Enhancing the Professionalism of Muslim Journalists in Handling Disinformation and Hoaxes During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract   The term alternative media refers to media that serves as alternative sources of information in lieu of mainstream media. In contrast to social media, alternative media are mass media entities that carry out journalistic functions even though they are affiliated with community organizations. Thus, alternative media are expected to provide authentic news just like mainstream media in Muslim countries. Islamic alternative media are also required to produce quality news, and this was especially seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, when a flood of information resulted in confusion among the community. In response, training that aimed to enhance journalistic professionalism for practitioners of Islamic alternative journalism from four alternative media entities was conducted during the pandemic. Entitled *Enhancing Professionalism of Muslim Journalists*, the training was carried out in a measurable manner using the Assets-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, which consists of five steps, namely discovery, dream, design, define, and destiny. With these five steps, the training resulted in significant changes in how journalist carried out their jobs. These include improvements in their understanding of professional ethics, news writing, and the use of journalistic language. This training also provided an overview of the pattern of reporting in Islamic alternative media, which are platforms that can provide news from a religious perspective.

Keywords: alternative media; disinformation; Islam; journalists; COVID 19

1.   Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has become a major problem in Indonesia since the beginning of 2020 (Fegert et al., 2020). From April to June 2021, Indonesia experienced the peak of a pandemic that paralyzed various sectors of society (Aeni, 2021; Kurniasih, 2020). The communication for development specialist at UNICEF noted that more than 4,000 people died in Indonesia due to COVID-19 (Putri, 2021). In the midst of problems that arise from various aspects of life as the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown, and mandate measures, hoax producers prove to be prolific. Dihni (2021) counted 4,741 COVID-19 hoax contents that popped up and spread in society. Based on the observations from Dihni (2021) and Kominfo (2021), for the period of 2021, January 23–September 15, the most widely spread COVID-19 hoax content was found on Facebook. The platform that came second was Twitter, which was followed by YouTube, Instagram, and Tiktok (Kominfo, 2021) (Figure 1). It should be noted that the dissemination of information in group chats among relatives and family can also serve as means of spreading false information (Umam, 2021).

One of the hoax contents that has often appeared during this pandemic pertains to the COVID-19 vaccines (Priastuty et al., 2020; Arianto, 2021). Posts about the inoculation products developed for the SARS-COV2 disease are much sought after because the public tends to do research first before deciding whether to be injected with them or not (Rahayu & Sensusiyati, 2021). The pandemic even became an opportunity for some people to monetize hoaxes (Rachman & Pramana, 2020). One of the cause of the many victims of the disease is this circulating hoax (Ravelo, 2021). Various disinformation can occur during the COVID-19 pandemic, not only regarding vaccines but also various things regarding the handling of the global epidemic (Yustitia & Ashrianto, 2020). Disinformation regarding health issues during a pandemic needs to be handled quickly by promoting good circulation of information (Grimes, 2021).

Table 1. Handling the spread of COVID-19 hoax issues

Ministry of Communication and Informatics	The Handling of the Spread of Covid-19 Hoax Issues Period of 23 January 2020 – 15 September 2021			
The Findings of the Covid- 19 Hoax Issues 1.906	Dissemination to Ministries/Agencies and Society	Takedown Submission		Law enforcement 767
		Total Spread 4.741	Follow up (Take down) 4.616	

Submitting Take Down for the Spread of Covid-19 Hoaxes on Social Media

	Total	Submitted	Follow up (Take Down)	Being Followed Up
Facebook	4.060	4.060	3.961	99
Instagram	38	38	37	1
Twitter	567	567	557	10
Youtube	55	55	54	1
Tiktok	21	21	7	14
Total	**4.741**	**4.741**	**4.616**	**125**

Source: Kominfo, 2021

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government must not only deal with problems related to health or education but also make efforts to prevent the circulation of hoaxes so they will not cause harm to the community (Susilo et al., 2021). The Ministry of Communication and Informatics has been cooperating with some social media platforms to delete contents and block accounts that spread hoaxes and disinformation. UNICEF is also collaborating with two Islamic organizations in Indonesia to be able to control false information about COVID-19 within the community (Ravelo, 2021). The government attempt to read the disinformation pattern by using data mined from online and social media, however, the method has a weakness, namely, not being able to reach personal pages on social media, i.e. Facebook and Instagram, as well as short messages (Wantiknas, 2020).

