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# Understanding Homeless Media

A Study on Social Media Based  
Informal Local News in Five Indonesian Cities  
2024







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Published in September 2024 by Remotivi

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# Executive Summary

Homeless media refers to news outlets that initially distributed information solely through social media, with the majority of them now based on Instagram. Nowadays, as our findings suggest, homeless media outlets have emerged as an important source of local news, referred to for their quick update and locally relevant content. Using content analysis of their news, interviews with homeless media founders and personnel, and discussions with media audiences, this study attempts to understand their emergence and dynamics, how they are positioned among other actors in the contemporary Indonesian media landscape, and their prospects and issues.

Our research focuses on homeless media in five Indonesian cities: Medan, Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya. We conducted content analysis on 3,000 posts from 15 homeless media outlets, which we categorize to investigate the type and source of content that effectively generates engagement, as well as interviews with 9 homeless media in these cities to gain an insider perspective. We also conducted focus group discussions in these five cities to gain audience insight into homeless media consumption and exposure patterns.

## **The following are the main findings of this study:**

- Homeless media outlets are mostly run informally, with only a few employees. Only one from nine we interviewed is registered as a media entity, and that was only after years of operation. There are two homeless media outlets

that are only managed by one person. Others are mostly managed by two to five people. They may hire more on occasion if they need to create higher-quality content, such as endorsements.

- Four homeless media outlets we interviewed began as something entirely different, such as hobby, community, or paid Instagram promotion pages. They changed course after noticing increased engagement by providing local news, as well as citizens voluntarily sending them newsworthy incidents to be published.
- As the majority of homeless media outlets are not legally registered as a media entity, this raises concerns about governance among government officials and journalists. However, our homeless media interlocutors stated that they have implemented an internal code of conduct, particularly in terms of filtering misinformation.
- The informality of homeless media outlets provides them with advantageous flexibility, allowing them to respond to audience submissions or circulating internet content while making quick decisions about what content to publish.
- The most engaging content on homeless media is related to crime, followed by city facts, eccentric citizen behavior, city romantization, commotion among citizens, and accidents; however, they most frequently post about shopping/service recommendations, government policies, crime, culinary recommendations, and city facts.
- Homeless media outlets provide impressively specific and local news to their audiences immediately after it occurs, thanks to audience submissions and the circulating local social media content. They function as an effective local information hub.



- Nonetheless, because homeless media outlets rely on social media as a publishing platform and distribution channel, losing their accounts, whether due to a social media ban or hacking, can pose a significant risk to their operations. Our interlocutors have no plans to mitigate the risk. This happened to another account managed by @merapi\_uncover personnel, and they were unable to do anything about it.
- Many of our audience interlocutors admit to being first exposed to local news through homeless media, and they actively use homeless media outlets to learn about recent events in their community, such as incidents they witnessed or traffic jams.
- Homeless media’s most engaging content—city facts and romantization—evokes a sense of connection between the audience and their city.
- Although not all, homeless media outlets may become participatory spaces, with citizens using them to draw attention to incidents or public issues, or to respond to other posts.
- According to our interviews with homeless media personnel, they fund their organizations through paid endorsements, which include promoting commercial local spots, hotels, restaurants, cafes, events, and so on.
- Misinformation has become a major concern for the homeless media audience, and homeless media personnel are well aware of it. Because they prioritize delivery speed and high engagement, they are prone to reposting misinformation. Some of our homeless media interlocutors stated that they implemented a mechanism to filter misinformation.
- Mainstream media journalists, knowing that they cannot compete with homeless media outlets in terms of speed

of delivery, use homeless media outlets to stay up to date on potential local information.

- Homeless media has the potential to disrupt the general journalist business and practice, as they command large audience attention while using significantly fewer resources and, on occasion, using mainstream media products as news.
- Many homeless media outlets collaborate with state bodies, and government institutions provide them with regular news updates. Some homeless media outlets are even circulating information primarily from one institution, with the news they provide appearing to be based on internal information.

Given that homeless media is here to stay in today's media landscape, we've made some recommendations to the appropriate stakeholders. In essence, homeless media should be encouraged to continue fostering audience participation in producing locally relevant news while simultaneously minimizing the risks associated with it—misinformation, unmoderated disturbing content, a lack of transparency and credibility, and unaccredited use of others' content. The traditional media, which frequently focuses on news from formal institutions, must acknowledge the importance of everyday local news as well. The following are our suggestions:

- Our findings suggest strategies for addressing homeless media issues and leveraging their participatory model. To mitigate problems such as misinformation, we recommend implementing capacity-building programs that include basic journalism training as well as how to navigate user-generated content. A guideline on how to use user-generated content can be developed.

- To remain relevant in the social media age, traditional media must adapt to homeless media's local focus. This has been accomplished through journalistic individual efforts to stay up to date on homeless media posts, but institutional efforts are required to progress. Traditional media must broaden their focus beyond formal institutions that typically provide them with readily available news.
- Collaboration between traditional and homeless media can improve information accuracy and reduce unaccredited use of traditional content. Facilitating regular activities involving both of these media is of importance.
- Furthermore, civil societies should work with homeless media to keep them away from elite capture. Government institutions have actively engaged with homeless media personnel. Civil society organizations may want to consider disseminating campaign-related information through homeless media.
- The legal vulnerabilities of homeless media, which are not protected by the Press Law and often lack legal literacy, must be addressed. Collaboration with Legal Aid Institutions and improving legal literacy will provide critical support to homeless media practitioners.

# Introduction



01

# Introduction

The Indonesian media landscape is seeing an explosion of social media accounts posing as news outlets. These accounts provide news and stories to a large number of Indonesian social media users, as the most popular are followed by hundreds of thousands of people. They are best known for posting photos or videos of current or recent events overlaid with a prominent title text, occasionally followed by a caption with a more detailed description of what is going on. They also share footage from recent events with a brief caption. Some may also frequently share information about interesting local attractions, restaurants, or events. In contrast to social media influencers, who have many followers on popular platforms as well, these accounts do not associate themselves with specific personalities or provide opinionated takes on specific events, instead focusing on bringing information with news values to their audience. Their style and nomenclature are somewhat reminiscent of traditional media, as evidenced by account names like Info Jakarta and Kabar Tangerang Selatan, as well as how they report events.

While some such accounts may be controlled by established media companies, the vast majority are not. These social media accounts do not reveal the individuals responsible for their content, the legal entities to which they belong, their address, or any other information that reveals more about them. Some officials and mainstream media use the term “homeless media” to describe these accounts, borrowing a term introduced by a media company to name their decentralized news distribution model (Marconi, [2015](#); Hanum, [2016](#)). Although this term has a negative connotation because it associates these outlets with

informality, it is also descriptive. Many of these social media news outlets do not have a presence outside of their respective platforms. Unlike their mainstream media counterparts, they do not have a “home,” which can be a website address or the legal entity under which they are registered. Traditional media landscape actors’ hold negative sentiments about these outlets, which is understandable. Traditional media has long battled unauthorized reproduction of its content, and homeless media accounts are frequently the violators. For government officials, homeless media is a problem of governance. Because they are not registered, they cannot be easily subjected to the existing media law ([Kemenkominfo, 2023](#)).

Nonetheless, as traditional media struggles in the rapidly changing media landscape, homeless media accounts appear to be flourishing. Their social media content engagement rate consistently outperforms that of traditional media. The successful ones, such as Folkative, may expand and become prominent media companies, though we must also consider that the number of failing homeless media can be much higher than the successful ones. Our study aims to learn more about these homeless media accounts in Indonesia. Our approach is exploratory, which instead of focusing on specific aspects of this new form of media, we attempt to establish the context in which it emerges, sustains itself, and proliferates, making sense of how it came to be as well as how it relates to others in the media landscape, most notably the audience and other media. In a sense, we try to address the why and the how of homeless media. We accomplish this in the following sections by connecting diverse materials from a variety of sources and data collection techniques.

The prevalence of these homeless media accounts speaks volumes about recent socio-technological changes and the evolving way we, as audiences, interact with media. Globally, there is an increasing trend of consuming current events via social media, which is also happening in Indonesia. According to Pew Research Center data collected from surveys of US adults since 2016, attention to news has gradually declined, reaching a low point in 2021-2022 ([Forman-Katz, 2023](#)). On the other hand, news consumption via social media is increasing, particularly among millennials and Gen Z ([American Press Institute, 2022](#)). The same pattern is evident in Indonesia, where youth knowledge of specific information is now primarily shaped by incidental news exposure on social media ([Fatharani, 2023](#)). Social media is most effective at delivering relevant information to the audience, catering to each individual audience as it collects data and understands their personal preferences. It is a semi-automated self-learning architecture whose ability to curate relevant news cannot be matched by traditional media companies.

One of the notable consequences of this new social media-dominated landscape, as noted by Charlie Warzel ([2023](#)) of The Atlantic, is the rise of influencers and creators as the new hub of information, replacing traditional media. They provide personas that connect with each audience segment on their own pages, forming personal bonds with them in ways that traditional news outlets cannot. Nonetheless, another trend that has escaped observers' attention since the recent dominance of social media is the emergence of unofficial news hubs nested exclusively in social media platforms. These news organizations prefer not to reveal their personal identities, instead focusing on delivering specific news to specific audiences, and some appear to be thriving as a result. As social media provides

practical and inexpensive infrastructures for disseminating information that individuals previously could not afford, the emerging media landscape becomes a fertile ground for such accounts.

While we focus on what contributes to the emergence of homeless media, we also consider its current and potential impact on the Indonesian media landscape. With the rise of an algorithm-tailored information ecosystem, news distribution has become highly localized. Many homeless media accounts in Indonesia focus on specific provinces or cities, providing news and information about the area, and this strategy appears to be working well, as such homeless media accounts are rapidly growing. These local homeless media accounts are the first that people see when they search for the names of specific cities on social media platforms, and their posts are among those that are prioritized for distribution to the audience. Earlier research (Tapsell, [2021](#); [Heychael et al., 2021](#)) indicates that such accounts proliferated during the Covid-19 outbreak, arguing that their presence aided those in need of relevant local information that could not be provided by traditional media. As the traditional Indonesian media landscape is notoriously concentrated, whether in terms of ownership, information, or audience (Masduki et al., 2023; [Heychael & Dhona, 2014](#)), this situation raises the intriguing question of whether homeless media can contribute to decentralizing information sources and circulation.

However, because homeless media outlets are informal news outlets with little information about themselves, they cannot be held to the same level of ethical or legal responsibility as traditional media outlets. While government officials concerned with governability express concern about homeless media, civil society should also have a legitimate concern. Some homeless media outlets have



spread false information about marginalized groups, such as during the Rohingya refugee crisis in late 2023. Misinformation directed at marginalized groups is emotionally appealing, compelling people to share it, and engagement-oriented accounts are likely to be drawn to it ([Cherici, 2021](#)). Politicians and institutions may also hire these accounts to conduct online campaigns, exacerbating Indonesia's media landscape, which is known for its lack of political independence ([Tapsell, 2017](#)). Nevertheless, homeless media outlets may also set their own standards of practice in response to audience and other actors' expectations, making them not completely unaccountable.

In our research, we examine homeless media accounts that focus on providing local news in five Indonesian cities: Medan, Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya. All of these cities are among the most populous in Indonesia, with the highest internet penetration, so it stands to reason that they have a significant number of homeless media and a need for local information ([APJII, 2023](#)). We also examine homeless media in multiple cities to ensure comparability and a more generalizable set of empirical data. The research questions we try to answer are as follows:

1. How do homeless media outlets emerge, sustain themselves, and grow in the changing Indonesian media landscape?
2. How do homeless media relate to other actors in the Indonesian media landscape?
3. What are the prospects and issues associated with homeless media, particularly in terms of media democratization, the spread of malicious content and misinformation, ethics, news quality, and accountability?

# Emergence Stories



02

# Emergence Stories

This chapter captures the emergence stories of homeless media accounts, as well as how they evolve in response to the social-media dominated information landscape, primarily through our in-depth interviews with homeless media representatives. One of the characteristics associated with homeless media is obscurity. Information about individuals or the organizations that manage it is not displayed, making it difficult for anyone interested in learning the actual size of its organization or how it operates. Since the term “homeless media” was first used in the Indonesian media landscape by a media corporation attempting to implement a new decentralized content distribution model, it appears that it can be run by people who have never worked in professional journalism as much as it can be an avatar of an established media company (Hanum, [2016](#)). Nonetheless, our findings suggest that the majority of homeless media accounts are informal small-scale organizations, often centered on specific individuals who also served as their founders.

Their founding stories, which may appear unlikely in the past when the information ecosystem was different, clearly reflect how newsworthy information is circulated and received by its audience today. The information shared by the outlets made its way to the appropriate social media audience, and those who found it useful chose to follow them. Some of these homeless media outlets frequently have humble beginnings, with their founders establishing them as side projects or accounts for various purposes, and the founders never imagined their media would reach the level it does today. In a short period of time, their accounts grew exponentially as they received unexpect-

edly warm responses from the audience. Others aimed to become news sources from the start, but they all began without the support of established media companies or even experience as professional journalists.

In each case, we can also see that the audience has as much, if not more, influence on the trajectory of homeless media as the people who create it. The homeless media management learns about their most engaging content along the way, and they tailor their content production to what their audience responds to. With visible metrics such as like, share, and recent view counts, social media architecture enables creators to quickly grasp the audience's reactions to their content, essentially encouraging them to reproduce the type of information with the highest engagement rate. As we will see, there are various beginning stories, but they eventually evolved into producers of certain content with news values. We will also see how the audience influences homeless social media accounts by sending them content. The audience has a need to communicate publicly relevant information, and social media accounts with a large following provide the necessary exposure. This helps homeless media accounts gain content and establish themselves as a local information hub.

The informality of homeless media is advantageous for disseminating the most recent news, as decisions can be made quickly when they are tagged with information by an audience. They are actively comparing themselves to other forms of media, both traditional and social media-based, drawing inspiration from them while also positioning themselves in the media landscape. In an ironic twist of fate, they, who once looked up to the traditional media, are now the ones to whom the traditional media refers for current news.

## Humble Beginnings and Trajectory Changes

The founder of the @wargajakarta.id Instagram and TikTok accounts was a casual motorcycle ride-sharer. In 2019, he created his account as a side activity. He enjoyed documenting things he found on the street while working and created @wargajakarta.id to share them, which unexpectedly grew into accounts with large followings on both TikTok and Instagram, as people saw what he shared as useful. “After the account gets many followers, it turns out to be fun!” he said, expressing how he enjoyed seeing his account gain a large following and be helpful to many people. The @wargajakarta.id Instagram and TikTok accounts now primarily post incidents in Jakarta, with occasional glimpses into fascinating aspects of daily life in the city.

We accessed the @wargajakarta.id TikTok account in the first week of July 2024 and immediately found pinned posts about crime news. One of the pinned posts depicts an online car seller swindler being apprehended, and when played, it displays an edited video of a police press conference reporting on the crime’s method of operation. Another pinned post features footage of a celebrity being apprehended for drug abuse. The videos that dominate its TikTok and Instagram pages give off the vibe of a crime report show, which is also popular on television. Its video of an exhausted motorcycle rider pulling over and resting in the middle of Jakarta’s brutal rush hour received a lot of attention on its TikTok page, with over one million views. The content thumbnail is highlighted with text describing the motorcycle rider as a “family’s champion” (*pejuang keluarga*), which means someone who works hard to provide for their family. The audience responded positively to the post. TikTok users commented on how this reminded

them of their husband, or shared the rider's feelings and stated that they do it for their families.

Figure 2.1 - @wargajakarta.id TikTok Posts



The background story and content of @wargajakarta.id are similar to that of @merekamjakarta and, to some extent, illustrative of other homeless media outlets we interviewed. The founders of @merekamjakarta and @wargajakarta initially used their accounts to pursue their hobbies. The Instagram account @merekamjakarta began as a platform for the founder to share his photos. He has a hobby of photography and writing, which he has shared on his accounts. When we visited the @merekamjakarta Instagram account in early July 2024—the media does not have a TikTok account—we were greeted with pinned posts celebrating Jakarta's birthday on Bundaran HI, a roundabout that has become a cultural icon in the city.

Figure 2.2 - @merekamjakarta Instagram Posts

**merekamjakarta**  
Original audio

**merekamjakarta** HARAPAN WARGA UNTUK JAKARTA YANG BERULANG TAHUN KE-497

Sejumlah warga menyampaikan harapannya untuk Jakarta yang kini sudah berusia 497 tahun di kawasan Bundaran Hotel Indonesia, Menteng, Jakarta Pusat pada Sabtu (22/6/2024) dini hari.

