

Agenda Building in CNN Indonesia's News Production

Niki Charles Laoh¹, Hendriyani², Eriyanto³

¹²³University of Indonesia

nikicharles.academia@gmail.com, hendriyani.sos@ui.ac.id, eriyanto09@ui.ac.id

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini membahas bagaimana proses agenda building berlangsung dalam produksi berita di CNNIndonesia.com. Di tengah dominasi media sosial, redaksi media arus utama dihadapkan pada tantangan untuk tetap relevan, sekaligus menjaga otoritasnya dalam menentukan isu publik. Menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif dengan teknik triangulasi (wawancara mendalam, observasi redaksi, dan analisis dokumen internal), penelitian ini menelaah dinamika internal redaksi dalam menyusun prioritas isu, menimbang faktor viralitas, dan mempertahankan nilai-nilai jurnalistik. Teori Agenda Building digunakan untuk memahami interaksi antara tekanan eksternal (misalnya tren media sosial) dan keputusan internal redaksi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa CNNIndonesia.com tidak secara pasif mengikuti tren media sosial, tetapi melakukan seleksi dan rekontekstualisasi isu dengan mempertimbangkan nilai berita, kelayakan sumber, dan dampak editorial. Praktik agenda building di CNNIndonesia.com mencerminkan pergeseran model redaksional yang adaptif, di mana logika jurnalistik dan logika algoritmik berinteraksi secara strategis. Penelitian ini memperkaya wacana tentang konstruksi agenda media di era platformisasi dan menawarkan pemahaman baru tentang otonomi redaksional dalam lanskap digital ketika menghadapi arus informasi yang luar biasa dari media sosial.

Kata Kunci: Media Agenda; News Production; CNNIndonesia.com

ABSTRACT

This study explores the process of agenda building in news production at CNNIndonesia.com. Amid the rise of social media, mainstream newsrooms are challenged to remain relevant while maintaining their authority in shaping public issues. Using a qualitative case study approach with triangulated methods (in-depth interviews, newsroom observation, and internal document analysis), this research examines the internal dynamics of editorial decision-making. The Agenda Building Theory is applied to analyze how external pressures (such as social media trends) interact with internal editorial judgment. The findings reveal that CNNIndonesia.com does not passively follow social media trends but selectively recontextualizes them based on newsworthiness, source credibility, and editorial impact. The newsroom's agenda-building practices illustrate an adaptive editorial model, where journalistic logic and algorithmic logic interact strategically. This study enriches the discussion on media agenda setting in the era of platformization and offers new insights into editorial autonomy in the digital news environment when faced with the overwhelming flow of information from social media.

Keywords: Media Agenda; News Production; CNNIndonesia.com

A. INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation of the media landscape has profoundly changed the dynamics of news production. Traditional journalism, once characterized by clear editorial hierarchies and defined gatekeeping roles, now operates within a media ecosystem shaped by user engagement, platform algorithms, and instantaneous feedback loops. Social media platforms, particularly X (formerly Twitter), serve not only as channels for audience interaction but also as influential actors in setting news agendas.

This transformation has significant implications for newsroom practices. Journalists are no longer the sole arbiters of what constitutes newsworthiness. Instead, they must constantly negotiate between professional judgment and metrics of popularity. In this environment, the boundaries between content creation and content consumption are increasingly porous. Newsrooms must therefore adjust their internal routines to respond to both audience signals and organizational norms.

In the field of political studies, such dynamics are best captured through the theoretical lens of *Agenda Building*. Originating from the foundational work of Cobb and Elder (1971), agenda building theory explores how the media's issue priorities are shaped through a network of actors—including journalists, political elites, interest groups, and now, digital publics. The theory expands upon the original premise of agenda-setting by emphasizing the collaborative, contested, and often iterative nature of agenda formation.