Dealing with the above-mentioned problem of online disinformation, journalists are expected to form the foundation of hope for accurate and reliable information related to COVID-19, or any pandemic for that matter. Hoax contents are always consumed when people feel that their information needs are not sufficiently met (Melki et al., 2021). Even so, based on the results of a public opinion survey done by Ambardi (2019), public trust in journalism is still quite high. At any rate, training and education of journalists in many countries are urgently needed to improve their competence (de Lara & García-Avilés, 2013; Iyer, 2015; Githinji & Ndayikunda, 2019). As information gatekeepers, journalists must have the ability to rightly manage and disseminate information (Firmansyah & Asgha, 2020). It is the knowledge and competence of journalists to prevent hoaxes, especially during a pandemic like COVID-19. This does not only apply to journalists in mainstream media but also to journalists in alternative media.

Several online alternative media outlets in Indonesia are under the auspices of community organizations, such as Muhammadiyah, Aisyiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, PERSIS, and so on (Zaenudin, 2018). They have a fixed and definite segment of readers, namely, members and administrators of community organizations (Zaenudin, 2018). Nahdlatul Ulama owns NU Online, Persatuan Islam (PERSIS) has Risalah magazine and persis.or.id, Suara Aisyiyah is under Aisyiyah's supervision, and Suara Muhammadiyah serves as the medium of proselytizing activities for Muhammadiyah organizations.

These online alternative media, which are affiliated with Islamic community organizations, also play a significant and strategic role in helping the community to better understand and deal with the pandemic. People will tend to be more trusting of, and thus more receptive to, content provided by alternative media affiliated with the organization they follow or are under the auspices of. Based on the results of a survey conducted by Dewan Pers (the Press Council) in 2019, trust in the media is determined by three factors, namely (1) the data and facts presented; (2) trusted media brand image; and (3) news sources (Widarini et al., 2019). Data processing chiefly determines why the public chooses a certain media. In the context of members of and media affiliated with, an organization, the belief that such a media firm will provide more reliable information is very high. This mindset that the media under the auspices of a particular organization they follow will provide accurate, reliable, and needed information is carried by members and all cadres because of the idea that the affiliated media vets information through a series of proper data processing, yielding useful knowledge. In addition, their trust is also explained by their belief that their organization monitors the media under its umbrella.

Members of the organization an alternative media entity is affiliated with are very influential in producing social media content or news. This is explained by the information model based on the hierarchy of influence theory. The model describes the various factors that affect news content, arrayed on a continuum from a micro-individual to a macro-social system level. The idea of this theory can be regarded as one of the key concepts in journalism studies (Franklin et al., 2005).

Contents and news production are influenced by five-component levels. These are the (1) individual level; (2) media routine level; (3) organizational level; (4) social institutional level; and (5) social system level (Krisdinanto, 2017). At the core of the hierarchy of influence, which is presented visually as a set of concentric circles, is the individual level (Reese,

2019). The content of news is determined by journalists, reporters, and editors, each of whom has their point of view that is influenced by the beliefs, values, and characteristics of the individual.

Beyond the individual level, journalists are affected by routine-level structures of action embedded in the immediate environment of their work, such as news values, objectivity, pyramid writing style, and story frames (Reese, 2019). The organizational level described in the news occurs in entities or firms that have their own policies, motives, biases, political interest, and economic imperatives (Reese, 2019).

Social-institutional level captures the influences attributable to media organizations and relationships with other institutions, covering those that are both political and economic. The largest scale with most diverse component level is the social system level, which better captures the idea of larger, more complex systems within which journalism operates (Reese, 2019). This macro level was originally termed the 'ideological level' (Vos & Heinderyckx, 2017).

Straightening out pandemic-related information that circulates in the community—through the role of community organizations and their affiliated media—is the urgent aim of this community service training and study activity. Online media is the media most consumed by the public, which makes it important for people to understand that online media information deals not only with the matter of speed but also with the quality of the factual content (Kurnia et al., 2020). The problem with journalists from community organization-affiliated online media entities lies in the cadres of the organizations themselves. Some of them do have a scientific background in journalism, but not a few are cadres without journalistic knowledge. This is acknowledged no less by the editor-in-chief. Further, there is a need for the competence and ability of journalists to continually be improved.