Mereka berharap Jakarta lebih berjaya, maju kotanya, lebih aman, dan lebih bersih. Warga juga berharap Persija Jakarta bisa juara.

Tim Merekam Jakarta

Ayo merekam peristiwa di Jakarta

Informasi seputar Jakarta?  
Follow @merekamjakarta  
Follow @merekamjakarta

3,070 likes  
June 22

Add a comment...

---

**merekamjakarta**  
Soundridemusic • True Crime

**merekamjakarta** KOMPLOTRAN MALING GASAK MOTOR DI KLINIK, PEMILIK SEMPAT KEJAR TAPI GAGAL KARENA TERJATUH DAN TERSERET

Komplotan maling motor beraksi di sebuah klinik di Jalan Meruya Utara, Kembangan, Jakarta Barat pada Sabtu (6/7/2024) sekitar pukul 16.56 WIB.

Motor Honda Beat bernomor pelat B 5868 BKG raib digasak maling.

Korban berinisial D (24) bersama adiknya saat itu sedang berobat di klinik tersebut. Komplotan maling motor terlihat berjumlah dua orang.

Satu pelaku menunggu di motor, sedangkan pelaku lainnya berperan mengambil motor incarannya. Dalam beberapa detik motor korban raib dicuri.

1,732 likes  
July 7

Add a comment...

---

**merekamjakarta**  
Original audio

**merekamjakarta** MOBIL TERBAKAR DI DEKAT MASJID CUT MUTIA

Sebuah mobil terbakar di Jalan Cut Mutia dekat Masjid Cut Mutia, Kebon Sirih, Menteng, Jakarta Pusat pada Rabu (3/6/2024) sekitar pukul 16.15 WIB.

Api terlihat berkobar besar di bagian depan mobil.

Sebanyak satu unit mobil dan empat personel Suku Dinas Penanggulangan Kebakaran dan Penyelamatan Jakarta Pusat dikerahkan untuk memadamkan api.

Api diduga berasal dari korsleting di bagian mesin mobil.

Istimewa

Ayo merekam peristiwa di Jakarta

1,083 likes  
July 3

While the account now has 214K followers, the founder of @merekamjakarta admitted that his account differs from what he had envisioned at the beginning. He initially wanted “to become an archive of what exists in Jakarta.” Along the way, he discovered that posts with news values, particularly those about crime, are more popular, so he decided to create more of this type of content. As their accounts grew, the founders of @wargajakarta.id and @merekamjakarta discovered that their followers were eager to share interesting information that they had documented with them. Their followers frequently tag them or send them direct messages with photos or videos. They are expected to distribute them further. “[My] platform becomes a kind of complaining centre [for the audience] as well,” said @merekamjakarta’s founder. This audience expectation for homeless media, particularly those with large followings, will serve as an information hub enables the accounts to receive continuous follower-generated news.

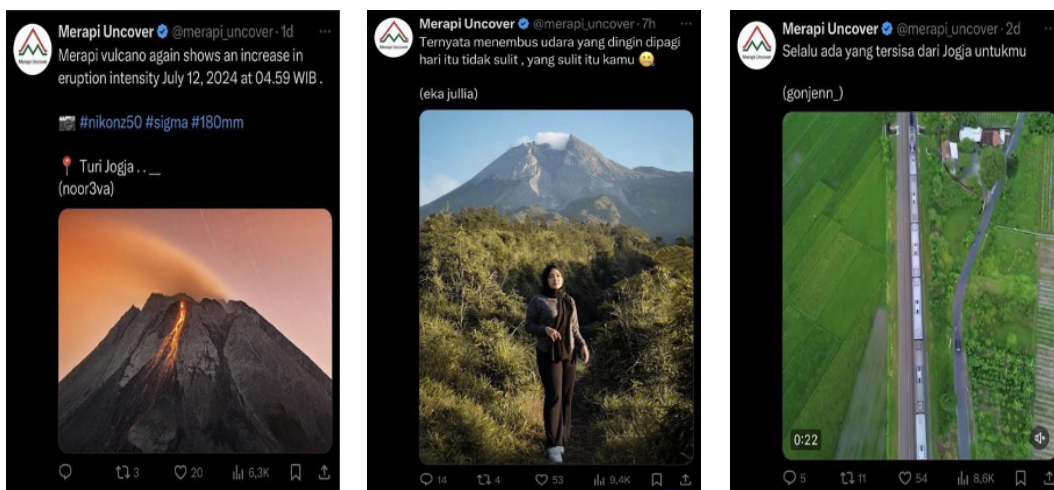
The background story of Merapi Uncover (@merapi\_uncover) is intriguing, but it is typical of homeless media emergence stories. Merapi Uncover is one of, if not the most well-known, homeless media outlets in Yogyakarta. We kept hearing our Yogyakarta interlocutors associate homeless media with Merapi Uncover, whereas in other cities, it is not associated with specific accounts. As of July 2024 when we last observed it, Merapi Uncover had 636K Instagram followers and 291K Twitter followers. Merapi Uncover began as Merapi News on Twitter in 2011, providing updates on Mount Merapi. Mount Merapi, located on the border between Central Java and Yogyakarta, erupted dramatically in 2010. Many Yogyakarta residents experienced trauma as a result of the event. It killed 386 people, destroyed nearby landscapes and villages, and displaced tens of thousands of villagers. As people in Yogyakarta became wary of Mount



Merapi's activities in the aftermath, local media began to regularly report on Merapi's daily activities.

Prior to the creation of Merapi Uncover, the founder of @merapi\_uncover noticed that there were numerous reports about Mount Merapi on television, particularly from media outlets owned by large media corporations. The founder stated that he wanted to keep people in the social media informed about Mount Merapi. He had previously handled another Twitter account, @jalinmerapi. He explained that the name Merapi Uncover refers to the media's goal of providing previously unknown information about Mount Merapi. When we checked Merapi Uncover's Twitter account in the present, we noticed that it still regularly posts information about Mount Merapi activities. Its posts, however, are now primarily about recent events, sourced from content submitted by its audience. The most recent content focuses on incidents, traffic situations, events, and crime reporting in Yogyakarta. However, unlike the previous two Jakarta accounts, many of the contents are photos and videos of beautiful or unique local landscapes and scenery. It also occasionally posts humorous and amusing events or reflections on everyday life. It could be a poem or a funny heartbreak reflection sent by a follower.

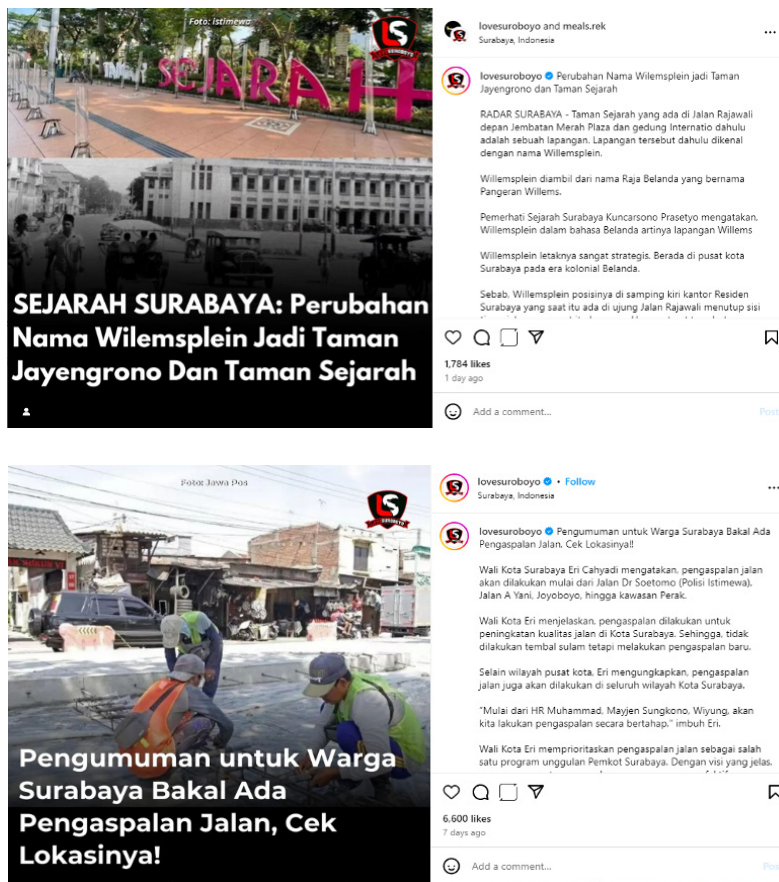
**Figure 2.3 - @merapi\_uncover Twitter Posts**



The three examples above demonstrate the prevalence of focus shifts in homeless media, as well as the formative nature of platform-mediated audience's expectation. These media must be relevant for a specific audience to thrive; what is considered newsworthy may evolve over time among the audience, and their audience actively positions them as an information hub, including by sending them content to be reposted.

On the other hand, there is a homeless media account that has successfully grown its following while realizing that in doing so, it frequently posts engaging content that may not be relevant to its original purpose. There is a sense of loss of identity as a result of having to adapt to external preferences. The account @lovesuroboyo started with its enthusiastic founder's desire to share anything Surabaya-related. Prior to launching @lovesuroboyo on Twitter in 2014, the founder frequently shared information about the city on his own Facebook page. His initial intention was to create an account that would serve as a community platform for Surabaya residents. He cares deeply about the city, which is why he named his account after it. As of July 2024, his media's Instagram account has 580,000 followers. It is filled with posts depicting the vibes of Surabaya, the city's history, event information, and breaking news. The founder noticed that a large portion of the page's content now focuses on current viral issues. He hoped that in the future, his media would include more content that adds significant value to its readers, the people of Surabaya, such as historical content. He hoped that the media would be more selective and not overly focused on viral stories.

Figure 2.4 - @lovesuroboyo Instagram Posts



It is also possible for homeless media news outlets to start with internet-based media or as accounts for various purposes, which are purchased from others because they have a large following. The first is the case of @punyabinjai, a homeless media platform based in Binjai, a provincial city in North Sumatra. The founder's initial motivation for starting the media in 2015 was to provide current news, believing that doing so through an internet news portal would be more effective (and likely less expensive). They eventually migrated to social media because it provided them with a valuable network and space to share information with their followers. The latter example is provided by @jogjainfo. The current owner is not the original founder. The original founder sold it to him when it still had 40,000 followers and focused on reposting tourist destinations

and paid promotion. According to the owner, the account was changed after the Yogyakarta provincial government invited local social media accounts with a large following to collaborate. The account @jogjainfo, which had 509K followers when we visited in July 2024, is now also disseminating news. Apparently, most of it comes from the government.

**Figure 2.5 - @jogjainfo Instagram Post**



## Measuring Relevance and Audience Expectation

Homeless media personnel are particularly attentive to the needs of their audience. Aside from making the necessary changes once they understand their audience's preferences, some conduct research to determine what is required from social media news outlets. They are actively comparing their media to that of others, attempting to determine how they can best provide information as news organizations with limited resources. This is reflected in our conversation with @merapi\_uncover. As one of the first social

media news outlets, @merapi\_uncover was founded with television news in mind. The founder observed that there was a high demand for information about Mount Merapi activities, but there was a lack of information providers on this topic in social media.

In the case of later-emerging homeless media, @bdg.info's background story may serve as an illustrative example of such sensitivity to the needs of the audience. The Instagram account @bdg.info was created in 2018. After completing his bachelor's degree, the founder of @bdg.info considered creating something useful for people. He noticed that Bandung still lacked local social media accounts that shared locally relevant news. People in Jakarta already had these types of accounts, and he wanted to start his own news outlet in his hometown. "When I needed information on how to extend my driver's license, I had to consult Jakarta-based media. There was no such media in Bandung. Even if there was one, it was rarely updated," he reflected. The @bdg.info founder then conducted his own research. He asked Bandung residents what kind of information they needed, and many mentioned the location of driver's license extension services or a flooding spot in the city. They primarily require local, relevant information.

Figure 2.6 - @bdg.info Instagram Posts



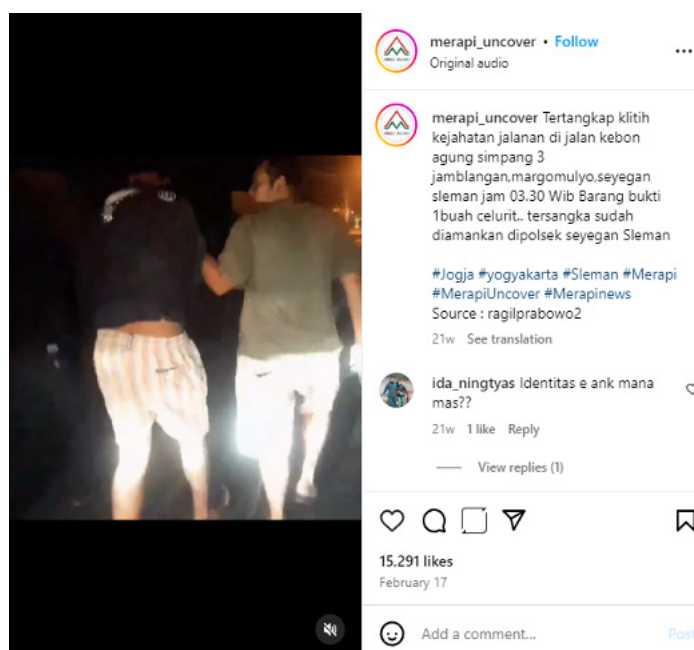
Homeless media personnel explained that they use engagement and virality as metrics to assess the relevance of their content to the platform's readers. Not everyone appears to be comfortable claiming that their media pursues news with high engagement potential, but everyone can clearly explain the type of content that allows their post to generate more audience, implying that they regularly attempt to produce such content. The owner of @jogjainfo spoke candidly about the engagement-orientation of homeless media. In his own words,

*“Since we’re on social media, the goal is to go viral. Before we post content, we always analyze it and determine whether it has the potential to attract attention.”*

Homeless media also actively examines factors that help or hinder its content’s reach to a larger audience. As @war-gajakarta.id has four social media platforms, the founder attempted to identify each platform’s algorithm in terms of content. According to him, the audience on Instagram prefers more dramatic content about crimes, bullying, and murders, whereas on TikTok such content can easily be reported, potentially leading to the account posting it being banned. Facebook, he added, is the most secure, and the media can freely share information.

Our interlocutors unanimously agreed that crimes and incidents are among the most engaging types of content, and this is supported by our content analysis, which will be expanded later—the genre of content with the highest engagement rate is crime. The founder of @beritakota-bandung stated that “events such as incidents and fire had more viewers than other content.” In Yogyakarta, our interlocutor confirmed that the most engaging issue is klitih, a notorious adolescent crime in which youth harm streetgoers for no apparent reason. “Klitih content is always drawing public attention,” he pointed out. There is also a variation in the most engaging content across accounts and cities. Our homeless media interlocutors in Yogyakarta and Surabaya mentioned that tourism promotion content generates a high level of engagement for them. Meanwhile, the founder of @jogjainfo, in particular, stated that content about city garbage is gaining traction in his media—we should note that garbage was once a hot topic among citizens.

