tasks, (5) implementation of the news production. The process of managing social media contents can be seen in the following flowchart.
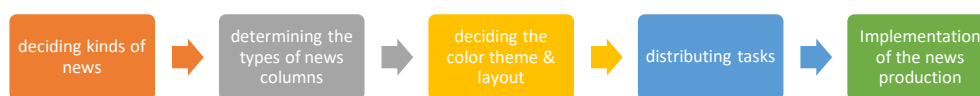

Fig. 1. The flowchart of managing social media contents

1. Deciding kinds of contents: Timeless or Real-Time

In the Instagram account, contents are characterized into two categories: timeless or real-time. Timeless content refers to a post that is not restricted by a particular time or date. It could be read in the present or future. On the other side, real-time content referred to news that needed to be produced fast and it was created for a specific occasion. It is expected to be published in the actual time during which a process or event occurs. Both content writer and layouter needed to be able to decide whether the news should be classified into timeless or real-time. For example, English tips were timeless since it could be used in the present and future, while the announcement of thesis defense schedule or students' achievements could only last for a certain period of time. While the timeless version of the contents can be created and checked prior to publishing time, real-time news required quick publication, otherwise the news will be no longer relevant. Problems occurred in the graphic designing process when the students are expected to produce very quick posts on the Instagram. To address that issue, the team should have created a template for a news that was required a quick posting and they utilized a free pre-made design platform, *Canva*, to help them produce the contents. By categorizing the news into timeless and real-time, it is expected that students who are working in the team can manage their time well in producing contents.

2. Determining news columns

Every week, the Instagram managers should post at least six categories of news, namely *lecturers' profiles, announcement, updates, cool subject, events, and students' corner*. From the six columns, it was found that the lecturers' profile was the follower's most favorite content. It can be seen from followers' engagement toward this type of content. The number of comments, likes, and shares were the highest among others. Data was collected from a post insight generated by Instagram, as follows:
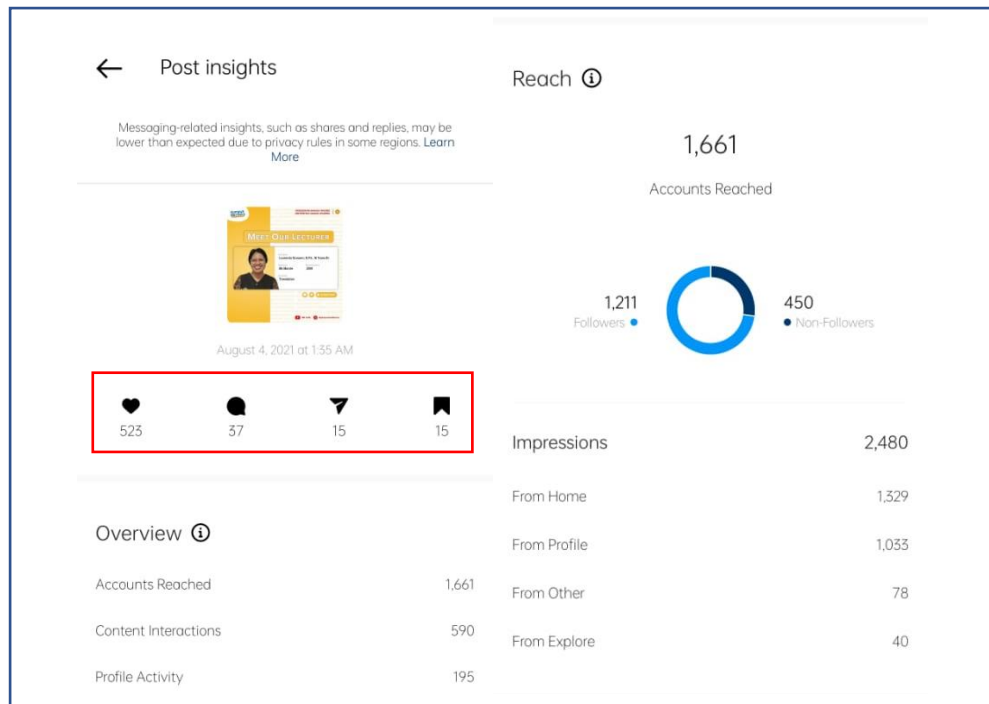
Fig. 2. Lecturer's profile post insights (source: @pbisanatadharma)