In an effort to resolve this situation, community service activities aimed at increasing the professionalism of journalists during the pandemic were carried out. These activities focused on Muslim journalists from online media that were affiliated with Islamic community organizations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama, PERSIS, Muhammadiyah, and Aisyiyah. As a country with a Muslim majority population, the presence of Islamic organizations and the media they cover should be able to save people from misleading hoax attacks. The purpose of this research is related to providing activities aimed at developing the professionalism of Muslim journalists in a bid to avoid disinformation and hoaxes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.   Methods

The training entitled *Enhancing Professionalism of Muslim Journalists in Handling Disinformation and Hoaxes during the COVID-19 Pandemic Era* was carried out using an assets-based community development approach (Harrison et al., 2019). This approach utilizes the assets and potential that the community already has, which in this case were Muslim journalists from various media having affiliations with community organizations. These media were NU Online, which is affiliated with the Nadhatul Ulama community organization; Suara Aisyiyah, which has an affiliation with Aisyiyah, Risalah which is affiliated with PERSIS, and Hidayatullah. The determination of the sample considered

several requirements in accordance with the study objectives (Allen, 2017). The selection was carried out by considering the media as sources of public information that spread consistent posting of content on their platforms. The target number of training participants was 40 Muslim journalists who subsequently became regular news writers in the Islamic alternative media.

The participants, the Muslim journalists from the four media outlets, were considered to be equipped with professional assets and potential before this activity was carried out. The focus was on developing the skills of Muslim journalists based on their professional assets and potential. The approach taken in the implementation of training with the concept of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) involved performing five key steps. First is *discovery*, which is the making in-depth observations of the training targets. The second step is *dream* which consist of designing expectations of goals in training activities. Followed after is the third step which is *design*. This step consists of creating a general description of the problem or summary that would be used as a basis for thinking in work plans or strategic steps, including a method to see the result of its training. The pre-test was distributed to the participants (Muslim journalists) before the training was conducted. The post-test was carried out after the training was finished. The results of the pre-test and post-test showed changes in cognitive, affective, and cognitive aspects. The fourth step is *define*, which is to implement the program that has been designed according to the plan. The five step is destiny which is providing assistance to training participants and conducting evaluations to determine further development. These five steps in empowering Muslim journalists in dealing with disinformation and hoaxes during the pandemic using the ABCD approach are depicted in the following graph:
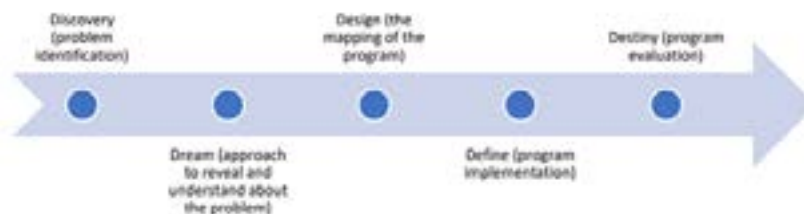

Figure 1. Steps to empower Muslim journalists in handling disinformation and hoaxes during the COVID-19 pandemic

This research used observation and descriptive qualitative research methods, which were combined to The training was conducted for a period of six months, which was from March 2021 to August 2021 and consisted of various activities, including focus group discussions conducted by the editors of Islamic alternative media. The Focus Group Discussions (FGD) serve to get a comprehensive view of existing problems (Then et al., 2014). The webinar activity was carried out by bringing in experts and practicing journalists with the ability to conduct seminars and knowledge of the themes raised, such as COVID-19, contemporary journalism, and comparative journalism in Indonesia and Australia during the pandemic. In addition, intensive training was also carried out for journalists with various themes, including of introduction of hoax threats, news writing training, and information of various journalistic languages.