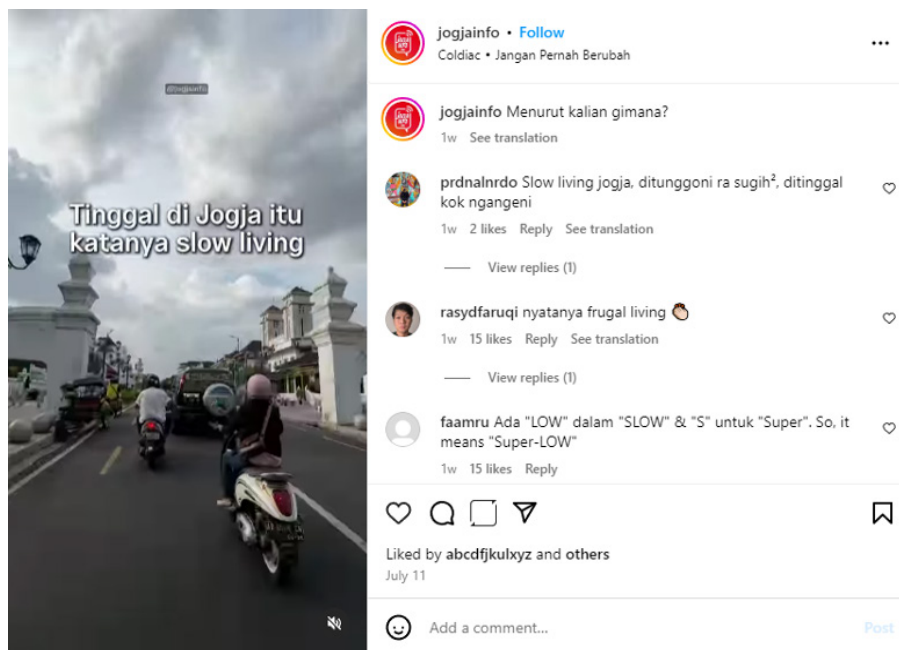
Figure 2.7 - @merapi\_uncover Instagram Post



It is worth noting that some homeless media outlets regularly post amusing and personal reflection content. In addition to @merapi\_uncover, who regularly posts poems, funny photos, and videos, as previously mentioned, some others do the same. On May 28, 2024, the Instagram account @bdg.info posted a video of a Toyota Fortuner driver struggling to tap his payment card into the parking checking platform, presumably due to overtaking the previous car, which entertained the audience. This post appears to be oddly placed among their other posts, which record traffic incidents, criminal acts, or crime scenes. Another example is a post by @jogjainfo on July 11, 2024, which shows a video taken from the perspective of a motorcycle driver in Yogyakarta and is accompanied by the text “living in Jogja is said to be slow living”. The post invited the audience in Yogyakarta to consider whether this word corresponded with their lives, and many appeared amused by it, cracking jokes. “The reality is [instead of doing slow living] we are doing frugal living,” a person replied.



Picture 2.8 - @jogjainfo Instagram Post



The reason homeless media posts this type of content, despite the fact that it may appear out of place on their pages and is often not happening in or related to the city, is engagement rate, aside from the fact that it circulates widely and is easy to obtain and repost. Comical and reflective content has been observed to be common on the internet, and homeless media, as an information hub, is contributing to its dissemination because it can increase engagement. We heard homeless media members admit that serious and planned content may not generate the expected engagement, whereas just for fun content generates a lot of engagement, and how they try to adjust to their audience in order to make their media successful. To quote the founder of @bdg.info,

*“People prefer viral content over serious news. For example, the schedule for the Persib parade received little engagement, but*

*humorous content such as someone falling or a motorcycle revving up can garner up to two million views.”*

The founder of @merekamjakarta referred to this type of content as “micro moments” of the city, in contrast to their other content, which captures more dramatic situations.

## **The Benefit of Informality: Immediate and Consistent Updates**

What homeless media personnel also understand is that they are expected to provide quick news updates and be consistent. Apart from relevance, news values is associated with timeliness. During the early days of internet mainstreaming in Indonesia, one of the first Indonesian internet news outlets, Detik.com, gained a large readership due to its brand of delivering information immediately, as opposed to other outlets that deliver it the next day after the copy of their print newspaper arrives. The homeless media accounts we interviewed also realized that their most desired quality is recentness. Some explicitly stated that they want to outcompete their traditional competitors, the conventional media, which have mostly abandoned print and now only circulate their news on the internet, and to keep their news as current as possible. They were aware that they had occasionally become a source of news for the traditional media, and they were quite proud of it.

The founder of @surabayaterkini named his media Surabaya Terkini, which can be translated into English as Surabaya Now, for this very reason. When he founded his media in 2020, during the early stages of the Covid-19 outbreak, he

hoped to establish a media capable of delivering news immediately after it occurred.

*“So, our media fellows can be a little slow sometimes. Let’s say an incident occurs at 8:00 AM. It may not be posted until the afternoon or evening. So, @surabayaterkini launched an initiative to find a way to immediately upload any incident to @surabayaterkini. This way, friends and the Surabaya community can stay up to date on whatever happens.”*

The founders of @bdg.info and @beritakotabandung made similar remarks when describing their media and content. The founder of @beritakotabandung stated that his media focuses on providing up-to-date news. Meanwhile, the founder of @bdg.info stated that his media strives to provide the public with news as quickly as possible. He went on to say, “we want the people of Bandung to see (our media) from the moment they wake up and be informed about various news such as fires or traffic congestion. So the people of Bandung have all the information until they go back to sleep.”

While most media outlets are now internet-based and could theoretically upload content as quickly as possible, the simplicity and informality of homeless media organizations allow them to bring news to their audience faster than traditional media outlets. They are managed by a small group of people, allowing for faster decision making, especially since there are no formal Standard Operating Procedures. We should also mention that the organization revolves around certain individuals, usually the founders, who, as our interview revealed, are primarily

concerned with getting the news out as quickly as possible. These media outlets are frequently notified of newsworthy information by being tagged by one of their followers, who expect them to share it so that it reaches a larger audience. They basically only need to repost it and, in some cases, include an easy-to-read brief description in the thumbnail or caption. This, of course, is something that traditional media organizations cannot accomplish. The reporters must write the story based on this information, which must then be reviewed by the editors.

The fact that the audience regards homeless media as a local information hub is also important. The audience essentially becomes homeless media collaborators, as they gladly share information that they believe is newsworthy, and all they require is that the stories be credited to them, usually with a brief mention of their social media handle at the end of the caption. The founder of @bdg.info described this homeless media-audience relationship as follows: “the more we upload news from the community, the more often they send news to us.” This is why he believed his media should check the direct message inbox as frequently as possible.

This audience-generated content is mostly raw, consisting of only a photo or a brief video captured with a cellphone camera and accompanied by a short descriptive caption. The information is gathered while the submitting audience is passing by; the visual is frequently unclear, and the information may be overly concise. There is also content produced by homeless media, and the overall quality is higher—the video or picture quality is clearer, and the news account is more comprehensive. However, as we will see in greater detail in Chapter 3, the content amount of this type of content is less than that of reposts. As a result, homeless media pages may appear messy when compared

to mainstream media, with visuals of varying quality filling them. Nevertheless, this does not appear to have an impact on their growth or the audience's perception of them as a source of current local information.

Consistency is another important factor for thriving homeless media news outlets. Homeless media personnel recognize the importance of updating their pages on a regular basis or risk losing readership. The founder of @bdg.info explicitly attributed his media's success to frequent updates. "We started with a few followers, but by posting consistently, we've grown to hundreds of thousands. News is now easily accessible, and we share all types of news," the founder stated. The founder of other Bandung homeless media, @beritakotabandung, stated that he began to be more consistent in updating after noticing that his followers' growth was stagnant. These media are also aware that if their pages are not regularly updated, they may not look good to their main sponsors. As the founder of @bdg.info stated,

*"First and foremost, we need to be consistent in order to get advertisements. Because if brands see that we don't update frequently, they'll be reluctant to advertise with us. The key is to consistently update from morning to night, as the community also needs a lot of information about new places. So if we don't update regularly, it will negatively impact our business."*

Our homeless media interlocutors expressed their delight at being able to meet their audience's demand for news and information. At some point, they realize they are doing something good for communities, and this gives them a

sense of obligation, whether it is to continue providing up-to-date information to their followers or to be a good representative of their cities.

## **Responding to Misinformation**

Because homeless media relies on audience-submitted content and strives to provide the most up-to-date news possible, the personnel are aware that they are prone to circulating misinformation. They are also aware that their type of media is notorious for spreading hoaxes, and their audience has a tendency to take their information with a grain of salt. The latter was confirmed during our audience focus group discussion. The audience admitted to seeing homeless media accounts repeatedly reposting misinformation, are skeptical of this type of media, and prefer to double-check their information with traditional media. In this section, we will mostly tell the responses as told by our interlocutors as homeless media personnel, which means this is how they represent themselves in relation to misinformation rather than assessing whether or not their misinformation control is effective, which will necessitate long-term monitoring. The chapters that follow provide a more critical evaluation of homeless media and misinformation.

Our homeless media interlocutors stated that they have made significant efforts to ensure that they are disseminating accurate information. The founder of @mereka-jakarta emphasized that he always prioritizes accuracy above all else. Other homeless media personnel made similar remarks, implying an acknowledgement for the importance of validity. Despite the lack of written Standard Operating Procedures, some claim that they try to ensure the validity of their posts before posting, making validi-

ty-checking their “Standard Operating Procedures”. How do they conduct validity checks in the absence of traditional media resources? The founder of @wargajakarta.id shared a method for cross-checking information across social media and texting platforms. When a user submits news to the media, he immediately checks WhatsApp Groups, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, entering the keywords for the news, such as “Jakarta flood”, to see if similar recent information comes up, proving the information is correct. Meanwhile, our @bdg.info interlocutor acknowledged making a similar effort to verify information. He will validate the information using Google and national news, as well as try to learn more about the senders of the information.

The founder of @merekamjakarta stated that he tries to be careful when reposting information submitted by social media accounts. When reposting user-submitted news, he will first conduct a background check, including determining whether the account is suspiciously private, whether the account belongs to an authentic user, and reviewing the photo or video metadata. The founder went on to say that information reposted by @merekamjakarta must include at least three elements: “where”, “when”, and “what”. “Those three pieces of information have to be clear before a post is published,” he stated.” He did not blame people for being skeptical of homeless media or believing it was less trustworthy than mainstream media, but he tried to be disciplined in verifying the information he provided to readers. He stated that as long as his media is able, they will visit the incident or event location to obtain confirmation or, at the very least, contact the local authority.

Some homeless media members stated that they also obtain information from official sources, such as the police, fire department, or local government bodies, which allows them to be more confident in the information they distribute. They have personal contact with these official sources, who are actively cultivating relationships with homeless media, which is understandable given the potential for this connection to help control the media and disseminate government information. Aside from that, our content analysis, which will be detailed in Chapter 3, reveals that government social media pages or websites serve as information sources for the homeless. They may also use information from mainstream media websites.

Even if homeless media outlets do not always check for validity, sticking to valid news may help them when they encounter troubles, as they occasionally have to deal with those who object to their posts. Homeless media personnel are not unfamiliar with being summoned for an investigation by the authorities, though they prefer to avoid it as much as possible. Contrary to the perception that they are obscure and unreachable, our homeless media interlocutors respond to attempts to contact them because they rely on others for information, access, and endorsement opportunities. They typically want to maintain their relationship with the government and police, and posting accurate information helps them do so. Aside from that, they must deal with people who claim to have been negatively implicated by the news on occasion and, as a result, want the news deleted. When this happens, the founder of @jogjainfo stated that his media will not remove the content as long as the information is correct. His media policy states that content can only be removed by the sender. In the story that the founder told us,



*Once, a tour jeep in Paralayang, Parangtritis, fell into a ravine, killing one tourist from out of town. I posted the news, citing sources from the police and the tour jeep association, and received threats. The reasons were that their family and relatives were involved. I ignored them because the information was valid. Why should I be afraid as long as I'm not posting hoaxes? The incident occurred, and it was confirmed by authorities. I am used to it. All you need to do is stay mentally strong. As long as it is true. I simply ignore them.*

The media @merapi\_uncover encountered a similar situation on multiple occasions. Once, the media was intimidated by a mob connected to an alleged thief. The media published a CCTV video of a theft, prompting the alleged thief's family and relatives to visit the office. They wanted the post removed. According to the founder, @merapi\_uncover did not comply with their request. Individuals who were previously involved in the media resigned as a result of this type of pressure. The founder himself stated that pros and cons are unavoidable in each posting, and they must simply face them—an attitude similar to that of the founder of @jogjainfo. Meanwhile, our @lovesuroboyo interlocutor claimed that his media had never posted a hoax, which we are unable to confirm. Knowing that misinformation is inextricably linked to homeless media, he appears to be quite proud of it. “Alhamdulillah, we have never posted news about conflicts or hoaxes,” he told us.

## Internal Management and Business-Strategy

As previously stated, homeless media organizations are typically managed informally and by a small group of people. Its informality is evident in the fact that none of our homeless media interlocutors have written Standard Operating Procedures, and only one of them is legally registered as a business entity. As one of our homeless media interlocutor said, “just go with the flow.” In some cases, our interlocutors’ homeless media outlets are run by a single person. They typically lack journalism training before managing social media-based news outlets. Social media platforms give them access to resources that were previously only available to media companies, such as story production tools and distribution channels. In the current ecosystem, they only need to act as information brokers, being dependable and effective in passing information from one source to the next.

This situation is particularly evident in the case of homeless media managed by a single person. According to the founder, the team at @beritakotabandung is made up of only himself. Working from home, he handles everything himself, including managing social media accounts, editing posts, and searching for resources through his personal network. He also managed another media account. “I want to have my own office in the future, of course, and be legally registered,” he went on. Prior to founding @beritakotabandung, he worked as balaikota’s security, which appears to have provided him with the necessary network to establish his media. Another media outlet run by a single person is @wargajakarta.id. He can manage with the help of his network, which includes others who are active in sharing information via social media. However, our @war-

gajakarta.id interlocutor did not reveal much about how the media is internally managed or whether it is legally registered, which seems unlikely.

Others are managed by a larger team of three to five people, which typically includes the founder or owner. Each employee may have their own job description, though in some media, each may perform multiple roles at once. Among the specified roles are typically social media administrators and post editors, external relationship managers (whose duties include visiting collaborating partners or attending events), and reporters or content creators. The founder @bdg.info explained that their line of work does not require a large number of employees, which is why they only have a few. They only need laptops and cellphones to create content and operate. His remark is consistent with that of @merapi\_uncover founder. The founder believed that media should not be handled by more people because the content did not require proper editing. “Compared to the edited one, the original unedited content tends to get more comments and likes,” according to him.

On the other hand, there are some, such as @jogjainfo, who use external journalists to create their own coverage. The owner feels obligated to have the media create its own content. “Because I have so many followers on my account, I do not feel like it’s proper to only do a repost,” the founder told us. To produce coverage, they hire external journalists as contributors and pay them based on the story that they contribute to. The practice of hiring external resources while delegating more important routine tasks to an internal team is also shared by homeless media @punyabinjai. The media is managed by only two people, and both are responsible for the daily operations of the media, such as social media management, post-editing, and networking. When they are assigned endorsement

work that requires them to create higher-quality posts, they will hire freelancers to work as videographers, photographers, and hosts. In terms of business legality as a media company, the majority of homeless media outlets we examined did not have one. The media @punyabinjaicom is legally registered as a small-scaled private company, but only since 2023, despite being founded in 2015. The media @lovesuroboyo is legally registered, but as an association (perkumpulan). Both are not registered in the Press Council (Dewan Pers).

Despite the lack of a written Standard Operating Procedure, homeless media outlets that we interviewed attempted to standardize their practices in some important areas, particularly validity-checking, as previously mentioned. Other issues that some attempt to explicitly regulate include who or what they cannot endorse, what types of content they cannot publish, and requiring contributors to obtain permission before filming or producing content in specific locations. One of our homeless media interlocutors stated that they will not accept offers to endorse political parties, alcoholic beverages, or cigarettes, whereas others stated that their media will not collaborate with online gambling and investment services, medicine products that have not been certified by the Indonesian Food and Drug Authority, or anything that appears to be a scam. One said he is afraid of promoting something illegal, which could lead to problems with the authorities. Meanwhile, some of our interlocutors stated that their media avoids publishing content that promotes ethnic and religious discrimination, as well as suicide.

Almost all of our homeless media interlocutors stated that they sustain their media through endorsements, similar to how traditional media did with advertisements, though there is a clearer distinction between paid promotion and

reporting in traditional media. Homeless media typically promotes products, events, culinary and tourism destinations, or, in some cases, politicians. This is evident as soon as we enter their pages, where, in addition to the news that has been circulated, there are usually posts informing us of upcoming events, new or promoted products, or local spots. The endorsement can be obvious and direct, with the homeless media account directly uploading the social media post made by those making the product, or it can be a compelling recommendation produced with high value, whose vibe fits with the pages because it is associated with the city's local potential.

Some of our interlocutors emphasized the importance of creating consistent and high-quality content in order to attract advertisers. "The important thing is that @punyabinjai is active, the important thing is that we create our own content so that we have value, so that many well-known brands [are attracted to be endorsed by us]," @punyabinjai founder told us. They will also require strategy, according to the others. The founder of @surabayaterkini stated that his media had to provide some teasers to attract advertisers. Before receiving endorsement requests from local malls, his media created some content within the malls. This has successfully enticed malls to place advertisements on his page. His media also routinely makes their own culinary recommendations, hoping to entice culinary businesses to want to be endorsed by his media.

