

Search Engine Optimization in News Production Online Marketing Practice in Indonesia Online News Media

Indra Prawira* and Mariko Rizkiansyah

Marketing Communication Program, Communication Department, Faculty of Economics and Communication, Bina Nusantara University, Jl. Kebon Jeruk Raya No. 27. Jakarta Barat 11530, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The number of online news media in Indonesia is growing rapidly yet media research, it is focused on its function as a tool of democracy. Like other businesses on the Internet, online news media needs to be open to innovation in the newsroom and know how to market their product through search engine optimization (SEO). This article adopts a constructivist innovation approach in the newsroom to understand the online news media production process that utilizes Search Engine Optimization (SEO). The research was conducted by ethnography method in three major online news media in Indonesia namely liputan6.com, detik.com and metrotvnews.com during January-March 2017. The research data was obtained from interviews with more than 30 journalists and observations in the newsroom. Results show that structure of an organization, work practice, and attitude influences the adoption of SEO in the newsroom.

Keywords: Indonesia online news media, innovation in newsroom, search engine marketing, search engine optimization (SEO)

INTRODUCTION

The number of online news media is growing rapidly in Indonesia yet media research in general is focused on its function as a tool of democracy (Lim, 2002; Nugroho & Syarief, 2012; Yangyue, 2014). Until 2016, there are 43.400 online news media in Indonesia, although the number of online news media listed in the Press Council (Dewan Pers) is only 234 (Kuwado, 2016).

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E-mail addresses:

iprawira@binus.edu (Indra Prawira)

mariko.rizkiansyah@gmail.com (Mariko Rizkiansyah)

* Corresponding author

Currently, the news production process has changed considerably. In the digital age, one of the standard changes in news production is the greater emphasis on audience interest (Crain, 2008; Ross, 2017).

One indicator of the success of an online news media company is the number of Internet users it has (Kritzinger & Weideman, 2013). Online news media need high visibility in search engines because Internet users will seek information through search engines on a daily basis (Spink & Xu, 2000). Research says that most Internet users will only click the information on the first three pages of search results in search engines (Weideman, 2009 in Kritzinger & Weideman, 2013).

The use of SEO that utilizes the function of journalists raises the pros and cons of whether the journalist's web must follow the rules of journalism or SEO rules (marketing) in writing the news (Melia, 2015). This study was conducted to examine online news media journalists acceptance on practicing SEO in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online News Media in Indonesia

Online news media is growing rapidly although conventional media is still the most important media in Indonesia (Nugroho & Syarief, 2012). The increasing number of Internet users from 88 million users in 2014 to 132.7 million users in 2016 supporting the development of online news media. The total penetration reached 34.9% of Indonesia's 252.4 million total populations (APJII, 2016).

Traditional media such as newspapers take a glance at this opportunity and provide their products in the online form (online newspaper) or convergence with online news media (Tapsell, 2014) in addition to the growth of media that has been established and grown as an online medium.

Online news media has a superior character than print media as it is fast, has low cost, and can reach unlimited geography provided Internet connection is available. In the worldwide web, online news media business can attract investors (Kritzinger & Weideman, 2013).

Nevertheless, like any other business, not everyone can run an online news media company. In Indonesia, online news media business raged in the late 90s, beginning with companies that already have print media such as *Republika*, *Tempo*, and *Kompas* (Margianto & Syaefullah, 2014). Development halted following the issue of dotcom bubble in America at the beginning of the year 2000 (Anggoro, 2012) to re-emerge such that in 2016, there are 43,400 online news media in Indonesia though does not reach 1% of the online news media that meet the requirements of the national press media (Kuwado, 2016).

Online news media is more open concerning its practice and innovation than traditional media such as print media and electronic media (Yunus, Budihardjo, & Hartanto, 2016). Digital era brings changes to journalistic practice which can have implications for market orientation and general marketing strategies (Frambach, Fiss & Ingenbleek, 2016).

Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

Online news media businesses sell traffic to the advertiser for revenue. According to the recent study, customer orientation is critical to company's performance (Frambach et al., 2016). Since its development, the media must know how to source advertisements to support their incomes (McChesney, 2016).