Due to the fact that this content was popular among followers, the managers paid more attention to the validity of the news contents. The process of creating this content took longer time than others. After selecting whose profile was going to be written, the content writer needed to gather information by interviewing the lecturer. The contents of this lecturer's profile contained the information about their publication, educational background, a message for students and some pictures to help students get to know about their lecturer.

In the process of producing this news content, the CW's language and time management skills played an important role. Writing skills which they have acquired in the classes such as *Paragraph Writing* or *Creative Writing* should be applied in order to create an informative and interesting contents which captivate followers' attention to read. Related to time management, CW needed to prepare a backup plan in case the news was not ready to post at the prearranged schedule, considering the lecturers' limited time in responding the interview questions. After all the raw materials have been collected and processed by CW, CL proceed the text and pictures to be visually arranged into a well-designed post. Collaboration and communication between members of the team are of vital importance. When the draft is ready, CW dan CL needed to consult it to the supervisors and other team members regarding the wordings, grammar, and also the layout design via Whatsapp Group. Feedbacks were then given to them and the contents were revised. The quality and validity of the news content should be verified by the supervisors before the news were ready to post. The next step is constructing the caption. Instagram post is never published without an attractive caption as an introduction of the content in the Instagram feed. In this case, the ability or skill to create good sentences was needed. Then, the news contents were ready to be published online and can be accessed by anyone following the account on Instagram.

Besides *lecturer's profile, English tips, cool subject, announcement, updates and students' corner* contents were also parts of the six columns. On Mondays, the team inform the followers about any news or updates of the study program. On Tuesdays, both CL and CW created contents on *cool subjects*. *Cool subject* is a description of courses offered in the study program. Next, *Students' corner* was published on Wednesdays. It is where students can share their opinion toward certain issues such as hybrid learning or managing time between work and study. Then on Fridays, *English tips* or *events* would be posted. *Announcement* was managed to post on Saturdays and the last column and most awaited content in a week was the *lecturer's profile* which was posted on Sundays. The schedule can be seen in the following table.

Day	Column
Monday	PBI Updates
Tuesday	Cool Subjects
Wednesday	Students' corner
Friday	English tips / events
Saturday	Announcement
Sunday	Lecturer's profile

Fig 3. The news column posting schedule

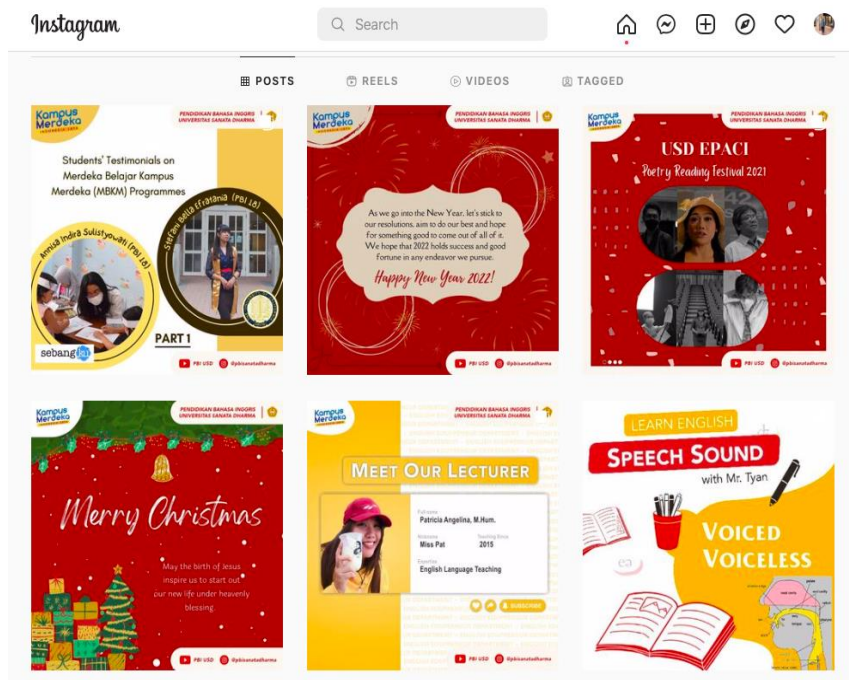These are the examples of the contents:

Fig. 4. Some samples of the IG contents

Apart from lecturer's profile content, other contents such as *announcement* and *cool subject* do not require extra time to produce. After drafting the texts, caption and completing the layouting process, the draft will be verified through the WhatsApp group, then other members of the team could provide some feedback. The content was soon posted after the revised version was made. Figure 3 below was an example of an *announcement* post.
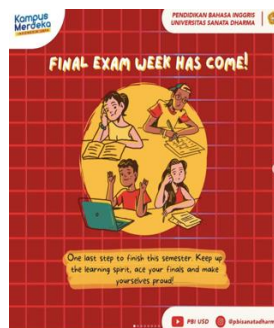

Fig. 5. Final examination announcement.

3. Presenting identity through color theme and layout

The third step of managing social media was presenting an identity through layout and color theme. This official Instagram account is the extension of the study program because it extends communication and information from the study program to target audience which are active students, alumni, and prospective students. According to Burmark (2002) in his book *Visual literacy: learning to see, see to learn*, 65% of world population are visual learners. They learn best by seeing visual images and in terms of social media, it helps them decide whether they want to engage with a certain content or not.

Color theme and layout can help the institution get recognition in public, and consistency is the key in order to have recognizable institution in the social media because it shows identity. Choosing the right color pallet/ mood board is needed in order to convey messages and association with followers. The appealing visuals evoke feeling even before followers take time to read the contents.

The color theme and elements in the layout were decided as an identity of the study program in the social media. Red, yellow and white were selected since it represents the university color theme. As seen in figure 2, only those three colors were used. The placement of three logos was taken into account. *Kampus Merdeka* logo was on the top left of the page to show that the study program participating and supporting the government program. Meanwhile, the study program logo was put on the top right of the page. On the right bottom of the page, YouTube and IG addresses were placed. Both content writers and layouters followed the template has been decided including the use of well-written English structure. The process of gaining feedback and revision process made the content creators understand the importance of maintaining the formal identity of an official account.

4. Task Distribution

The fourth step was to discuss task distribution with the team. In the @pbisanatadharma social media team, it consists of three pairs of content creators or social media managers who were responsible in producing the news contents collaboratively. There are one content writer and one content layouter responsible to produce contents every week. Content writer is responsible to copywrite the information and caption in form of texts, while the content layouter is the graphic designer who is in charge of the visual materials of the contents. Creativity, copywriting and a keen eye for design are the three most important soft skills to look after by the team. This table below was an example of task distribution:

Table 1. Task distribution.

Date	Managers
Feb (Week I)	Content Writer 1 & Content Layouter 1
Feb (Week II)	Content Writer 2 & Content Layouter 2
Feb (Week III)	Content Writer 3 & Content Layouter 3

Six members are considered the ideal number of social media team in this context, since they need to balance their time with other college tasks and organization responsibilities. By working every other week, it is expected that the team can have sufficient time to check the validity of the contents and create visually appealing contents.

5. Implementation of the news/contents production

After all the process has been done, it is time for the social media team to implement their skills. It includes time management skill since content writer and layouter had to be able to produce the content quickly and accurately especially for the real-time news, amid many assignments from the courses they were taking as students.