# The Landscape:

Connecting Homeless  
Media with Others



03

# The Landscape: Connecting Homeless Media with Others

To gain a better understanding of homeless media, we must consider its relationship to other actors in the emerging media landscape. Here is where our content and audience reception analysis come into play. They are providing us with materials that allow us to make important connections between the media, the audience, the platform, and the content. We begin by expanding on the findings of our content analysis, which identify and categorize 1,500 most engaging and 1,500 regular content from 15 homeless media Instagram accounts. As we mentioned in the method section, the 1,500 regular content is based on their posts in March 2024 and is intended to describe the type of content they produce in a typical week, as each homeless media posts approximately 80-120 posts per week. The 1,500 most engaging content is made up of the top 100 liked and commented posts from each Instagram account.

The findings substantiate what the preceding chapters have established, as well as adding some new connecting pieces. Some dramatic topics, identified as the most engaging by our homeless media interlocutors and frequently reproduced, do receive more attention than others. Trivial information, such as reflective and humorous posts, are also among the most engaging. Furthermore, it appears that the audience enjoys learning trivia about their city. Meanwhile, homeless media's regular content focuses on topics whose source materials are easily accessible given their limited resources. They can access the content via

other media or social media accounts, as well as through government channels. These topics are not particularly engaging, but they provide content that can be posted on a regular basis. The majority of content in the regular post category is also business-related, essentially endorsement posts. Their primary content source is reposts from other accounts, possibly due to their need for consistency, as social media provides an endless stream of circulating information, and homeless media outlets with smaller followings cannot expect followers to send them relevant content all the time. This reinforces our view of homeless media as an information hub.

Then, our audience focus group discussions in five cities provide insight into how homeless media information is distributed to the audience. Today's audience is exposed to news primarily through social media rather than actively seeking it, mirroring a global trend. This allows homeless media to thrive as an information hub, as information tailored by social media platforms to each user's preferences and networks tends to be specific. Meanwhile, our audience interlocutors perceive homeless media news as particularly pertinent, informing them of specific details that they require in their daily lives. They also appreciate the "real time" local news updates provided by homeless media, which they cannot easily find elsewhere. The FGDs also demonstrate the potential for further participation in homeless media. While homeless media information has been described as participatory, the venue also allows citizens to articulate public issues or urgent situations, which can then be addressed by officials and citizens. Nonetheless, our interlocutors expressed concern that homeless information is not entirely reliable because it is not verified media.



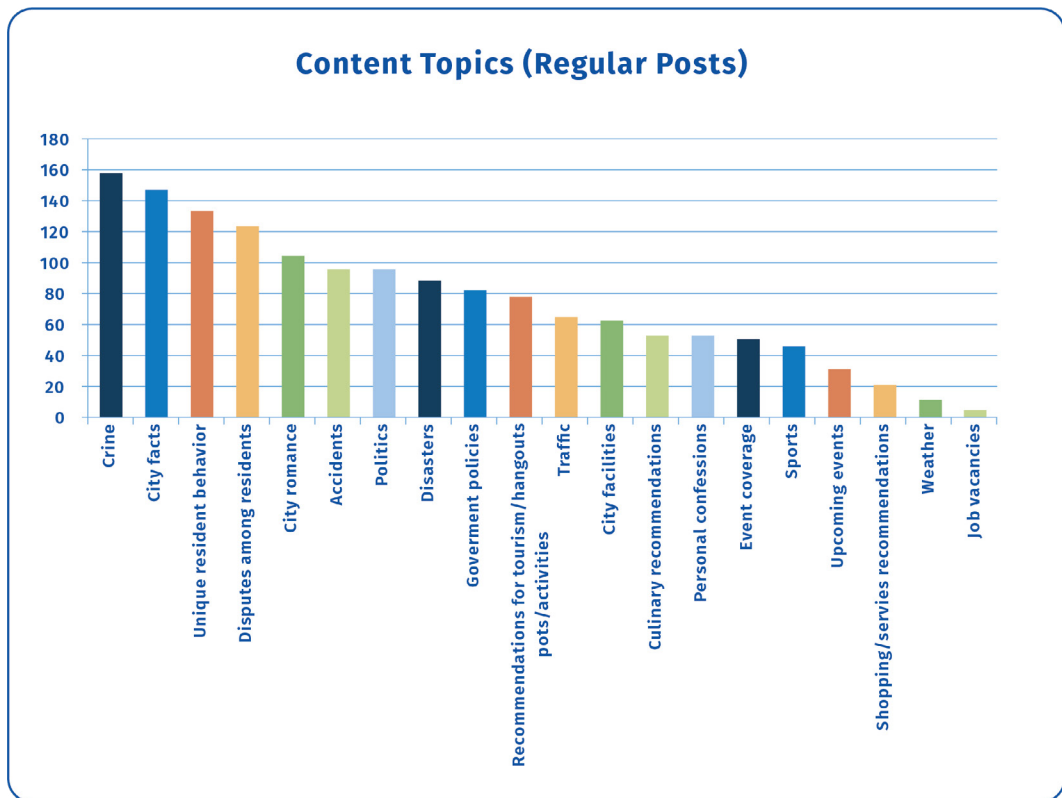
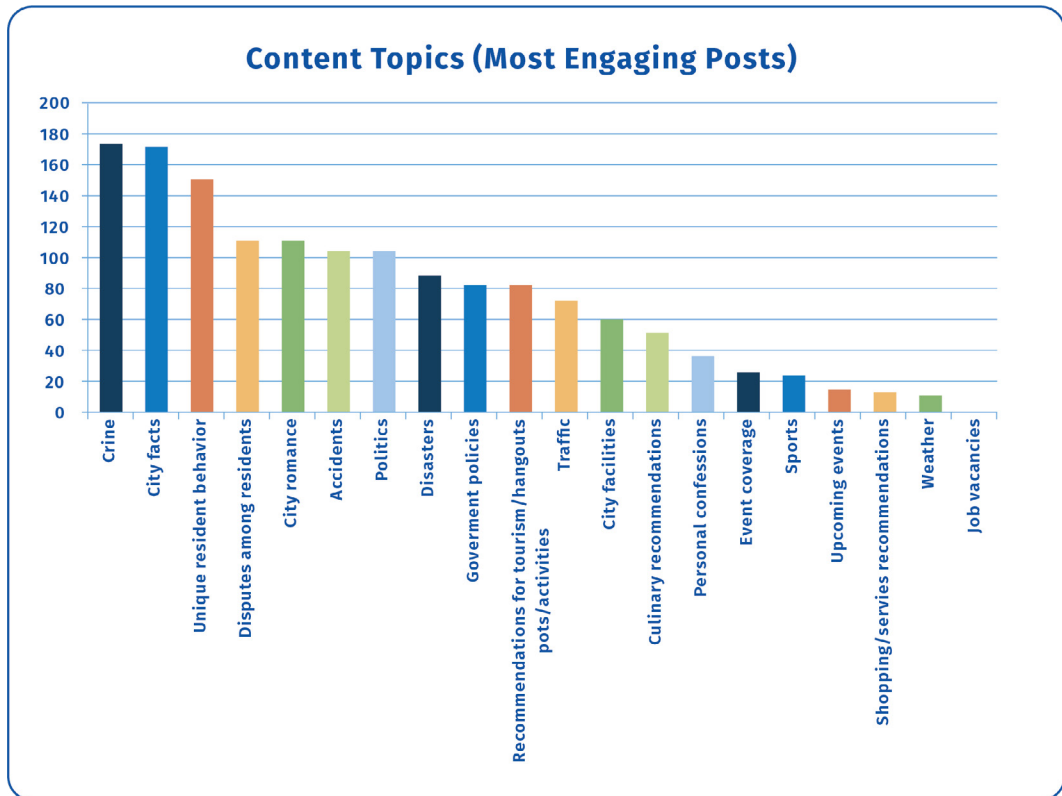
Eventually, the reason why local homeless media thrives will be better understood here. As local information brokers, the news they distribute becomes appealing to their audience because their audience's proximity to the events creates a sense of urgency, particularly when it concerns incidents or crime. We can additionally build on the argument we made in the previous chapter, that informality is beneficial to homeless media. Because they are not as concerned with procedures as traditional media, they can circulate emotionally moving posts immediately, and they will travel far through the algorithm and to the affected audience. However, we can say that homeless media exists in a gray area in the public's mind, where it is associated with inaccuracy, unreliability, and unverified.

## **Engagement and Connection**

After categorizing the 3,000 posts mentioned earlier, we discovered that crime content, followed by city facts, unique citizen behavior, city romantization, commotion among citizens are the top five most engaging topics in terms of quantity. This means that these five topics generate more engagement than other topics, such as government policies, politics, shopping/service or culinary recommendations, despite the fact that the latter are posted more frequently than the top five, as indicated by our topic categorization of regular homeless media posts.



Figure 3.1 - Content Topics (Most Engaging and Regular Posts)



Crime posts dominating the most engaging posts is expected and consistent with what our homeless media interlocutors shared with us, as detailed in Chapter 2. Examining some of the posts in this category reveals much about why the audience is so engaged with them—they elicit a wide range of powerful emotions, from fear to anger. What adds to this is the audience’s spatial and affective proximity to the events—they are involved in them and must care about them. [One of the crime posts](#), published by @infobandung-raya, shows police apprehending those who counterfeited branded shoes in Bandung. The audience can relate to the case because counterfeited products are all around them, as the city is full of fashion stores. They are also irritated by the fact that only the sellers were apprehended, rather than the producers, and suspect that the police are scapegoating the weaker actors.

[Another crime post](#) is a CCTV recording of a motorcycle theft in Surabaya, shared by @surabayaterkini. What catches the audience’s attention is the thief’s identity, which is indicated by the M letter at the beginning of their motorcycle plate number. “M plate, really concerning,” a user commented. The M plate indicates that the motorcycle is coming from Madura, and Madurese are frequently discriminated against in Surabaya. They are stereotyped as troublemakers who get involved in a variety of crimes and problems. This example also demonstrates how a homeless media post can elicit ethnic discrimination even when neither the post nor the caption contain any ethnic stereotypes. Essentially, the caption simply warns the audience about the dangers of motorcycle theft. The most engaging audience comments, as with many social media posts, are framing the issue, in this case directing people’s anger toward one of the city’s most stereotyped and resented groups.

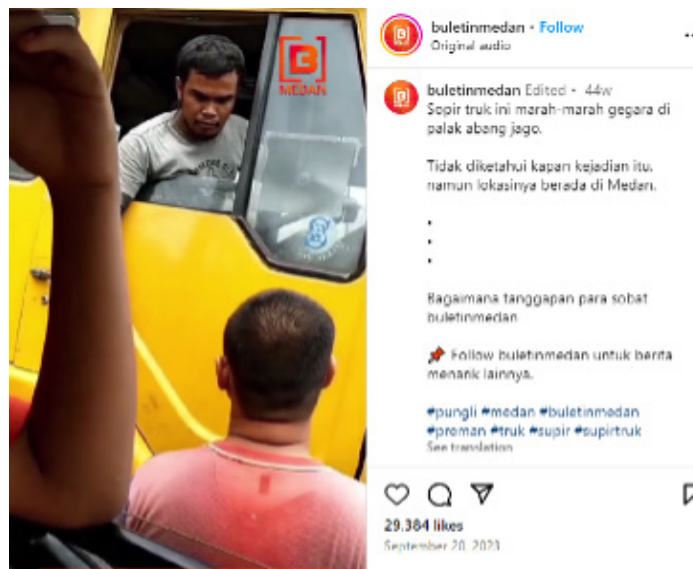
Figure 3.2 - @surabayaterkini Instagram Post



Accident was another topic identified by our homeless media interlocutors as appealing to the audience, and it is indeed among the highest in most engaging posts, just below commotion among citizens. Similar to crime posts, accident and commotion among citizens posts are popular because they appeal to the audience's negative emotions and appear to be nearby, making it real and concerning enough for the audience. This can be seen in the comments section of [@merapi\\_uncover's post](#) about a traffic incident on a Yogyakarta main road. The video was sent by a passerby who captured the scene as he drove by. Those who happened to pass by the scene and learned more about the accident have the top comments. They are providing more information in response to the curiosity of the other audience members, who most likely passed by or noticed the traffic caused by the incident. Other commenters, who are clearly familiar with the location and how similar incidents occur on a regular basis in the city, expressed concern for their own or others' safety.

Regarding posts about commotion among citizens, we should look at @buletinmedan's [post](#), which depicts a truck driver enraged by a local thug's attempt to extort him in Medan is noteworthy. The video begins with the driver screaming at the thug from the truck's driver seat, and the thug simply leaving him, possibly because it would be too much trouble to ask him for money. The audience in the comments section praises the truck driver's bravery. They are well aware that extortion is a common problem in the city, so they sympathize with the trucker.

**Figure 3.3 - @buletinmedan and @merapi\_uncover Instagram Posts**

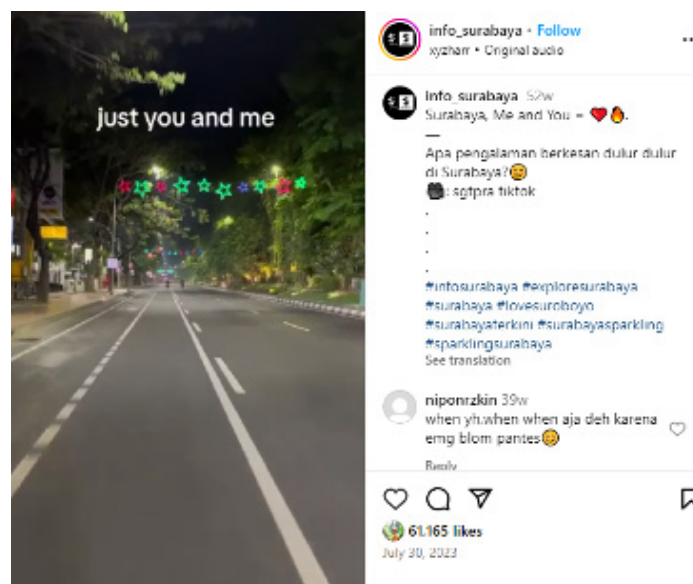


In the previous chapter, we also discussed how funny and reflective posts are popular on the internet and widely circulated by homeless media. This type of post typically falls into the other high-engagement categories—city facts, unique citizen behavior, and city romantization. In city facts posts, homeless media highlight the unique aspects of their city, such as how people in Yogyakarta queue for the city’s uniquely prepared coffee, how their city has been named one of the most comfortable or happy cities, or facts about the city’s “crazy rich”. The tone can be nostalgic, humorous, inspiring, or surprising, but people interact with it primarily because the content reminds them of their connection to the city. This video of a notoriously steep, narrow road in Bandung is an excellent example. [The video](#) is a short clip of a motorcycle rider crossing the street, accompanied by a funny template background sound of people panicking. As can be seen in the comments, the audience appears to immediately relate to the post, sharing their experiences in a variety of playful and nostalgic tones. “I shivered when passing this road!” a user wrote, along with laughing and crying emoticons.

City romantization posts are also about connecting with the city. They highlight the city’s memorable aspects, similar to city facts, but with more idyllic and reminiscing descriptions and nuances. Many of the posts feature pictures or videos of the city, such as a night ride video or a stand-still video of a well-known and scenic area. However, there are other types of posts, such as old footage of parents transporting their children to school in Jakarta or photos of exhausted city workers who are romantically portrayed as the family’s champion. The connection evoked by such posts is exemplified by what appears in the comments [section of a Surabaya nightride video](#) with a romantic pop song playing in the background. “I miss strolling in

Surabaya with mas @praram.ihml,” a user wrote, seemingly tagging who is now her husband. Meanwhile, another user expressed how Surabaya had hurt him. He appeared to have a bad romantic memory in the city. City romantization posts may appeal to a wider audience, particularly if they feature tourist destination cities. However, rather than appealing to this audience because of their relationship with the city, it appears to them as unspecific aesthetic or romantic posts or displays of tourist destination spots.

**Figure 3.4 - @info\_surabaya Instagram Post**



Meanwhile, the popularity of unique citizen behavior posts can be attributed to their comical nature. These are posts that capture or depict people in everyday situations doing unexpected or humorous things. The posts may feature the city in some way, such as a post of people using a jetski to cross to Madura from Surabaya or a post of a motorcycle rider crossing the city’s flooding spots on his old Supra motorcycle, but many of them do not and instead depict individuals engaging in unexpected activities that entertain, inspire, or surprise the audience. The latter type of video, for example, [is a post](#) by @surabayaterkini focusing on a joking announcement from the

mosque's public sound speaker—that people should not be overly dedicated to doing the Friday prayer, as in doing it frequently, because they only need to do it on Fridays. The video gives no indication of the location and could take place anywhere in Java.