News monitoring activities were carried out to see how changes in writing style, completeness of 5W + 1H elements, word choice, title-making, news structure, and news ideology were used by the participants. Monitoring was carried out weekly by taking news samples considered to be representative of the platform in which the journalists work. The results of the news evaluation were submitted and discussed in the Whatsapp group earlier formed with the journalists. In the evaluation phase, measurements were made of the effect or impact of the training by giving pre-test and post-test to journalists to determine the results of the training (Leavy, 2017). Data collection was carried out using a survey method conducted before and after, which was further analyzed to get a measurement of the difference in the significance of the training (Apuke, 2017).

3.   Results of Study

The COVID-19 pandemic has had global and diverse impacts across all segments of society. The adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been further exacerbated by pandemic-related rumors that are not true or hoaxes spreading in society (van der Linden et al., 2020). To broaden the role of journalism in the handling of the pandemic, various stakeholders need to support in performing its information gate-keeping role before the public (Catalan-Matamoros & Elía, 2020). In Indonesia, the media has served as an important entity in handling the pandemic, especially in dealing with hoaxes (Prajarto, 2021). Mass media reporting plays an important role in informing about the development of the COVID-19 pandemic in accordance with the facts (Woda et al., 2021). As the spearhead of the mass media, journalists have the responsibility to report true information and clarify false information circulating in the community (Perreault & Perreault, 2021). This activity focused on developing the skills of Muslim journalists based on the basis of assets and potential. The use of the ABCD approach must involve five key steps, namely discovery, dream, design, define, and destiny. The explanation of the training activities carried out using the ABCD approach is as follows:

3.1. Discovery

In the discovery step, in-depth observations were made of news articles about the COVID-19 pandemic published in NU Online, Suara Aisyiyah, Risalah, and Hidayatullah. This was done to observe the main elements that must be available in the news. In this stage, a record was made of the extent to which these main elements were present in the news produced by Islamic media journalists. Furthermore, in this discovery step, an empowerment strategy was needed, which is an approach involving direct communication with the editors-in-chiefs and journalists of these media in the form of Forum Group Discussion (FGD). The FGDs were held alternately between journalists from each media outlet, not entirely because the time allotted for each was different. The schedule of the FGDs conducted can be seen in the following table.

Table 2. FGD with Islamic alternative media editors and journalists schedule

FGD	Time
FGD with editorial team and journalists of Risalah Persis	16 February 2020
FGD with NU Online	19 February 2020
FGD with Suara Aisyiyah and Hidayatullah	20 February 2020

In this FGD, the editors-in-chief and journalists conveyed the problems they faced while covering news during the pandemic. The companion team also conveyed the empowerment objectives that were to be carried out so that they could jointly identify the problems faced by Muslim journalists in covering the pandemic in a bid to determine the core problem.

3.2. Dream

From the FGDs conducted with the editors-in-chiefs of NU Online, Suara Aisyiyah, Risalah, and Hidayatullah, the dream stage in the ABCD approach was completed. These FGDs helped the participants to understand and explore the problems they faced so as to foster critical awareness in each of them, be it at the level of editors-in-chief or level of journalists. This dream stage was carried out to find out the dreams or desires of the editors and journalists of NU Online, Suara Aisyiyah, Risalah, and Hidayatullah in terms of their self-developments in the scope of knowledge (capacity change) and attitude (behavior change), as well as in regards to the impact that could be achieved. By determining their desires, the concrete steps needed to increase knowledge, attitudes, and positive impact as journalists while covering the pandemic could be formulated.

Table 3. Design of training targets based on the FGD results

Islamic Alternative Media	Target of Training
NU Online	Featured News Writing
Muhammadiyah.or.id	Journalistic Language Training
Persis.or.id	Live Reporting Training
Hidayatullah	Media Technology and Journalists

In exploring the training targets through FGDs, the results of discussions with the editors became a guide in determining the training materials to be given to journalists. The results of each FGD were then re-discussed by the service team by considering which resource persons could be presented to be able to provide skills improvement training. The choice of material also took into account the level of ability of the trainees who have been regarded to have graduated to become professional journalists. The inputs for the training in the FGDs were not intended to provide basic journalistic skills training but, rather, to improve the journalistic skills of the training participants.