Subsequent developments in agenda building theory have incorporated insights from digital media studies. Scholars such as Kim and Lee (2007) introduced the concept of agenda-rippling, showing how online discourse can flow back into mainstream media through strategic amplification. Others have extended this line of inquiry to include the impact of platform algorithms, influencer networks, and data analytics in shaping news priorities (Meraz, 2017; Klinger & Svensson, 2018). These expansions

underline the relevance of agenda building in analyzing news production in contemporary digital contexts.

However, despite these theoretical advancements, there remains a noticeable gap in the application of agenda building frameworks within non-Western media environments. Much of the existing literature focuses on media systems in North America and Europe, leaving questions about how digital newsrooms in countries like Indonesia respond to the pressures of platformization largely unanswered. Furthermore, empirical studies that examine newsroom decision-making in real time, using direct access to editorial environments, are still relatively rare.

In the Indonesian context, the need for such inquiry is especially acute. The country's vibrant digital ecosystem, combined with its complex political and media structures, provides a unique site for observing the negotiation between professional norms and algorithmic logics. CNNIndonesia.com, as one of the leading digital newsrooms in the

country, represents a compelling case for studying how editorial teams manage trending topics, user-generated content, and institutional expectations. Yet scholarly attention to this subject remains limited, particularly in high-quality communication journals.

The urgency of this topic is underscored by the escalating role of virality in shaping public opinion and the proliferation of disinformation across digital platforms. In recent years, Indonesia has witnessed several incidents in which false information spread virally before journalistic verification could intervene. These developments signal the critical need to understand how professional newsrooms respond to real-time digital pressure without compromising editorial integrity.

This study seeks to fill that gap by investigating the agenda building practices within CNNIndonesia.com. Specifically, it examines how editors respond to viral content on social media, how they determine issue salience, and how they uphold journalistic values amid external

pressures. The research applies a qualitative case study approach that triangulates data from in-depth interviews, newsroom observations, and internal editorial documents. This approach enables a grounded analysis of the mechanisms through which editorial judgments are made.

These dynamics unfold within a broader concern about the erosion of editorial gatekeeping in the platform era (Carlson, 2020). Scholars have argued that algorithms, virality, and audience metrics increasingly shape news production in ways that undermine professional discretion. However, recent scholarship introduces the concept of *algorithmic resistance*, highlighting how journalists develop strategic responses to mitigate these pressures (Bucher, 2021; Poell, Nieborg, & van Dijck, 2022). This study draws on these perspectives to examine how CNNIndonesia.com exercises editorial agency in the face of platform-driven constraints, offering a lens to understand both vulnerability and resilience within the digital newsroom.

By focusing on the interactions between internal newsroom routines and external digital cues, this study offers a detailed account of how editorial priorities are constructed. It pays particular attention to the ways in which editors filter, reframe, or reject topics originating from social media. These processes reveal not only the criteria used in news selection but also the strategic considerations behind editorial autonomy. In this sense, the newsroom is not merely a passive receiver of public discourse but an active interpreter and mediator.

The findings of this study contribute to ongoing debates about the role of journalism in an era of platform dominance. While much research has emphasized the disruptive effects of digital technologies on news production, this study highlights how professional journalism adapts to digital pressures while preserving its editorial autonomy. Editors at CNNIndonesia.com demonstrate agency not by following viral trends, but by negotiating them through critical judgment and institutional

standards. This negotiation reflects a hybrid editorial model that integrates traditional journalistic values with new media dynamics.

Such a model has theoretical and practical implications. It challenges deterministic views of digital disruption that assume the erosion of journalistic norms. Instead, it suggests that agenda building remains a site of professional reflexivity, where newsrooms balance competing demands through contextual judgment. This reinforces the value of communication theories that foreground human agency, institutional culture, and socio-technical interactions in understanding media production.

Moreover, this study offers a methodological contribution to the literature on agenda building. Unlike studies that rely solely on content analysis or audience metrics, this research draws from inside the newsroom. The inclusion of confidential editorial documents and direct observations provides access to the logic of decision-making as it unfolds. This insider perspective

enhances the analytical depth and validity of the study's findings.