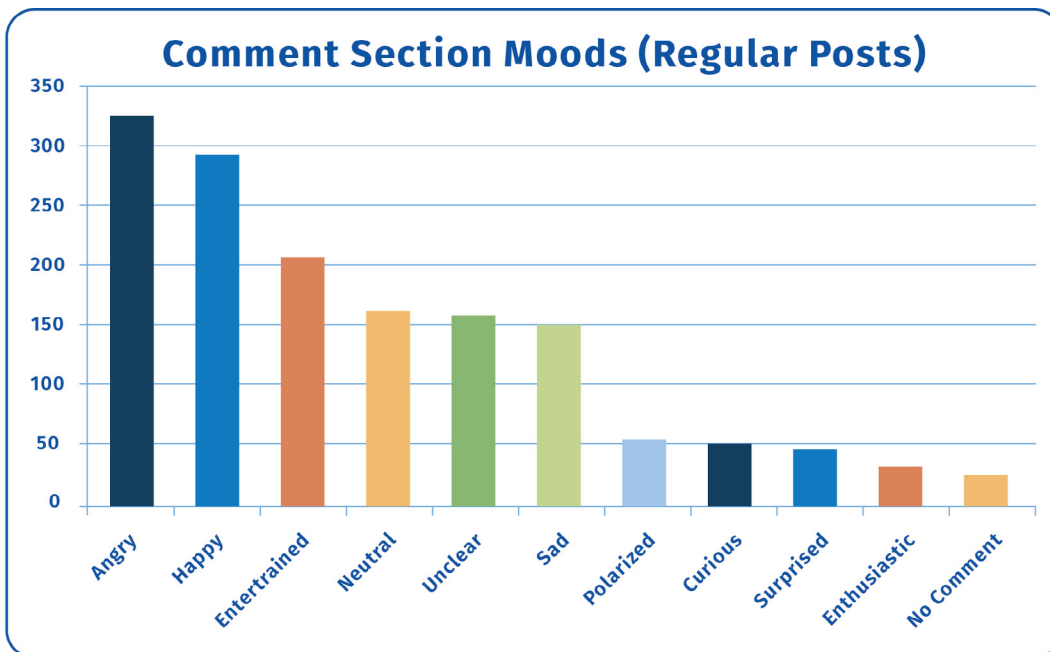
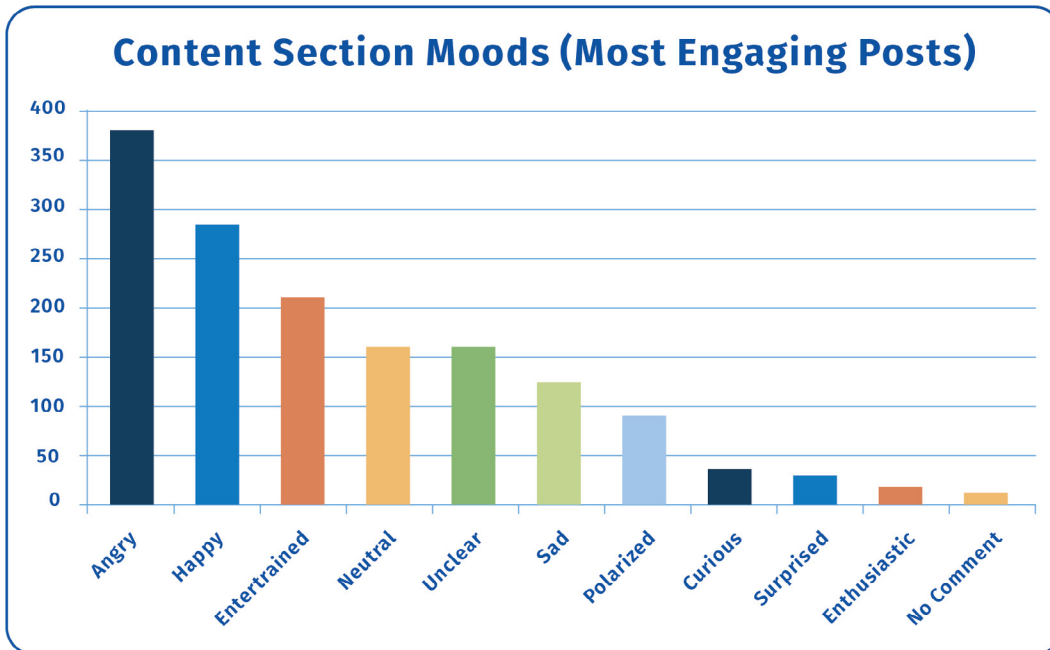
We also classify the predominant moods in the comment section, which tells us more about how the audience reacts to homeless media. The predominating moods in both categories of most engaging and regular posts are angry and grateful. As previously pointed out, the audience can express these emotions in a variety of ways, such as being appreciative by liking the vibe of certain posts, conveying their fondness for a memory of the city evoked by a post, or being enthusiastic about a specific product promotion. In terms of anger, the audience may be enraged by local thugs threatening people, resentful of the bad behavior of individuals from specific ethnic groups, or cynical about government policies. Regardless of the expression variety, both of these moods are typically unambiguous when in display and appear contagious, as one comment mood can shape the subsequent ones, resulting in the dominant overall mood.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>We include unclear because there may not always be a dominant mood in certain Instagram post comments, and polarized means the comment section becomes a debating ground between opposing audience camps.



**Figure 3.5 - Comment Section Moods (Most Engaging & Regular Posts)**



What can we learn from this data? In some ways, homeless media engagement is often fueled by strong negative emotion directed at specific things that triggered it, similar to social media engagement on other accounts ([Mukerjee et al., 2023](#)). The most engaging posts chart confirms this, as angry is the most popular mood among most engaging

posts by a large margin when compared to regular posts. Anger-inducing content is strongly associated with engagement ([Hasell, 2021](#)). However, anger is also a mood that requires involvement. People are angry at something because they are involved in it or have a stake in it, which sets it apart from other moods mentioned such as appreciative, entertained, or surprised. Homeless media gains a following in the first place because the content it provides to its audience is more local and involves them. This is not so different from enraging content, and both qualities can empower each other.

## **Explaining Homeless Media Everyday Posts**

When we switch to the regular posts chart, we can immediately see a difference in quantity between the top posts. Our regular post chart shows that, in terms of regular updates, homeless media outlets mostly posts about shopping/service recommendations, government policies, crime, culinary recommendations, city facts, politics, and unique citizen behaviors. The dominance of shopping/service recommendations is understandable, given that it is one of their primary sources of income, as suggested in the previous Chapter. However, as evidenced by our most engaging chart, it appears to be one of the least engaging topics.

Other types of endorsement posts receive higher engagement than shopping/service recommendation posts. Travel/place to hang out/activity recommendations posts have more content with high engagement, as do culinary recommendations, though not as many as the first category. This distinction is understandable when we look at the posts that represent each category. Many travel/place to hang out/activity recommendations posts include footage

of scenic and aesthetic locations, as well as places where people can hang out and participate in engaging activities, which can be immediately visually appealing. This means that such posts have the potential to appeal to the vast majority of city dwellers, as well as those who simply enjoy scrolling through photos and videos of beautiful places.

Shopping/service recommendations, on the other hand, have a diverse offering, which may not appeal to the majority of the audience. For example, endorsements for termite repellent products and hair removal services, which are included in this type of post, are unlikely to appeal to everyone. This category of posts also includes promotional posters for various products and services. Compared to posts of travel spot footages, which are typically presented with compelling visuals and have the host enthusiastically narrating their visits, it can appear wordy, and a lower engagement rate is to be expected. Many are only endorsed with this type of poster endorsement, possibly due to a limited endorsement budget.

The regular post chart also indicates that homeless media outlets are actively producing more content that they know will attract an audience. Crime posts are among the most popular topics they publish, as are city facts and unique citizen behaviour. While this producing tendency may be intentional on the part of homeless media outlets, it may also be due to the availability of content in their possession. As previously stated, homeless media outlets have a limited ability to gather information. They waited for press releases or information from their network, whether it was local government bodies or police, and then reposted the circulating information on social media or WhatsApp groups, or, in the case of more established homeless media, had the audience submit reports to them. Easily obtained news values materials will assist them in

continuing to post and maintain consistency, which is critical for their appearance in front of potential clients and the audience.

This explains why homeless media posts a lot about government policies and politics, despite the fact that these two topics are not particularly engaging. This is the type of information they can easily obtain. They can simply use press releases or videos sent directly to them by their government's public relations representatives. They may also use publicly available information and news from mainstream media and official websites, which they then post on their pages with interesting visuals. The latter strategy is exemplified by [@infomedan's post](#) about the winner of the 2014 Indonesian national election, whose caption text was copied from a mainstream media source and simply credited them while adding a representative photo, highlighted with an easy-to-read headline.

**Figure 3.6 - @infomedan Instagram Post**



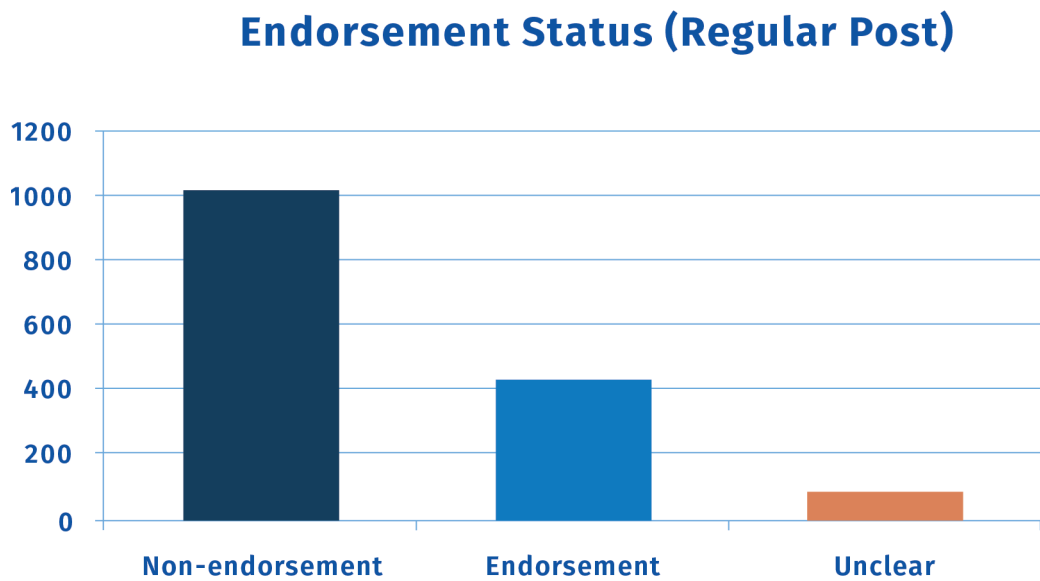
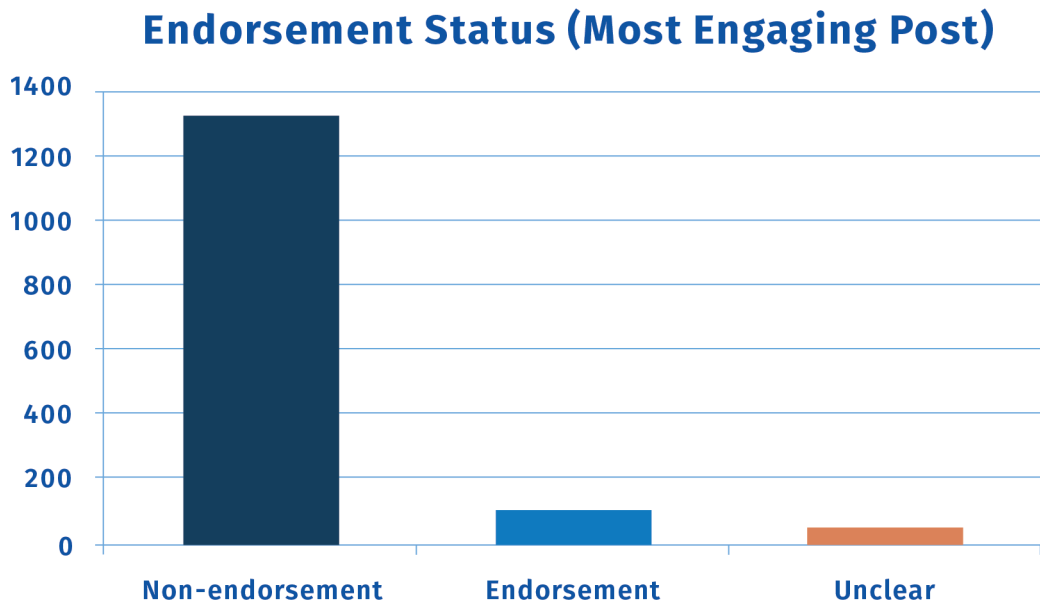
While we are on the subject, we want to share our findings about the content sources of homeless media posts. As we classify the collected posts, we discover that their primary

content sources are posts from other accounts that they reposted on their own account, either credited or not. This holds true regardless of whether the posts are the most engaging or regular. This predominance of other accounts' reposts demonstrates the need for homeless media to be consistent, as circulating social media information should be one of their most reliable content sources, and such posts have already been proven to be engaging to their previous audience. While some of our homeless media interlocutors stated that their media primarily uploads audience-submitted news, this source of information can be unreliable. The submissions may not always align with the media's goals or be capable of attracting the attention that is needed. Furthermore, homeless media with fewer followers cannot rely on audience-submitted news as a consistent source of information, as the audience will prioritize sending their reports to places where they will reach a larger audience.

The predominating amount of self-produced content is another important finding from our content source identification. This type of content is abundant on the one hand because it represents the core business of homeless media: endorsement. Even though not all paid endorsements need self-produced content from homeless media, and some endorsements are done by sharing client-created promotion posters, a significant number of endorsements are produced with high-value production. As previously stated, when homeless media, which is typically managed by a small group of people, needs to produce self-produced product or service endorsements, they will hire freelancers to ensure that the production quality of their content meets the standards of their clients.



Figure 3.7 - Endorsement Status (Most Engaging & Regular Post)



Nonetheless, endorsement posts do not account for all of the self-produced content. Self-produced content can also include brief and simple interviews with passers-by about any aspect of their city, videos of everyday situations such as a crowd looking for iftar snacks, or even inspiring and melancholic quotes. This category may also include

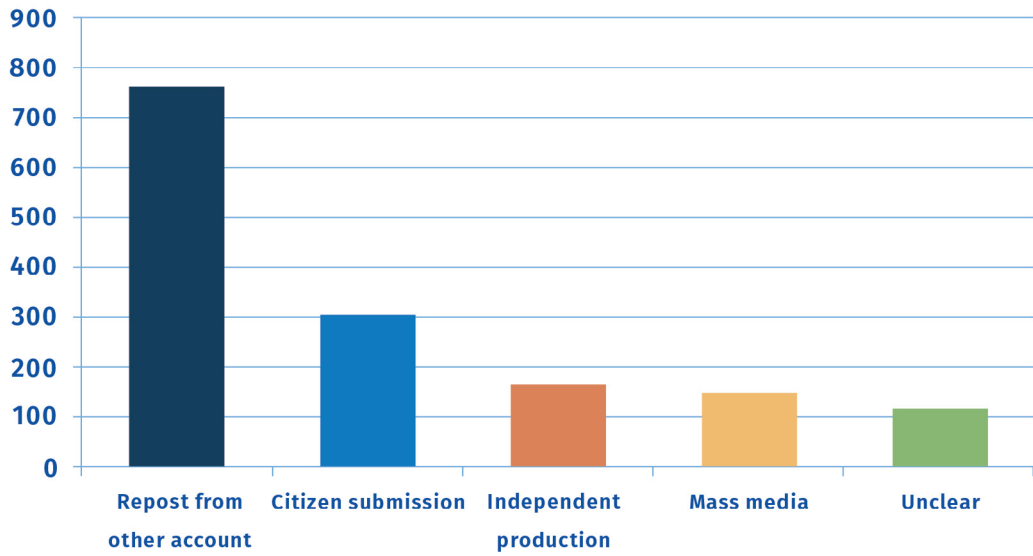
event reports for homeless media outlets with reporters or external contributors. With limited resources, it is understandable that homeless media would try to be as efficient as possible in producing self-produced content. Interestingly, compared to reposts from other accounts and audience submission posts, this type of post does not appear to receive as much engagement. This demonstrates how reproducing highly engaging moments incentivizes the messengers who distribute it further, essentially explaining how virality occurs.