The determination of the training theme also took into account the problems that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic period as the main theme of the activity. The training was then aimed towards the following achievement targets, which are to obtain: 1) participants with sensitivity to health issues, especially COVID-19, 2) participants who understand contemporary journalism on global issues, 3) participants who have analytical skills concerning comparisons of journalism at home and abroad, 4) participants' mindset who favors a new ideology that is vigilant against hoaxes but faithful to truthful information, 5) participants which have the ability to write news based on various sources of information, and 6) participants who can write good and correct news according to journalistic rules.

3.3. Design

From the dream stage, we obtained a general picture of the problem (summary problem) that was to be used as a basis for thinking (basic thinking) in formulating work plans or strategic steps. The next step was to formulate strategic steps to achieve the desires, hopes, and targets identified in the dream stage. The strategic steps taken were as follows:

a. The first step is to conduct a training that could increase the knowledge, skills, and impact of Muslim journalists from the four Islamic media. The training was divided into two sessions. The first session was conducted on the first day by bringing up macro topics. Based on the training objectives that focused on the COVID-19 issue, the general topic raised was the development of COVID-19 and how journalism plays a role in dealing with the pandemic. The resource persons were chosen not only from communication experts from Indonesia but also from communication and health experts from Australia for comparison. The topics raised were as follows:

Table 4. Training material Day 1

Topic/Material	Resource Person
Health Issues related to Covid-19 in Indonesia and Australia	Dr. Febi Dwirahmadi
Contemporary Audio and Digital Journalism	Dr. Septiawan Santana K
Journalism Practice in Indonesia and Australia: A Comparison	Dr. Ross Tapsell

The training in the first session (macro) was conducted openly to the participants and also to the general public. The selection of resource persons in the macro training topic took into account the expertise needed to provide a comprehensive picture of the COVID-19 pandemic, from the perspectives of social and health observers, journalism in Indonesia, and journalism in Australia. The background of these resource persons are described briefly in the next paragraphs.

The first resource person was Dr. Febi Dwi Rahmadi, a lecturer in Global Health at the School of Medicine at Griffith University, Australia. His expertise in disaster management and resilience building, global health priorities, interventions, monitoring, and evaluation of health program planning could provide journalists with a perspective on the conditions that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and what roles all stakeholders in society must play.

The second resource person was Dr. Septiawan Santana K, a lecturer at the Faculty of Communication at the Islamic University of Bandung who has expertise in journalism, especially in contemporary journalism, in Indonesia. He provided training participants with an overview for the examination of journalism opportunities in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as in the concepts of disaster journalism and health journalism.

The third resource person was Dr. Ross Tapsell, a senior lecturer and researcher at the Australian National University's College of Asia and the Pacific, who specializes in Southeast Asian media. He is also the author of *Media Power in Indonesia: Oligarchs,*

Citizens, and the Digital Revolution. Based on his expertise in studying media in Asia, especially in Indonesia, he provided training participants with knowledge on how to map mass media in Asia and Australia during the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. He shared his knowledge in observing opportunities and challenges of mass media during a pandemic in order to help participants open up their understanding of modern journalism.

Table 5. Training material Day 2

Topic/Material	Resource Person
Hoax and Post Truth Threats to Journalists	Firmansyah, S.I.Kom., M.Si.
News, Features and Data Search	Arbaiyah Satriani, S.Pi., MA(Hons).
Language Dynamics in Indonesian Alternative Media	Andalusia Neneng Permatasari, S.S., M.Hum.

In the second session, the training was conducted with a limited number of participants. Only representatives from Islamic alternative media who planned to become regular participants in news monitoring were included. The topics designed based on training needs are summarized in the FGDs. The second and third training sessions were carried out intensively by opening discussions between resource persons and participants. The training materials were tailored to the expertise of each resource person.

b. After the direct training, the next plan was to conduct monitoring for one month, which was implemented. Monitoring was carried out by checking published news every week for one month. Through the Whatsapp group, monitoring was carried out by sending the correction results per news to the said platform group. The results of the corrections were discussed together with all Muslim journalists from NU Online, Suara Aisyiyah, Risalah, and Hidayatullah who became members of the group at end of the training.

c. The third step is to conduct process evaluations to detect and predict procedures during the implementation phase, as a way of providing information that is useful for program-related decision-making, as well managing traces of procedures throughout the activity.