Given these contributions, the present study addresses two primary research questions. First, how do internal and external influences shape agenda construction in CNNIndonesia.com? Second, what criteria do editors use to reconcile trending topics from social media with professional journalistic standards? These questions guide an exploration into the evolving practices of editorial decision-making in a digital media environment.

Ultimately, this study aims to deepen our understanding of agenda building in Indonesia's digital journalism sector. It sheds light on the strategic processes behind news selection, the resilience of journalistic norms, and the complex interplay between editorial autonomy and platform pressures. In doing so, it provides both theoretical insights and practical relevance for scholars, media practitioners, and policymakers concerned with the future of journalism in the platform era.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

The foundation of this study resides in the evolving field of agenda building, which originally explored how journalistic institutions and influence groups shaped media priorities (Cobb & Elder, 1971). Modern scholarship extends this focus to include the digital transformations that inject new dynamics into editorial routines.

Kim and Lee (2007) introduced the concept of agenda rippling, which describes how online discussions filter back into mainstream journalism. Their work demonstrated that digital audiences—from bloggers to active social media users—serve as influential agenda partners rather than passive consumers. Meraz (2017) further expanded these ideas by examining how algorithmic signals from platforms like Twitter and Facebook infiltrate newsroom deliberation, effectively transforming editorial gatekeeping into a negotiated process influenced by both humans and machines.

Beyond agenda building, studies in digital communication highlight the interplay of traditional journalistic logic and platform-driven behaviors. Chadwick and Dennis (2017) describe hybrid media systems, where editorial decisions result from complex interdependencies between institutional norms and algorithmic incentives.

Likewise, Newman et al. (2024) emphasize that newsrooms now adopt a data-informed, if not always data-led, approach to content creation—balancing metrics-driven demands with journalistic standards. These findings create a theoretical space in which editorial autonomy is preserved through selective engagement with external digital pressures.

Replicability of the Editorial Model

However, critics argue that while agenda building provides useful insights into the construction of media priorities, it often assumes a linear and rational editorial process that does not fully account for the complexity of algorithmic influence.

Benkler et al. (2018) note that the opaque nature of platform

architectures can undermine newsroom deliberation by privileging popularity over accuracy. Furthermore, classical agenda building under-theorizes the non-human agency embedded in digital metrics, which can shape news prominence without editorial awareness or consent. This critique suggests the need for theoretical frameworks that foreground reflexivity and contestation within the newsroom.

To address this limitation, this study incorporates the concept of reflexive gatekeeping, as proposed by Van Dalen et al. (2012). This model emphasizes the active role of journalists in critically evaluating social media trends and digital signals. Rather than treating popularity metrics as deterministic, reflexive gatekeeping highlights editorial autonomy, professional norms, and institutional culture as mediating factors. Integrating this model with agenda building enables a richer understanding of how newsrooms respond to viral topics while maintaining ethical boundaries and editorial independence.

In the Indonesian context, recent research in *Jurnal Komuniti* affirms the relevance of these perspectives. A study on media framing in local news revealed that editors strategically shape public discourse by amplifying or limiting issue visibility (Pinontoan & Wahid, 2020).

Another study examined the influence of trending topics on news coverage and concluded that editorial gatekeeping remains intact even under digital pressure (Siwi & Monggilo, 2024). However, both studies primarily rely on content analysis or survey data and do not engage directly with newsroom decision-making processes.

Research on digital newsrooms demonstrates that agenda building processes are not limited to online dissemination; they also shape internal cultural routines. Shoemaker and Reese (2014) conceptualize news production as rooted in structural layers—individual, organizational, and institutional—that collectively guide editorial outcomes. Similarly, Shoemaker et al. (2021) provide empirical evidence showing that newsrooms with well-

defined editorial norms can resist click-driven logics imposed by social media trends. These findings underscore that the tension between journalistic autonomy and platform influence is mediated by internal routines and values.