Online news media, as well as other companies that sell products on the Internet should invest in Internet marketing through search engines or search engine marketing (SEM). Internet users will seek information through search engines on a daily basis (Spink & Xu, 2000). This is the reason online news media websites are visible. There are two ways for a customer to find a business website via the search engine: through pay-per-click (PPC) listing and organic result listing (based on search engine optimisation-SEO) (Kritzinger & Weideman, 2013).

It is crucial for company names to be at the top of the SERP because according to Weideman, user behaviour showed that 91% of users ultimately view results only within the first three pages, 76% of searchers look only at the first page (Kritzinger & Weideman 2013). PPC guarantees the name of the company, who pays an amount of money, will be listed at the top of SERP. However, 60% - 86 % of search engine users will click on which are the natural result (SEO result) (Sen, 2005). Each search engine has its way to recognize and rank the website. Therefore, every company should choose the appropriate search engine to market its products. Most company

focus on targeting Google because it is the most popular (Flosi, 2011 in Kritzinger & Weideman, 2013).

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

One of the most popular methods of search engine marketing (SEM) is search engine optimization (SEO). SEO methods performed by modifying the website to achieve a good ranking or relevancy in search engines (Sen, 2005) is considered as the most efficient.

Two factors that influence the result of SEO are the on-page factor and the off-page factor (Codina, Iglesias-García, Pedraza, & García-Carretero, 2016). The first is SEO that is controlled by the creator while the other is beyond the control of the creator. On-page factor carried out by SEO is used to know, which modifying website content such as title tags, meta-tags, heading tags, links, and other areas on their pages to make them more visible to search engines (Sen, 2005).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study presented here uses the theoretical framework of Paulussen and Ugille (2008) for researching the adoption of citizen journalism as a form of innovation in the newsroom. According to that research the innovation in the newsroom depends on three factors: newsroom structure, work practice, and attitude. Innovation in the newsroom framework is beneficial if it is applied to examine how the adoption of SEO in Indonesia online news media because

SEO in the newsroom is also a new thing (Giomelakis & Veglis, 2016).

The analysis is based on data obtained using ethnography method from detik.com, liputan6.com, and metrotvnews.com from January to March 2017. The selection of online news media is based on two reasons. The first reason for the highest page views in Indonesia (alexa.com, 2017). Detik.com came in the first place while liputan6.com ranked third for Indonesia's most visited online news media. However, metrotvnews.com was selected because of its popularity as one of Indonesia's online news media with the largest income despite having low page views.

Some of the topics for the interview were organizational structure, work practice, and attitude in implementing SEO. Observations were done at liputan6.com for one month, while in detik.com and metrotvnews.com each for two weeks. Using the innovation framework in the newsroom (Paulussen & Ugille, 2008), the research questions are: 1) How does the role of organizational structure affect the adoption of SEO; 2) To what extent the application of SEO in online news media working practice?; 3) How is online news media journalist representation of adoption SEO?.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study showed the factors that influence the application of SEO in the newsroom. The organizational structure, work practice and attitude consecutively were examined to see the implementation of SEO in online news media companies in Indonesia.

Organizational Structure

To view the role of organizational structure in influencing the application of SEO, the author interviewed members of the newsroom (Franquet, 2014), i.e., micro level (journalist), meso level (editor), and macro level (management). However, in the interview process, it turned out newsroom members did not give enough answers to research questions. Newsroom members who are journalists did not understand the actual application of the technology and how to do SEO research, although they all understood its importance. Some hire SEO specialists while others rely on journalists to apply SEO in their writing.

Because the level of SEO implementation differs from each medium, one medium implemented SEO simply because it feels that all media apply it. This media does not want to be left behind but also has the belief that they can still survive without using SEO. However, the other media seriously implemented SEO. In the other kind of news media, all news will be monitored and must meet SEO rules. According to one editor in chief, the use of SEO is very helpful to know the demand of readers. The editor in chief said there is a daily discussion about which news to report. Moreover, News reporter's side said if the news is interesting but there is no kind of story on Google. Then, the team decided to throw the story away (Personal interview, 20 January 2017).