3.4. Define
In this stage, the participants began to implement the program that was designed according to the plan. The steps at the design stage were concretely detailed, including the determination of the implementation date and day, place, etc. Because the program was conducted during the pandemic, some activities were carried out online. Activities were carried out in stages based on a predetermined plan. Training participants were screened from the media sample that was the target of the training.

For the implementation of the training on the first day, the material was presented on global-scale topics so that participants could increase their insight, understanding, and knowledge related to the world of health and journalism. The material topics were devoted to the COVID-19 pandemic and journalistic practices by the media. On this first day, the training was conducted in the form of an open webinar, attended by 165 participants

consisting of Muslim journalists and students of communication science. The online webinar was scheduled to be held on April 8, 2021 via Zoom Meeting and simultaneously broadcasted live on the YouTube platform. This webinar was open to the public to make people, especially students, and Muslim journalists, apart from alternative media journalists to better understand the global COVID-19 pandemic and learn how to tackle disinformation in society.

Figure 2. Training session 1 (Zoom meeting)

During the second day of training held on April 9, 2021, the material was more selected, as shown in Figure 4. It was not an open training, specifically conducted via Zoom for journalists from alternative Islamic media who are a partner in community service activities. The training aimed to improve journalists' skills following the results of the training design from the FGD. On the second day of training, participants received material regarding the threat of hoaxes to journalists, one of which was during the COVID-19 pandemic. The training material was aimed at teaching journalists to be more sensitive to a phenomenon so they can better sort out important information that the public ought to know. In addition, journalists were also provided with technical materials for data retrieval, news writing, and feature stories and the context of a pandemic, the purpose of which was to increase the ability of journalists in writing techniques, especially in feature, and narrative news. In addition, the training targeted the development of journalists' ability to package language when writing news. This aim was carried out with the help of a third training material, which was about the dynamics of language. Discussion of the three materials was held the next day.
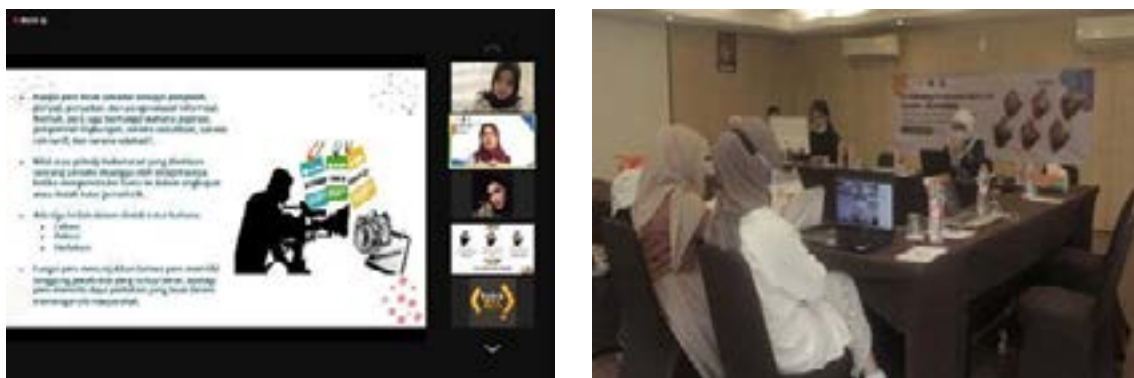

Figure 3. Training sessions 2 and 3 (Zoom meeting)

On April 10, 2021, the training became more of a discussion between resource persons and training participants. The material on the first and second days then became a topic of discussion that developed into a very interesting exchange, especially on the topic of the ideology of reporting in alternative mass media as opposed to that in the mainstream mass media. The issue of alternative media reporting that is driven by a purpose tailored to the Islamic organization that houses it became one of the growing topics not only among speakers but also among alternative media journalists. Alternative media strategies to compete with the mainstream media were also tackled by journalists. The development of technology and online reporting systems was also a point of discussion for journalists.

3.5. Destiny

This stage was the end point of the training assistance provided to Muslim journalists with the aim of increasing their professionalism in dealing with disinformation and hoaxes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Reflection and evaluation were carried out at this stage. The evaluation was carried out by monitoring the news the participant journalists wrote for a full month after the training. This evaluation was important in order to find out how far the results have been achieved in program implementation as means of obtaining feedback as material for reflection, notes, and thoughts.