How many of the homeless media posts are actually endorsements? Our classification reveals that the number of endorsement posts is relatively high. Almost half of regular posts are endorsements, which can be easily overlooked because we associate homeless media with viral, often controversial local news. Despite the fact that homeless media is not always explicit in its endorsement content, this type of post is usually easy to detect. They are promoting to the audience specific products or services to buy. They can do indirect promotion by covering client events, but such coverage typically has little news values for the homeless media audience.

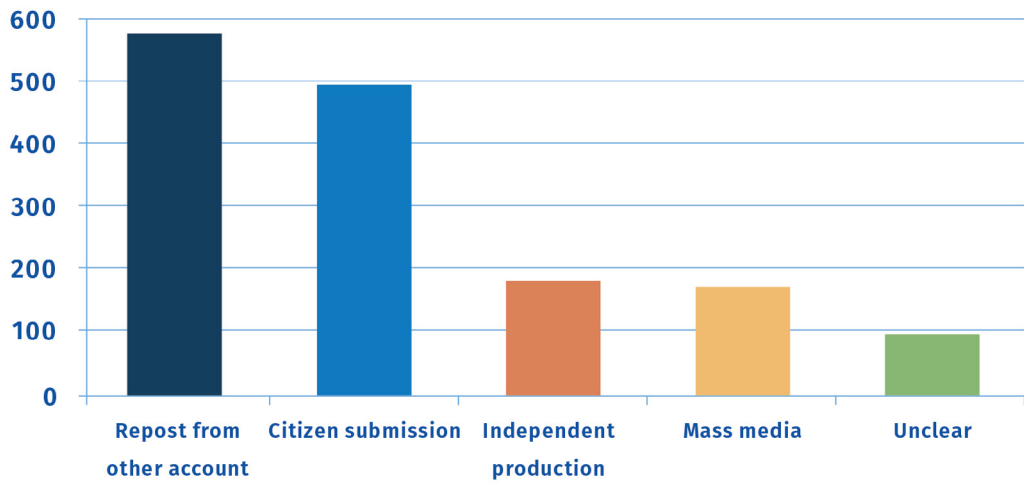


Figure 3.8 - Content Sources (Most Engaging & Regular Post)

### Content Source (Most Engaging Post)



### Content Source (Regular Post)





When it comes to promoting hangouts, tourism destinations, or activities, endorsement posts can be easily distinguished. Unlike non-endorsement content, which highlights iconic or scenic city spots, endorsement posts focus on paid venues or activities. Furthermore, while some culinary or hangout venue recommendations content may be unpaid, as our homeless interlocutors' interviews revealed, the goal is still to compel others to endorse. The majority of such posts are paid, and they cannot be produced unless there is advertising money, as homeless media labor resources are limited. Then there is a clear distinction between homeless media's coverage of government policies and endorsements of its programs. When a post is an endorsement, it will also promote the government program or directly invite citizens to participate in it. It may also include logos for the relevant government bodies.

Despite their high number, both of our charts suggest that endorsement posts are less engaging. To demonstrate this more specifically, we visited @infojkt in July 2024. We immediately noticed a mix of thumbnails of local news, event information, product promotions ranging from sauce to fast food, and real estate advertisements. The page was visibly filled with endorsement posts—outside of local news, almost every other post was an endorsement. However, the engagement rate between local news and endorsement content was quite different, with local news receiving 1,000-2,000 likes and endorsement posts hardly receiving 100. Instagram, as well as we as news consumers, are focusing on delivering news rather than endorsements, which are frequently irrelevant to those around us.

## Audience Engagement with Homeless Media

Now that we understand the emergence of homeless media and their content circulation patterns, we can turn our attention to how the audience interacts with their content. What motivates them to consume homeless media news? What is their pattern of exposure to this? How do they position homeless media within the current media landscape? These questions are important because the answers will eventually lead us back to the media practice of homeless media, giving us a better understanding of why they thrive despite their limited resources and humble beginnings.

Regarding how people consume news today, our audience interlocutors admitted that they do so through passive exposure. This occurs regardless of where our audience lives, expectably so as more and more people around the world spend their time on algorithm-curated social media platforms, resulting in what observers refer to as incidental news exposure ([Schafer, 2023](#)). Our interlocutors are either opening or scrolling through their social media homepage when they are suddenly exposed to news from an account they may or may not know. As one of our FGD participants in Bandung stated, she got news because she was “exposed incidentally to it, not by intentionally looking at the homeless media account.” Another participant in our Yogyakarta discussion stated that she no longer reads newspapers. “When I woke up in the morning, I opened Twitter, and then Instagram,” she said, describing how she gets news-related information. Our interlocutors also get news through their social media connections. Their mutuals shared it, and it now appears on their front page.

This condition explains why so many people became interested in local homeless media in the first place, and why they continue to engage with it afterward. Initially, they noticed homeless media content being shared by their connections and decided to follow them because it was relevant to them. As previously stated, @merapi\_uncover was an early homeless media outlets, possibly one of the most well-known in Yogyakarta. One of our Yogyakarta interlocutors stated that she first followed @merapi\_uncover on Twitter, where it first appeared, after seeing an update about Mount Merapi reposted by someone in their network. She was apparently captivated by the detailed but important information about Mount Merapi, which became the focus of attention following its eruption, that she could not find elsewhere at the time, and decided to follow the media. She said it herself,

*I didn't follow Merapi Uncover from the beginning. Suddenly followed because someone made a screenshot on WhatsApp, [and I was] curious. Earthquake info, mudflow, making stories, I was curious, opened it, turned out there was a lot of info, finally [I] followed [the account]. Then there is info about Jogja, [I] followed [it].*

Following our interlocutors' engagement with homeless media content, the platform appears to continue presenting them with media news. Our audience interlocutors described how they learned about nearby brawls or accidents and were advised not to travel on certain roads, despite the fact that they had not expected to find such information. They just opened their social media accounts and were greeted with homeless media information about

nearby situations. Despite being passive recipients, and despite the fact that this algorithm-focused content presentation has been criticized for limiting people's ability to seek information, our interlocutors still valued it. They find the algorithm and network's presented information to be very relevant to them, which keeps them engaged with homeless media.

In this environment, where the audience is presented with information tailored to their specific preferences and network, homeless media thrives. Our interlocutors' homeless media interaction experiences demonstrate how information from these media can be impressively specific and local, owing to their position as a hub that mediates information from potentially anyone. An office worker who participated in our Jakarta discussion said she would immediately open @JKTinfo or @jktinfo24jam on Instagram if she encountered an unusual traffic jam on her bus ride home. While listing the various local homeless media that they follow, our participants in Bandung explained that these media have been helpful in providing immediate information ranging from weather to earthquakes much faster than traditional media. "It will be too long to wait for official media!" one of them said. One even follows @infokopo, a hyper local homeless media outlet to find relevant information about her home subregency, Kopo, and praising how responsive the administrators are—they respond quickly and as if there is no distance between them and their audience.

We also have an interlocutor who works to identify human rights violations and has been assisted by homeless media information. Homeless media frequently post cases of police repression as well. Cases of police forcefully apprehending street vendors can be found in the media, and the videos are usually posted shortly after the incidents

occurred. These homeless media footages assist him in recording the cases while also identifying the perpetrators, when and why it occurred, and the type of violation committed. Even though he will need to verify the footages further, the homeless media footages are excellent starting points.

Apart from @merapi\_uncover, another homeless media account mentioned by our Yogyakarta discussion participants was ICJ—Info Cegatan Jogjakarta (Traffic Alert Jogjakarta). Its model is even more illustrative of an information hub. ICJ started as a Facebook community group where Yogyakarta residents shared locations of police traffic razia. As traffic razia information proved to be useful to many Yogyakarta residents, ICJ membership grew exponentially. As of July 2024, it has 641K Instagram followers, which is similar to Merapi Uncover, and 1.2 million Facebook community members. It now shares a variety of local newsworthy information, such as accidents, crimes, and people being possessed, which other members can verify in the comment section. Our Yogyakarta audience interlocutors explained how they go to ICJ when they need to go home late because it may have information about the notorious youth motorcycle gangs roaming the route they are about to take. They also stated that if an emergency arises, ICJ will be the first place they report to, as is customary in the community. By reporting there, they may receive immediate assistance from other members nearby. “If my motorcycle tire went flat, the response was quick. It’s extremely pleasant. They are even very up to date, and it appears that people from all over Yogyakarta are present,” one interlocutor stated.

Despite being particularly pertinent, homeless media relevance for audiences can be attributed to their focus on crime and accident news, which is essentially triggering

information, which can be overwhelming for some. Our interlocutors identified homeless media with crime and accident reports, and as a result, some people deliberately avoid the media. Some of our Yogyakarta interlocutors stated that they had either unfollowed or blocked Merapi Uncover. The media frequently posts graphic content taken immediately from the accident scene, which is upsetting for them. Even after blocking it, one user reported that she is still “pursued” by Merapi Uncover news, which appears on her social media homepage and is reposted by her friends.

### **Positioning Homeless Media: Speed Advantages, Credibility Issues**

Our audience interlocutors’ news consumption patterns, as well as a study indicating a high likelihood of incidental news consumption among Indonesians (Kenya & Rofil, [2023](#)) point to a significant increase in homeless media engagement among Indonesian audiences. This means that mainstream media receives less time and attention. Despite this, homeless media cannot easily take the place of mainstream media in regard to catering to the audience’s information needs. Our interlocutors, who consume both mainstream and homeless media, believe that each has advantages. Homeless media is known for its up-to-date news and participatory nature, whereas mainstream media provides more comprehensive and accurate accounts.

Our audience interlocutors associate homeless media with being quick to report news or, if they submit reports, to address it. Without our facilitators bringing it up, homeless media is associated with “real time” in the words that were repeatedly used in our discussions across cities. This reality is evident in our Yogyakarta interlocutor’s previously mentioned interactions with ICJ. People enjoy being able

to find recent incidents around them in the media or post them themselves, and as a result, the media thrives. A Medan interlocutor also mentioned a similar personal experience with MedanTalk. One night, his cousin fell into the river. He immediately reported this to MedanTalk Instagram account, requesting the public's attention and assistance. His report was quickly published by MedanTalk, prompting an emergency official disaster team to rush to the scene for rescue. The mainstream media reporters only arrived much later in the day.

Our audience discussions across cities included mainstream media journalists as interlocutors. These journalist participants confirmed the homeless media's advantage in speed, as well as the notion that mainstream media now follows homeless media, by saying they follow homeless media and check their updates on a regular basis. These media provide them with a glimpse of noteworthy incidents in specific locals, which they are well aware cannot be found in mainstream media and may require further investigation if they become newsworthy. A journalist interlocutor in Jakarta stated that she was trained to pay close attention to these media outlets, and that other journalists do the same. Her remarks were immediately confirmed by our other journalist participants from various cities. Another journalist interlocutor in Yogyakarta stated that it is his habit to check out homeless media in the morning, which helps him look for, in his own words, "what are the things happening right now?" Meanwhile, a journalist in Bandung always checks the homeless media before sleeping.

Nonetheless, our interlocutors associate homeless media with speed and public participation, as well as inaccuracy and misinformation. Skepticism about the accuracy of their content is generally shared, as evidenced by interlocutors in each of our audience discussions. Our inter-

locutors observed that homeless media occasionally published misinformation or unverified information. For example, a homeless media account shared a provocative video of a landslide, but the footage was actually shot two years prior. Our interlocutors also criticized how the media handled this error. When they realize that the information they published is problematic, which usually happens after a public outcry in the comment section, they do not issue a public apology and instead only remove the problematic content. As a result, some members of the audience may never realize that the information they received previously was incorrect.

Our interlocutors stated repeatedly that homeless media poses a risk of public misinformation. They acknowledged that homeless media wields enormous power, as it becomes the public's source of information. Left unregulated and uncontrolled, it could be fatal, with some journalist interlocutors expressing clear concern about homeless media and their personnel being exempt from the Indonesian Press Law, which means they are not required to follow the verification principle and other journalist professionalism codes. While saying this, some interlocutors added to the homeless media's problems by stating that they frequently engage with sensational headlines and content, as well as copy the entirety of mainstream media news content. The latter issue has long been the reason why mainstream media disliked homeless media, whereas the former has been constantly nagging the public, to put it mildly.

Due to this, our interlocutors typically distinguish between official and homeless media. They position homeless media as a real-time news provider or information hub with a variety of credibility issues, whereas mainstream media is portrayed as providing verified and comprehensive reports later. They cannot immediately believe all of



the information provided by homeless media, especially if it is provoking. They will either wait for more information from the traditional media. They may also browse it there. Interestingly, such a comparison may present Indonesian mainstream media as if they are not associated with the various issues attributed to homeless media, which is clearly not the case. Indonesian mainstream media has frequently relied solely on institutional press releases, which they will copy verbatim for their reports, causing many to simply act as extensions of the government or specific companies. They are writing clickbait news, misleading readers, and engage in other unethical practices, which have become institutionalized as a result of the heavy workload that media companies place on their journalists (Heychael, [2018](#); [2023](#); Surya, [2023](#)).



# Prospects and Issues



04

# Prospects and Issues

This chapter delves deeper into the potential and challenges of homeless media. The presence of homeless media is inevitable, that much is certain. It is essential to the modern Indonesian media landscape, which is now dictated by the globally established social media industry, which demands engaging and specific information. It thrives in this environment, driving engagement through social media platforms while providing news, particularly about local communities, in ways that traditional media cannot match. Keeping this in mind, the various prospects for homeless media must be outlined. We want to know what kinds of challenges it poses to established media practices and, more importantly, how it can benefit or harm the public.

The materials available to us, some of which were hinted at in previous chapters, indicate that this type of media can be both beneficial and harmful to the public. It fosters a participatory ecosystem of information while potentially discouraging comprehensive journalistic reporting. It functions as a locally sensitive and responsive information hub, but it is prone to sensationalism, borderline vulgarity, and even false or hateful content. Uncontrolled and informal, it can misinform the audience while providing “real-time” information. It may occasionally reinforce dangerous stereotypes about certain groups, particularly marginalized ones, and spark hate speech, but it can also be a tool for promoting and facilitating citizen cooperation.

We also discuss the possibility of elite capture or use of homeless media by powerful actors, which would be detrimental to media democratization. Despite the fact that

homeless media organizations appear to be small-scale and run by ordinary citizens, several indications point to the possibility that some are part of the larger political establishment. We must also consider that homeless media is frequently controlled by local governments through various means, since they provide both information and resources. This has been a long-standing problem for local media, and homeless media may be unable to avoid it.

### **Participatory Media and Challenge to Established Media Business/Practice**

Homeless media is associated with participation, which we believe is greatly beneficial to the public, particularly given the long-standing problem of Indonesian mainstream media. Indonesia's mainstream media is notoriously centralized (Tapsel, 2017). Furthermore, it is focused on areas where government, political, and business institutions are located. Practically speaking, placing reporters at these established institutions is convenient for the media because these institutions serve as a reliable source of information and reporters only need to wait for information provided by them or, in the event of a newsworthy incident, seek comments from these institutions. If they want to get more local news, reporters must gather information that is not immediately available to them, which can be difficult when they are required to provide stories on a regular basis.

On the other hand, as discussed in previous chapters, homeless media accounts provide content that is more relevant to the local audience, as they can serve as a channel for informal information produced by locals, which is why the local audience follows them. They share news about specific locations that are relevant to the audience,

and it is impressively relevant because it assists them in making immediate everyday decisions, such as which road to take home to avoid traffic jams or brawls. They provide amusing information about their locales, which is mostly entertaining because it evokes the audience's sense of connection to the cities. Even in their endorsement posts, they provide information that is immediately relevant and relatable to the audience because it involves something in their surroundings.

Homeless media accounts are noteworthy not only for the information they provide, but also for how they obtain it. The news they bring, which can be impressively local and relevant to the audience, is sourced from the audience as well as social media and local WhatsApp groups, both of which report on incidents in close proximity to their local main audience. Because the stories are derived from audience recordings, the audience may use them for their own purposes. It can be used to request assistance in an emergency or for any other issue that requires public attention, and in some cases, it has proven to be extremely effective. There was once [a case where a woman in Yogyakarta](#) cried out for help on the ICJ Facebook group because she was being stalked. Her cry for help prompted others to cooperate and assist her.