The numbers of the SEO specialist team rely solely on the role of the journalist or the special team. Of the three media, Liputan6.com is the media that maximize

the application of SEO. Regarding human resources, Liputan6.com has SEO team that consisted of six people and recruited from the marketing department. The decision to use SEO has implications for production costs because SEO specialist salaries are relatively high than that of most journalists.

Practice

SEO is a marketing technique to attract Google, this method force journalist to involve journalists when applies new media. According to one editor, the use of SEO contains elements of coercion. The editor said there is a little coercion, “SEO is how you use words, magic words so the story could attract Google. It is the art of how to attract Google. The problem is when every online news media applies SEO then we are all going to write the same stories” (Personal interview, 16 February 2017).

In practice, the application of SEO consisted of two kinds of on-page optimization and off-page optimization. The journalist who wrote the story containing the title and the body with the recommended keyword from the SEO team did the on-page process. The journalists were trained on how to put these keywords in the news beforehand. The journalist at the editor level edited the story and then gave the tags for those keywords. After that, the editor uploaded the news via CMS (content management system).

Online news media that hire specialist SEO team did off-page optimization by doing backlinks news that has uploaded. The backlink is a web page that linked to

other pages (Agrawal, 2016). In addition to backlinks, SEO team also performed campaigns and promotions on the home channel. The promotion was also done on popular sites in Indonesia such as Facebook (alexa.com, 2017), and Twitter. For promotions in these social media, the editor feels the need to take over this job because the link needs to be edited first. They considered SEO teams with marketing backgrounds do not have the ability in editing the story.

Attitude

The SEO implementation decision in the newsroom is a hierarchical management decision beyond the newsroom. This decision received years of resistance from members of the newsroom even though they were eventually compromised. One SEO specialist admitted that it took two years to convince the members of the newsroom to implement SEO. The SEO Specialist said that the newsroom members have a belief that a journalist has their ideals. Therefore, the SEO Specialists challenged them through their chief editor, and it worked out. It has been two years since they are following the SEO specialist’s recommendations (Personal interview, 31 January 2017)

In general, the role of journalists is to ensure that their material is readable by search engines. The problem of SEO is it is always related with the journalistic objectivity. The SEO specialists admitted that it was hard to convince the editorial team to use SEO because the results will

not instantly appear. Implementation of SEO is not easy and requires patience (Kritzinger & Weideman 2013; Richmond, 2008). They also stated that there was a debate between the newsroom member and the SEO specialist. “(They said) it does not guarantee will bring good traffic then why we should apply it (SEO). (I said) We cannot see the impact instantly, but we will harvest the result in one or two months, it will have a long impact. It is more like an investment” (Personal interview, 31 January 2017). The SEO team can assure that the implementation of SEO did not mean quality is compromised (Melia, 2015; Richmond, 2008) as reflected in the increasing web site page views.

DISCUSSION

In general, SEO in the newsroom in Indonesia online news media companies is relatively new. As with innovations in other newsrooms, SEO in the newsroom opens opportunities for a new profession, in this case, the SEO specialist.

The SEO specialist realizes that each search engine has a different way of recognizing the website. Therefore, they decide to focus on Google search engines which are more widely used in Indonesia (alexa.com, 2017). Therefore, this study is limited to SEO studies that use Google as a benchmark.

The problem in applying SEO in the newsroom is not only due to innovation but also due to SEO is a search engine marketing strategy (SEM). For this reason, SEO innovation is not easy to apply in the

newsroom. Members of the newsroom refuse to apply SEO because according to them it is contrary to the code of ethics of journalism, although it is expected to change over time.

CONCLUSION

Members at the newsroom of three Indonesian online news media understood the importance of SEO for their business development. However, the application of SEO in three media differed with organizational structure, work practices, and the attitude of journalists. Management decides to implement SEO as a benchmark for the success of their company to make the journalists participate as a marketer. The journalists are required to follow the rules of SEO for the news that they write to be easily recognized by search engines, in this case, is Google. Although compromised with the application of SEO in the newsroom but journalists are still authorized to use theirs in determining newsworthiness.

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