In measuring the success of the training, it was necessary to test the normality and homogeneity of the pre-test and post-test data. For the normality test, the researcher used the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test using SPSS 22 software to observe the distribution of the pre-test and post-test scores. The test was performed by comparing the probability (sig.) with the alpha value (α). The test criteria were if (sig.) > alpha (α), then the test results are said to be normally distributed. The conditions for normality testing using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov are if the significant number (sig.) < 0.05, then the distribution is not normal, but if the significant number (sig.) > 0.05, then the normal distribution. The results of the normality test are described in Table 6.

Table 6. Normality test

N		Unstandardized Residual
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean	30.0000000
	Std. Deviation	1.47503181
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.112
	Positive	.099
	Negative	-.112
Test Statistic		.112
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.200[c,d]

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.

d. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

The data in Table 6 show that the results of the pre-test and post-test normality tests are normally distributed. This can be seen from the results of the normality test of the pre-test and post-test data that have a sig value. > 0.05, that is Symp. Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.200. Based on the results of the statistical data of the normality test, it can be seen that the results have been tested statistically with a normal distribution, meaning that the test can be carried out in accordance with the predetermined questionnaire design.

The next step was the homogeneity test, which was conducted to determine the distribution of the data in terms of whether it was homogeneous or not. However, this study did not use a control class, so the homogeneity test was not carried out. Instead, a T-test, or average difference test, was carried out using the Paired-Samples T-Test Analysis test. The test hypothesis is as follows:

Ho: There is no difference in the average pre-test and post-test scores.
H1: There is a difference in the average score on the test and post-test.

With the test criteria, if the number $p > 0.05$, then Hypothesis Ho is accepted and H1 is rejected. The level of significance can be determined by comparing the probabilities of sig. with an alpha value (α). If the probability value > value, then it is not significant, otherwise if the probability value is sig. < the value of is then significant. The results of the T-test of the pre-test and post-test are described in Table 7.

Table 7. Paired sample test, results of statistical data analysis (2021)

	Paired Differences							
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Pre-test - Post-test	-4.500	1.697	310	-5.134	-3.866	-14.525	29	.000

From the data in Table 7 was obtained the value of sig. (2-tailed) of 0.000 < 0.005. From these scores, it can be concluded that the training produced a significant effect on Muslim journalists from alternative media that are affiliated with community organizations. The significance of the change can be calculated by a formula based on the data obtained. In general, the significance of the change can be explained by the N Gain formula, which is determined as follows:

$$\text{Gain} = \frac{714-515}{780-515} = 0{,}75$$

The gain-level category is if g > 0.7, then the significant level of gain is stated in the high category, if 0.03 < g < 0.7 then the gain level is stated in the medium category, and if g < 0.3 then the gain level is in the low category. From the data above, the gain level obtained was moderate because 0.03 < g < 0.7 is 0.453.

Based on the pre-test and post-test results, it was found that there is a significant difference between the two. This can be interpreted that the development of the journalistic abilities of Muslim journalists in Islamic alternative media has increased significantly. The basic journalistic skills possessed by these journalists increasingly developed after the training. An increase in the ability of alternative media journalists based on measurements shows that the training can be categorized as successful according to the targets and objectives.

4.   Importance of Continuous Training for Alternative Media Journalists: A Discussion

It is important that journalists continually improve their competence. Journalists are always required to improve their knowledge, skills, and work results (Waluyo, 2018). One of the efforts to increase the competence of journalists is the journalist competency test (UKW). There is a significant difference between journalists who have taken and passed UKW and journalists who have not. One of them is that journalists who have hurdled the UKW tend to be more careful in doing their jobs so as not to violate the professional code of ethics as journalists (Suhermono & Pareno, 2017).

Verification discipline is one of the items in the code of ethics of journalists. One of the practices falling under the verification discipline is correct, accurate, and objective data processing. Data processing skills must be mastered by a journalist. There are three dimensions of data processing skills, namely, reporting, editing, and networking skills (Örnebring & Mellado, 2016). Writing ability, one aspect of reporting skills is the most important ability that journalists must possess and master. Reporting skills also include a masterful use of interview techniques, research techniques, and the ability to work independently.