Occasionally, bypassers' recordings of incidents involving city facilities or government policies were circulated further by homeless media, resulting in widespread engagement that forced the government to respond or even reverse certain policies. This is the case with [a video of motorcycles slipping on a newly opened road in Medan](#), which the audience claims is made of ceramics, making it slippery. The video, which was originally posted on @fakta.medan, was also shared by local homeless media in other cities, such as Bandung, and it continued to generate high

engagement. The post eventually gained mainstream media attention, becoming a highlight in many media outlets. The government had to respond, claiming that the road was not made of ceramics but rather of other materials that appeared to be ceramics, and that because it had not yet been coated, it was slippery.

Citizens informing mainstream media about newsworthy issues, such as through “letters to the editor,” is nothing new. Citizens may also contact the media via mail or email, requesting that they inquire on topics they believe are newsworthy. However, aside from the fact that editors can be unresponsive to this type of request, the procedure can be complicated, especially when compared to submitting information to homeless media nowadays. Those who provide information to homeless media simply need to record the incidents and tag or send them to homeless media accounts. As some information reposted by homeless media quickly gained attention, it encourages many local citizens to do the same.

Nonetheless, homeless media’s ability to generate high and local engagement with limited resources, thanks in part to its participatory nature, can pose a challenge not only to the traditional media industry, but also to established journalistic practices. Despite being participatory and can be broadly classified as citizen journalism, information provided by the audience is frequently brief and incoherent, focusing only on what is important for gaining engagement in the short term. Audience comments on such news frequently express a desire for more details, and while some other commenters may provide additional information or verification, others may find it unclear or scrutinize it. This eventually demonstrates that we require parties with professional responsibilities to provide verified and more complete reporting.

When we discussed this, our audience interlocutors emphasized the importance of mainstream media and journalistic practices. They understand that mainstream media has professional reporting resources that cannot be easily replaced by bypassers' reporting. Aside from that, the Indonesian Press Law requires the media to write stories with verification. As homeless media generates engagement with little investment, traditional comprehensive journalistic practices, which were already perceived as burdensome, will become even more unprofitable, and fewer resources will be allocated to them. This issue demonstrates how homeless media's uncredited use of mainstream media news is more problematic than it appears, as mainstream media receives less engagement for the content they produce.

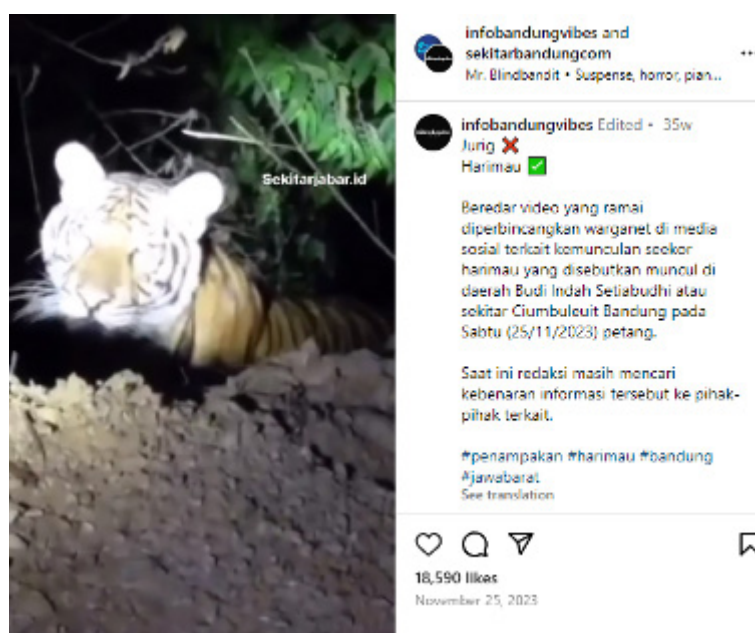
## **Publishing Problematic Content in the Pursuit of “Real Time” Engaging News**

Because of their informality and tendency to prioritize speed, homeless media accounts are vulnerable to misinformation, and they can serve as a hub for its spread. Even if homeless media personnel acknowledge that this issue has come to their attention, and that some have attempted to standardize an internal verification mechanism, their nature as an organization in the current media landscape is to pursue engagement with the few resources that they have. With the requirement to upload 80-120 posts per week and a preference for highly engaging posts, there will be times when they unintentionally repost misinformation, which typically attracts attention. We must also consider that, while some claim to have established a verification standard, not all homeless media organizations, particularly those with fewer followers, can be expected to do so. The majority of homeless media do not have large

followings, which prompts them to be active in seeking information through private and social media channels, and in their efforts to find potentially trending content, they may end up reproducing misinformation.

Based on our own examination of the 3,000 posts we collected, several appear to be hoaxes. One is [a post by @sekitarbandungcom](#) informing people about the appearance of a tiger in Bandung, which was sourced from @sekitarjabar.id, as indicated by the watermark in the video. The video post, taken in the evening and seemingly not in an urban setting, shows a tiger recorded from a distance, looking to the cameraman's side for a while before turning around and leaving. In the comments section, some users are terrified by the news, while others question whether the tiger actually appeared in Bandung. Some are even making jokes to highlight their skepticism, tagging a friend and commenting "please give him a dry food if he gets to your home." Eventually, the homeless media account clarifies in one comment that the news is false after consulting with some of their contacts.

**Figure 4.1 - @sekitarbandungcom Instagram Post**





There are several things that can be said about this case. For starters, homeless media accounts may clarify misinformation that they reposted and do verification work by checking in with some sources, but they are more likely to do so in response to the commotion in the post comment section than before posting it. Furthermore, as previously stated, they are prone to reproducing hoaxes by looking for circulating internet information with the potential to go viral. The post came from another account, and despite the fact that the news was suspicious, as the tiger had become extinct in Java, the media proceeded to repost it. Finally, while user clarification has the potential to clarify misinformation, it may also exaggerate the information. As can be seen, there are commenters attempting to claim that the news is true and that the Java tiger is still alive and roaming around.

A similar pattern can be observed in the other hoax posts we discovered. Another post is [a video of counterfeit money](#) published in collaboration with @bulletinmedan, which shows a banknote being placed under a blue light and displaying different patterns than another. The audience appears concerned because they do not understand the difference between genuine and counterfeit money. This post is rebuked by a user who provides official information on how to distinguish between counterfeit and genuine money. The homeless media account that originally posted it offers no further explanation. The news is clearly sourced from a circulating internet post, as evidenced by the video voiceover's dialect, which differs from the common dialect in Medan, but the homeless media account that reposted it shamelessly added its own watermark.

Other types of problematic content that homeless media can help spread include uncensored violence and incident scenes, as well as those that incite hatred against other

groups. Homeless media hate-inciting content may not be as common as misinformation posts. Some of our homeless media interlocutors have expressed a desire not to post content that promotes ethnic or religious discrimination. However, we do notice that there are a number of such posts among those that we analyze, particularly directed at the minority. [A post published in collaboration](#) with @medannews.id depicts a Rohingya refugee, an ethnic group that is currently facing widespread hatred in Indonesia, requesting land ownership in Malaysia. Even though the content is a repost, the caption subtly conveys negative sentiment toward the Rohingya by stating, “Hopefully, similar things will not happen here.” Following the caption, commenters made hateful and discriminatory remarks, claiming that as refugees, Rohingya do not respect their hosts.

**Figure 4.2 - @sumutkoma Instagram Post**



The more common problematic posts of homeless media outlets are uncensored violence and incident scenes. Because homeless media outlets repost crime and incident bypassers' reports, it is to be expected that some of what they publish contains graphic images or footage. The post can be extremely disruptive and triggering, and some social media users are accustomed to warning anyone who posts such content. Despite this, homeless media outlets continue to do this, possibly because they want to publish it right away, knowing that doing so will increase engagement. They may also be aware that the graphic content is attracting attention on its own.

At this point, we can argue that the problematic content handling of homeless media is not simply due to individual negligence, but is also encouraged by the ecosystem. There are those who repost misinformation and do not provide any clarification despite being exposed as doing so in the comment section, possibly knowing that the post has succeeded in attracting the attention that they initially sought. Some homeless media accounts then tend to repost viral content with their own watermark on it. Aside from the one we mentioned earlier, it is evident in [a video post of a man with his head stuck on a train's door](#). The post came from another account, and the original source is credited in the caption, but it is marked with the watermark of @kabarjogja, the account that reposted it. Homeless media personnel are likely aware that the content, not the media, will reach the audience, which explains why they are making their mark—to allow more people to learn about their media.

## Homeless Media and Elite Capture

The Indonesian local media has long been dependent on state bodies. This dependence is occurring on multiple levels. To begin, the media is dependent on state bodies because they are the most reliable and efficient source of news (Arsyad, [2023](#)). In many cases, government institutions are the most established organizations, capable of producing press releases designed for media use. Using press releases, reporters usually do not need to write stories from scratch, but rather copy and adjust them slightly. Now that each government office's public relations department has reporters in WhatsApp groups, government press releases can be shared with them and used immediately, often with minimal editing. We have seen instances where journalists who do not comply with government interests are threatened with not receiving such press releases or being removed from government public relations reporters' WhatsApp groups (Riyanto & Dzahabiyyah, [2023](#)). Because the local media will lose a source of content, this is viewed as a serious threat, making it an excellent method of controlling the media.

In addition, the government may exert control over the media by serving as its primary sponsor. Local governments regularly advertise in local newspapers. There are few places where businesses are established enough to be a reliable source of advertising for local media, and in order to stay in business, local media must rely on government advertising. Even if the government is not the sole advertiser in local media, its contribution is significant enough that local media would be unwilling to risk losing their advertising. Furthermore, government organizations are actively networking with the media. They invite reporters and editors to meetings, both press release-related and informal bonding sessions.

We do not believe that homeless media is exempt from the established pattern in terms of its relationship with government. We have noticed that local homeless media organizations actively engage with government bodies, whether by attending their meetings, being asked to collaborate with them, or complying when persuaded by them. Attending a few meetings does not imply that the media is dependent on the government. However, as we can see from the content analysis in the previous chapter, news about government policies dominates their posts, and several homeless media accounts cite the government as their source for this type of data. Not unlike local newspaper reports of government policies, homeless media posts containing this information are essentially government press releases, as evidenced by the fact that the source is government officials, either describing their policies, making official announcements, or responding to community responses to them or specific incidents.

Speaking of endorsements, based on the visible endorsement posts on their pages, local homeless media outlets may have more diverse funding sources than many local traditional media. In contrast to traditional media, which requires more resources to operate, whether due to staffing requirements or the need to print or manage websites, homeless media should have significantly lower operating costs, making them more financially flexible. In fact, most endorsement posts are from businesses. However, there is still a reliance on the government in terms of content, which is most likely due to the fact that it provides a source of content or that being connected to the government gives a sense of security. It could also be because they are fully supported by specific government institutions.

There are a few suspicious accounts where the posts are either predominantly or entirely sourced from a specific state institution, usually the police. We like to bring up an Instagram page whose name we cannot reveal in order to protect our interlocutor and interviewer. The post of this account almost entirely consisted of the topic crime and incidents, and any official comments accompanying the post are always made by police officials. The page also includes police public announcements. Another interesting aspect of the page is how much of the content is crime scene investigation, police apprehension scenes, or CCTV records of specific crimes, which cannot be simply obtained from anywhere, and the source is only written as “istimewa,” which literally translates as special, a source tag used when a media uses other media footages or photos as accompanying visuals for its reporting. It is more likely that the page manager receives the footage through a connection with the police, rather than receiving it from any other source.

Given that homeless media typically survives on endorsements, it is curious that this page does not feature any endorsement posts. When asked how his media obtains information, our interlocutor, who claimed to have found this page, gave a sketchy answer. He simply stated that he manages the media on his own and obtains information from his network of “social media activists”. Among the homeless media accounts we observed, there is one whose page focuses on city incidents and uses footage that was most likely taken by firefighters. The account frequently posts reports of firefighters extinguishing fires in the city, and some of the videos were shot from a distance that people other than firefighters are unlikely to be able to reach. The source of the post was identified as “istimewa” by the media, similar to the previous account.

This suggests that homeless media outlets can be connected with state bodies in ways other than as news sources, and it is not unlikely that they are also sponsors. One of our homeless media interlocutors confirmed that his media previously did endorsement work for politicians, and another mentioned how his media shifted its focus from paid promotion to providing news after being asked to collaborate by the local government—both did not elaborate on their responses. Because homeless media is largely unregulated and will almost certainly not be audited, it can be more flexible in managing resources for underground campaigns or endorsements. Interested parties can also contact individuals, who can make decisions for the homeless media right away.

We should also note that in the 2024 Indonesian national election, some homeless media outlets are indicating that they support specific candidates. They consistently publish posts that support one candidate while hurting others. While media allegiance in elections is to be expected, such homeless media outlets may go so far as to spread hoaxes that harm their opponents' political campaigns. Not all homeless media outlets can engage in such openly harmful activities as intentionally posting hoaxes, particularly those that have already established a reputation or are concerned about being called by law enforcement. However, we want to argue that elite capture is a real possibility when it comes to media that is initially praised for being community-oriented (Saroh, [2016](#)).

## Precarious Dependence on Social Media Platforms and Algorithms

Another issue that needs to be addressed, and one that makes the presence of homeless media outlets precarious, is their dependence on social media platforms' algorithms. These algorithms, engineered to gain audience engagement, have allowed homeless media outlets to thrive by delivering their content to an audience that finds it interesting or provocative—often local citizens interested in news about crime, incidents, or provocative events in their vicinity. Utilizing social media platforms also means homeless media do not need to invest heavily in reporting resources, giving them significant advantages and flexibility compared to traditional media outlets.

However, the fact that they lack their own technological resources and distribution channels means that homeless media are at the mercy of social media platforms and their algorithms. While some outlets have garnered a substantial number of followers, making their content more likely to go viral and gain high engagement, they remain vulnerable to changes in these algorithms. Increasingly, social media platforms prioritize circulating potentially engaging content from across the internet rather than information from accounts that users explicitly follow. Essentially, changes in algorithms can drastically affect the visibility and reach of their content without them being able to do much about it. If a platform decides to update its algorithm to deprioritize the type of content typically posted by homeless media, their audience engagement could plummet, threatening their sustainability.

Moreover, this reliance makes homeless media vulnerable to being banned or shadow-banned by social media



platforms. If a platform deems their content as violating community guidelines or terms of service, homeless media outlets can lose their primary distribution channel without warning. This risk is compounded by the nature of their content. Homeless media often share real-time news and incidents, which can include uncensored scenes of violence, accidents, or other disturbing imagery. While these posts can attract high engagement due to their raw and immediate nature, they also risk breaching the community standards of social media platforms, which generally have strict policies against graphic violence and explicit content. Repeated violations can lead to temporary suspensions or permanent bans, cutting off the media outlet's access to its audience.

Homeless media outlets often lack the resources and infrastructure to mitigate these risks. Unlike larger media organizations that can diversify their content distribution channels and invest in their platforms, homeless media are typically small-scale operations run by individuals or small teams. They do not have the financial or technical capability to develop alternative means of reaching their audience. This lack of control over their primary distribution method makes them highly susceptible to the whims of social media platforms. Even more concerning is their apparent lack of comprehensive mitigation plans if they happen to lose their accounts. For instance, the founder of @merapi\_uncover shared how he lost other accounts to hackers and had no way to recover them, only lamenting in regret. Furthermore, homeless media outlets never own or back up the audience data that is submitted to them. When they lose their channels, they lose everything.

The fact that these accounts are not associated with prominent personalities also makes them more vulnerable to changes, as audiences may have more difficulty

remembering them if they are banned or shadow-banned. This means they have no compelling reason to follow new accounts created after the banning. While some prominent homeless media outlets like @merapi\_uncover might be well-known enough that citizens of Yogyakarta would likely follow new accounts if the original were banned, most homeless media outlets do not enjoy such recognition. They typically have smaller followings and would likely go unnoticed if something were to happen to them amidst the continuous stream of engaging information on social media. Their posts often resemble those of other homeless media outlets, making it difficult for audiences to distinguish one account from another. This was confirmed in audience discussions, where apart from @merapi\_uncover, ICJ, and MedanTalk, participants struggled to name specific homeless media outlets, simply referring to them collectively.