In order to evade affliction, a pair of social media managers (CW & CL) can prepare the timeless contents prior to their task schedule. When the timeless contents are ready, they can focus on the real-time contents on their mandatory schedule of the job. Beside time management, the skill to collect true information was also practiced. They need to apply the principle of journalism which is truthful. The social media manager should confirm that the information they would like to share is true, reliable and verified. Before they could post the contents, they also need the skill to accept constructive feedback from the other team members and the key stakeholders. So, critical thinking is also required in this process. The screenshots of the discussion can be seen as follows:
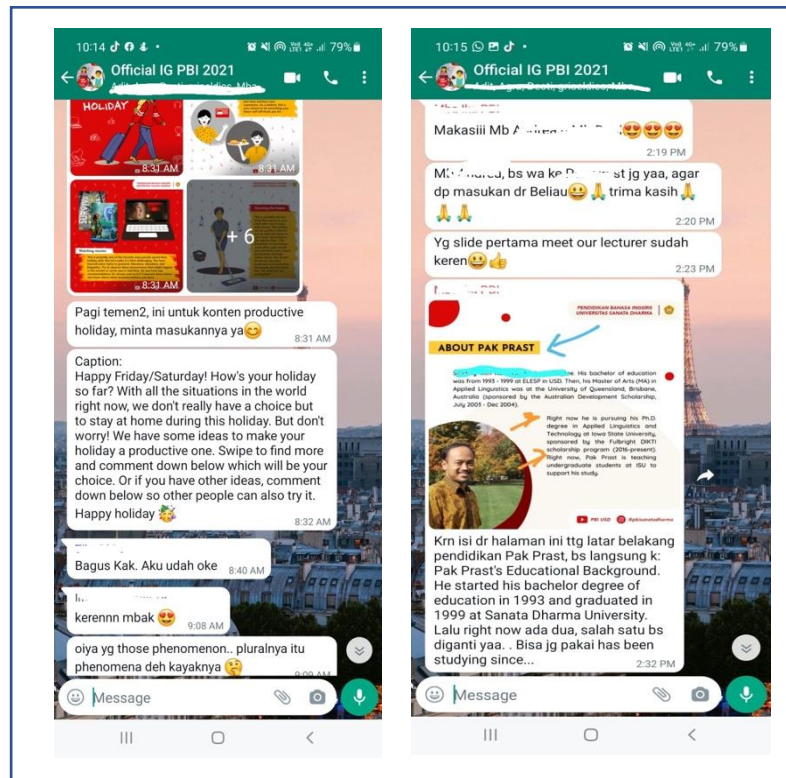

Fig 6. Team discussion on the process of content and caption creation

It can be seen from the chat history, that feedback was given in order to check some phrases or sentences. Consulting online dictionary was done too to ensure that no language errors were found and that the English language is naturally used. Finally, collaboration in managing the social media was part of professional development. It also required both content writer and layouter to practice or implement their digital journalism skill. In relation with the video contents popularity, reels would be added as one of the contents in the social media account.

4. Conclusion

Six English department students joining as university student journalists were given training on digital journalism. The team is divided into two: content writers (CW) and content layouter (CL). They need to collaborate well in order to produce news contents in the official Instagram account (@pbisanatadharma). There are five main steps to manage the social media contents, namely: deciding kind news whether it was timeless or real time one, forming the six columns based on the schedule, presenting a formal identity through layout and theme, distributing tasks in order to get the job done effectively in pairs and implementing various skills and teamwork to produce quality social media contents. The skills consisted of time management, digital journalism, news writing, communicating, gathering the information, layouting, accepting feedback and collaboration. Those practices helped the students to prepare for real job as professional in the future. Although this article has shown some steps of managing social media as the practice of digital journalism skill,

further research on the effectiveness of the digital journalism skills enhancement and self-evaluation of reflection also needed to be conducted.

Acknowledgment

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