The second dimension is editing skills which include editing/sub-editing, multimedia production skills, design/layout skills, and management skills (Örnebring & Mellado, 2016). This dimension shows the function of journalists at the process stage or in a managerial role. The third dimension is networking skills. This last skill is fairly new that resulted from the findings of Örnebring and Mellado (2016). Networking skills include networking, teamwork, and time management skills. Based on the findings of this 2016 research, journalists who scored high in the survey were orientated toward teamwork and social aspects. So far, the stereotype of journalists is one of a loner, a bohemian, and someone who often does not fit into the hierarchy or bureaucracy (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003).

Likewise, when it comes to preventing hoaxes, these three skills must be possessed and constantly improved by journalists. Hoax prevention requires the right strategy. Journalists should never become perpetrators of spreading hoax content. According to research conducted by Masrudi (2019), hoaxes deceive at the psychological level because the hoax content contains information that is somehow based on the opinions and attitudes of most people and because it is based on limited knowledge. Reporting, editing, and networking skills that are honed will be a provision as well as a weapon for journalists to ward off hoaxes. With more developed skills, journalists will also be more able to provide accurate information that is highly needed by the community. Especially in a disaster situation such as a pandemic, when everyone is experiencing difficulties, it is correct and trusted information that can be very helpful for the community.

Alternative media under the auspices of community organizations function to become the mouthpiece of the da'wah movement of these organizations. The needs of the people become the focus in the running of an alternative media outlet. Even though it is under the auspices of the organization, the management of alternative media is carried out seriously and in a way that maintains the principles or ethics of journalism. For example, Suara Muhammadiyah has been verified by the press council as a general press and its editorial staff members have passed the journalist competency test at their respective levels. NU Online is the largest Islamic digital platform in Indonesia and has the highest number of clickers among alternative online media that carry the flag of community organizations.

Although journalists play an important role in handling the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of disseminating information, the participation of the community and government must also support and cooperate with each other (Bhusal, 2020). Preventing the spread of false information and disinformation is not only the responsibility of journalists but also of everyone at all levels of society. The government also needs to be supported in making policies that are in accordance with the needs of the community. Alternative media journalists can be a welcomed means of validating the information circulating in the community. Religion-related news about the pandemic, such as the COVID-19 vaccines that are rumored to contain haram ingredients, arewhere Islamic alternative media journalists can play their roles by investigating and clarifying the issue amidst the flood of information during the pandemic so that people are not confused. Qualified and ethical journalists are important in promoting a quality information cycle in society.

5.   Conclusion

Alternative Islamic media in Indonesia are media that are mostly affiliated with Islamic community organizations, including the NU, Muhammadiyah, PERSIS, and Hidayatullah media. A number of affiliated media have journalistic functions that are tailored to the goals of the organizations they are affiliated with. Based on the test measurement results, it was determined that the majority of Islamic alternative media journalists know how to write but had levels of skills in other journalistic aspects that needed improvement.

Based on the results of the FGD with the alternative media editors, the training generated data as to the skills that needed to be developed among the journalist participants. The data show that the areas for improvement were in writing narrative and in-depth news, the ability to find new points of view, presenting facts in the news, and making news with high appeal and value. The results of the training and discussions illustrate that there is still confusion in the choice of words, especially for personal pronouns for Muslim figures such as kyai. This finding reveals that given their Islam-based characteristics, these alternative media cannot leave the language of politeness to religious figures.

The measurement of the results also shows that the training at least improved the professional skills of Islamic alternative media journalists. When alternative media practitioners are able to more professionally provide proper and correct news reports that are needed by the community, especially the Muslims, they can prevent the public from being instigated by unaccountable false reporting. The training led to a significant change in the ability of Islamic alternative media journalists to show that training among their peers is very necessary and needs to be carried out on an ongoing basis. This training was an effort to

create a quality information ecosystem in the community.

Through quality reporting on Islamic alternative media platforms, the public, especially Muslims, are expected to no longer be easily influenced by false and provocative information on social media. Islamic alternative media, after all, is considered to have a news ideology that supports Islamic religious teachings upholding honesty and peace. We recommend conducting another similar training for journalists from a wider range of media. Training subjects can be added by fact-checking skills, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), and search engine marketing which are very needed by online journalists nowadays.

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