Essentially, the lifeline of homeless media depends on their social media channels, but they are fundamentally replaceable in the ecosystem and lack the means to mitigate these risks due to their nature as informal and small-scale organizations. A few of these outlets that have attained prominence might create their websites and expand their channels to avoid relying on a single platform. Nevertheless, the fact remains that most homeless media outlets are small organizations unable to make risky business moves to expand and have no effective way to address the very real threats to their existence.

# Concluding Remarks



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# Concluding Remarks

Some homeless media began as a form of media that attempted to emulate established media. Today, this form of media appears to be more engaging than its traditional counterpart. This statement is especially true in terms of its role as local media. Homeless media outlets provide their audiences with news that is remarkably local and specific, relevant to the audience in a specific city, or even a specific section of the city, and emotionally connected to them. Their method of providing this is to create a participatory space, in which the audience can voluntarily contribute public information while also drawing the attention of others to certain important public issues. Most importantly, they do it in the most effective way possible: as an information broker. Instead of spending resources on report production and platform management, they need to be consistently responsive, both to audience submissions and engaging in the distribution of local and internet content.

There is a strong connection between homeless media and the current Indonesian media landscape. It is obviously impossible to imagine the existence of homeless media before the advent of social media. Social media provides them with a platform on which homeless media personnel can simply focus on content management while avoiding many of the institutional burdens of mainstream media, but they face a great risk to their existence if they encounter algorithm changes or happen to be banned. Furthermore, the most prominent homeless media outlets today are those that attempted to create public local media on social media platforms in their early days and were aware of their technological advantage in delivering information.

Knowing the participatory nature of social media, they introduced features that were not seen in previous media generations but are inherent in the platforms they use, allowing the information audience to also act as producers. Some outlets that were successful in taking advantage of this feature greatly succeeded. Others who emerged later focused their platforms on spreading viral local information with unique thumbnails, and simply by doing so, they generated a high rate of engagement.

While the label “homeless” may make such media outlets appear unestablished and precarious, they are more integrated into the social media-dominated information ecosystem than mainstream media. They are better able to profit from it than their counterparts. Their organization’s size does not exceed that required to maintain its operations, but it is flexible enough to respond quickly to audience and other inquiries. Journalists from established media have even expressed doubts about their own companies’ ability to compete with homeless media, while using homeless media accounts as references to research local issues. Even if today’s most prominent homeless media disappeared, we can expect others to take their place, as homeless media is currently the most effective kind of local media.

Some challenges cannot be avoided in an environment where the presence of homeless media is inevitable. As we have identified, one of its most pressing issues is how its news model threatens both traditional journalistic practices and the business model. While homeless media outlets and their audiences continue to rely on mainstream media to provide coherently written news, homeless media outlets have commanded such high audience engagement that traditional news production may be discouraged. The established journalistic practice may become less



profitable, so more are leaving, despite the fact that it is necessary. Homeless media is also known for providing unverified updates. Although the number of misinformation may be lower than what audiences believe, it is still concerning. Homeless media outlets, which prioritize delivery speed and highly engaging content, may unintentionally publish misinformation on occasion. They will occasionally publish triggering and graphic bypasser reports for the same reason.

Furthermore, homeless media face the same risk as other Indonesian media outlets: elite capture. Similar to local traditional media, a significant portion of their content is about government policies or announcements, with press releases serving as the primary source. They are constantly collaborating with state institutions, most likely in order to maintain their positions. They can gain significant advantages by aligning with the interests of the government. Some homeless media outlets appear to be deeply connected with certain state institutions, with posts coming almost entirely from the institution and containing information that cannot be found elsewhere. In addition, because they can be sponsored by political patrons and their organizations are small enough to go unaudited, they may become flexible venues for certain political camps to gain votes and popular support, as previously highlighted by Tapsell (2021).

As concerning as these issues are, we cannot envision a future where this form of media does not exist. Neither can we imagine a scenario where all homeless media is closely controlled by regulators. Its existence is firmly rooted in our contemporary media landscape, thanks to the helpful hyperlocal and immediate information it provides to the audience. In this context, we believe some homeless media outlets can serve as considerably better

models than others. We refer to specific outlets that have an internal code of conduct to verify their content and issue clarifications and public apologies if they happen to publish false information. These are also outlets that establish norms among their audience, particularly related to caring for other citizens and their city. They engage with their audience in the long term, which should make them responsible for what they publish.

## Recommendations

Based on our findings, we want to make several recommendations to multiple stakeholders to address issues related to homeless media and learn from their participatory model of news dissemination. The recommendations are as follows:

**Mitigating homeless media content problems.** One of the findings of this research is that homeless media is prone to spreading misinformation, using someone else's work without giving credit, and spreading sensitive information. Some homeless media owners have recognized this issue and have taken the initiative to establish informal standard operational procedures (SOPs) to prevent such occurrences. However, this research cannot yet determine the reliability of these SOPs due to their informal nature. Instead of demonizing or excessively restricting their work, we believe that capacity-building programs should be encouraged for homeless media practitioners. Since they effectively act as “avatar” of traditional media institutions, basic journalism training, including fact-checking techniques and journalism ethics, should be provided so they can integrate these into their SOPs and minimize content problems associated with them. This effort will also benefit from training homeless media outlets to navigate

user-generated content and developing guidelines for how to use it.

**Learning from the locality of homeless media.** Traditional media institutions in Indonesia often face criticism for failing to provide local information. On the other hand, the locality is a strength of homeless media, making them relevant and attracting wide public attention in the social media era. Traditional media practitioners in Indonesia can learn from this. If they wish to remain relevant in the social media era, they cannot continue with a formal and centralized institution-oriented journalism culture.

**Fostering collaborative relationships.** Instead of building a conflictual relationship with homeless media, traditional media institutions can establish collaborative relationships. One of the findings in this research shows that there are collaborative practices, albeit informal, between traditional media practitioners and homeless media. Traditional media practitioners often rely on fast information from homeless media as raw material for news articles, while homeless media practitioners rely on the accuracy of traditional media to verify the information they obtain. On the other hand, fostering connections may deter homeless media from reproducing traditional media content without acknowledgement. Such collaborative practices can benefit both parties and, more broadly, benefit the public by fostering an information ecosystem that is local, fast, and accurate.

**Helping homeless media distance themselves from elite capture.** Homeless media frequently becomes an extension of the government's voices. This is due to the demand for quick information delivery, which is frequently met by government press releases and the homeless media personnel's tendency to play it safe. As a result, homeless



media may perpetuate the traditional media culture of “public relations journalism,” further marginalizing citizens’ voices on policy and governance issues. Those concerned with social issues such as good governance, human rights, environmental protection, and democracy should think about collaborating with homeless media to avoid a one-sided flow of information from the elites. We see this collaboration as beneficial to both homeless media personnel and civil society. It could benefit environmental activists advocating for local cases that need public attention, as well as homeless media outlets that require quick, local information from these activists.

**Addressing legal vulnerabilities.** Due to the limited journalistic experiences of many homeless media personnel and their organization questionable legal status, legal consequences are a looming threat. Unlike traditional media practitioners, homeless media personnel are not protected by the Press Law, making them more vulnerable to criminalization for their content production activities. Repealing repressive regulations is a long-term endeavor. However, given this situation, legal protection initiatives should begin to be considered and undertaken by homeless media practitioners and anyone concerned with democratizing information. Some possible actions include: building collaborations with Legal Aid Institutions, enhancing legal literacy/capacity, or forming associations.

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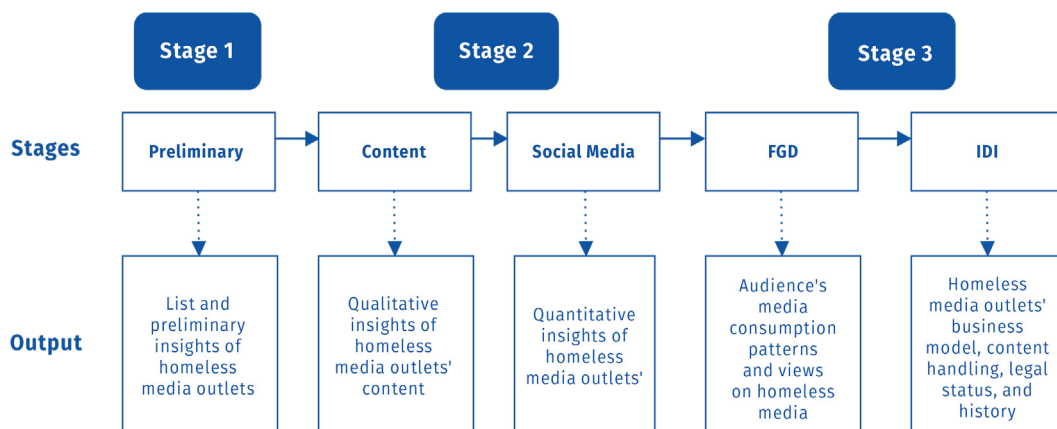
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# Appendix - Methodology



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To conduct this research, we used a variety of data collection methods and divided the process into three stages.



## 1. Preliminary Research

The first phase is establishing preliminary insights. We conducted focus group discussions with audience and traditional media journalists to get a sense of the situation before preparing our data collection instruments. Each FGD invited five participants from each city that would become the focus of this study, and during the process, we asked questions to elicit preliminary information about homeless media and the audience's and journalists' attitudes to it. In addition, during the preliminary phase, we conducted a desk study to gather information about each city's local homeless media and created a list of homeless media that would be subjected to content analysis. We also asked the participants in the preliminary FGDs if the list we created included homeless media that they read or were familiar with in their area, as well as their thoughts on it.



## 2. Content Analysis

We started with content analysis, analyzing a collected 3,000 contents from 15 homeless media accounts with three homeless media accounts from each city. Then, we attempted to manually code them, categorizing them based on content type, engagement rates, news source, the comment section's predominating moods, and whether the content is endorsed or not. In addition, we did qualitative analyses on the content of these homeless media channels. We examined the captions, graphic features, and audiovisual aspects in homeless media content, as well as how they are perceived by the public, as indicated by the comments. The work must be done manually because some information from the contents need to be analyzed by trained individuals, such as the news source and whether it is endorsement or not. The detailed explanation of this phase is as follows:

- We focused our content analysis on Instagram posts from homeless media outlets. We chose Instagram posts as the basis for our sample because of Instagram's significant presence in Indonesia, the fact that Indonesian social media users spend more time on Instagram than on Facebook or YouTube ([Tapsell, 2021](#)), and the prominence of homeless media outlets there.
- We aimed to include a wide range of homeless media outlets, from the most well-known and long-standing to those that have only recently emerged and have small followings. The primary consideration for our selection was that these accounts do not have any media outlets beyond their social media presence. The following table contains our list of selected homeless media accounts:

**Figure 1.1 - Selected Homeless Media Accounts**

CITY	USERNAME	PLATFORM
Yogyakarta	kabarjogja	Instagram
	jogja24jam	
	merapi_uncover	
Medan	buletinmedan	
	infomedan	
	medannewss.id	
Bandung	sekitarbandungcom	
	bandung.banget	
	infobandungraya	
Surabaya	surabayaterkini	
	info_surabaya	
	insidesuroboyo	
Jakarta	merekamjakarta	
	kabarjakarta1	
	infojkt24	

- Half of the 3,000 posts we examined were their all-time most engaging (with the most likes and comments), while the other half were their most recent when we collected our data in March 2024. As a result, we have two categories of content: regular and most engaging posts. Both types of content reflect different aspects of homeless media content. The most engaging ones reflect contents that are most successful in appealing to their audience, whereas the regular posts reflect their normal content over the course of a week—content that they can produce and reproduce under normal operating circumstances.

### 3. Focus Groups Discussions and In-Depth Interviews

#### a. Audience Focus Group Discussions

FGDs were held in five cities to learn more about the media consumption habits of the homeless audience. These discussions aimed to clarify how they first became involved with homeless media outlets and what keeps them interested in the media. We also asked about their views on homeless media. The focus group discussions included twenty-five homeless media followers, five from each city. We attempted to make the participants diverse, with an equal number of genders and professions, but for practical purposes, they were composed of formally educated urban middle class youth.

#### b. Homeless Media In-Depth Interviews

We also conducted IDIs to gain insight into the history, organizational and operational dynamics, and business of homeless media outlets. Ten representatives from the selected homeless media outlets, including two from each city, agreed to be interviewed. We first contacted the accounts identified in our content analysis, but only a few responded and agreed to be interviewed. We then used our networks to search for interlocutors. We had more difficulty finding interlocutors in Medan, so only one was interviewed. The table below shows the list of IDI participants:

Figure 1.2 - IDI Participants

CITY	USERNAME
Yogyakarta	jogjainfo
	merapi_uncover
Medan	punyabinjaicom
Bandung	beritakotabandung
	bdg.info
Surabaya	lovesuroboyo
	surabayaterkini
Jakarta	wargajakarta.id
	merekamjakarta

## Ethical Considerations and Study Limitations

To ensure the ethical considerations of this research, we inform our interlocutors about the scope of the study, its purposes, and information about Remotivi and the project’s main researcher in advance. These interlocutors included participants of our audience focus group discussions and homeless media personnel, who would be interviewed for insider information. We only involved them after they had read the consent form and agreed to participate in the study. We avoid mentioning their names to protect their anonymity. However, we believe it is critical to mention the names of their media outlets and their roles in them, as these characteristics are critical to our analysis, as we will not only mention their outlets but also analyze their insights in relation to their publicly available content. To avoid causing harm to our interlocutors, we refrain from mentioning any outlets, particularly when discussing what

we consider to be more sensitive topics.

It is important to briefly mention discussions about research ethics that have been brought to the forefront by social science and humanities scholars. Because research ethics originated from medical research, its principles frequently clash with research practices in the respective fields. These fields frequently use methods that appear intrusive and require quick, flexible interventions that do not follow pre-determined scripts. Journalism researchers, in particular, frequently have their research proposals withheld during the academic ethics committee process (Hunter, [2011](#)). In light of this issue, there is a call for universities to include more researchers from these various fields on the ethics committee (Beasley & Walker, [2014](#)). We are also seeing how associations in these fields develop research ethics that are more finely tuned to their research practices, such as prioritizing the well-being of research participants, maintaining trust between the researcher and the researched, and ensuring that the research is conducted for a good reason (Iphofen, [2021](#)). A scholar researching the impact of journalist coverages on indigenous communities also proposed an intriguing idea, claiming that the most important ethical consideration is reciprocity between the researcher and the interlocutors. This means that during the research, each participant can agree on a common clause that will benefit both parties while also preventing them from harming each other (Waller, [2012](#)).

Taking these discussions into account, as well as the nature of our research, which involves connecting several personal facets that contribute to the emergence of homeless media, we believe that research ethical principles must be interpreted in order to be integrated into our research practice. There is a good reason to tell the stories of our homeless media interlocutors, because the research is new

and will provide media practitioners and observers with early insight into the still mostly unknown outlets. On the other hand, we do our best to present the analysis in a way that does not harm our interlocutors and maintains their trust in the handling of the data.

As this is one of the first attempts to study homeless media outlets, we must acknowledge some limitations, which may be expanded upon in future research. The audience analysis in this study provides limited insight because the participants in the discussions were mostly from the urban formally educated-middle class, despite our efforts to balance gender representations and make their professional backgrounds as diverse as possible. We had a limited network to reach the audience for discussions in five cities, so the diversity of participants was limited. For future research, carrying out an audience survey can also be a good option for providing insight from the larger and more diverse audience population, with the survey design based on the early insights gained from our audience discussions.

Furthermore, while we interviewed two homeless media sources from each city and analyzed three homeless media outlets in each city for the content analysis, we cannot claim to have covered every possible type of homeless media. There may be more variations in homeless media, and our ability to select homeless media to be analyzed, by browsing Instagram and confirming them in our preliminary audience discussions, may be limited. Content analysis can be more comprehensive, especially when more content is analyzed over a longer period of time. In our attempt to grasp homeless media regular posts, we focused our analysis on their posts over the course of a week in March 2024, and future research could benefit from analyzing regular posts over a longer period of time. Future studies

will also benefit from focusing on community news outlets outside of Java, which are currently underrepresented in this study, and which typically thrive in the form of Facebook groups. This may provide a completely different but complementary picture to what this study contributes.







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This research was conducted with the support of the People of the United States of America through USAID. The contents of this report are the sole responsibility of Remotivi, and can not be regarded as reflecting the views of Internews, USAID, nor the Government of the United States of America under any circumstances.