Despite these advances, little is known about how digital newsrooms in Southeast Asia operationalize these concepts. Most research in the region focuses on content and effects rather than newsroom processes. This study thus aims to contribute a grounded, process-oriented account of how editorial judgment is exercised amid shifting digital pressures in Indonesia. It situates CNNIndonesia.com as a case for observing the interaction between professional routines and algorithmic signals in real time.

While literature on Southeast Asia remains limited, emerging studies in Malaysia and the Philippines offer comparative insights. For example, studies by Tapsell (2020) and Pertierra (2019) show how digital populism and partisan platforms challenge editorial independence in Southeast Asian democracies.

Including such regional perspectives enhances our understanding of CNNIndonesia.com within a broader platformized media environment.

In sum, this literature review identifies several critical insights. First, agenda building theory and its digital extensions offer a robust framework for analyzing how digital audiences and algorithms influence editorial processes. Second, critiques of the theory call attention to its limitations in addressing non-linear, data-driven influence. Third, by incorporating reflexive gatekeeping and newsroom institutionalism, this study proposes a theoretical synthesis that captures both external pressures and internal autonomy. These themes provide the conceptual grounding for examining agenda building in CNNIndonesia.com's newsroom.

C. METHOD

This research employed a qualitative case study approach to investigate the agenda-building practices within the newsroom of CNNIndonesia.com.

The case study method was selected for its ability to explore complex social phenomena in their real-world context, where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). This method remains highly relevant for contemporary media studies, particularly when the aim is to understand meaning-making processes embedded in institutional practice (Tracy, 2019). In the context of journalism studies, case studies allow researchers to examine the interplay between normative values, organizational routines, and technological pressures with depth and nuance (Cottle, 2007).

CNNIndonesia.com was chosen as a single case due to its prominence as a leading digital newsroom in Indonesia. As a hybrid platform that integrates traditional journalism with real-time platform metrics, it serves as a strategic site to study editorial decision-making in the face of algorithmic influence.

This study adopts an exploratory single-case design, positioning CNNIndonesia.com as a unique

newsroom that exercises editorial autonomy under platform pressures. The recontextualization of viral issues by its editorial team is treated not as a standard model but as an emergent practice that offers analytical insight into how journalistic norms evolve in response to algorithmic environments. Given the limited scholarship on real-time editorial decision-making in Southeast Asian digital newsrooms, this case serves as an entry point to understand how professional routines are negotiated in a context saturated by virality and engagement metrics.

The case selection followed a purposive sampling logic (Palinkas et al., 2015), based on the site's editorial structure, digital reach, and observable interaction with social media discourse.

Data were collected using three qualitative techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three key informants: Vice Managing Editor, Social Media Senior Editor, and a senior news editor. This method allows for

flexibility and depth while ensuring alignment with theoretical concerns (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The interviews explored editorial reasoning, perceived pressures from social media, and criteria for issue selection.

Second, participant observation was conducted in editorial meetings and daily rundown discussions. The observational notes captured real-time reactions to viral issues, editorial negotiations, and discursive framing patterns. Observation in newsroom studies remains vital, especially for understanding unscripted practices and decision-making behavior (Paterson & Domingo, 2014).

Third, internal documents—including editorial rundowns, decision memos, and social media reports—were collected and analyzed. These texts provide formal representations of newsroom workflows and performance expectations, allowing triangulation of insights across data types (Bowen, 2009). Data collection occurred from September to November 2023, under formal permission and ethical

clearance by the editorial leadership of CNNIndonesia.com.

The study followed thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), combining inductive coding with theory-driven interpretation. All interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were analyzed in cycles to identify emerging patterns related to agenda negotiation, issue selection, and journalistic autonomy. This method is particularly suited for media and communication research as it allows for flexibility while preserving rigor and transparency (Nowell et al., 2017). Coding was done manually and organized through thematic categories such as “social media influence,” “editorial discretion,” and “reframing practices.”

To enhance analytical rigor, this study applied pattern matching and explanation building, as suggested by Yin (2018). Identified themes such as “editorial discretion” and “reframing practices” were compared against theoretical expectations derived from agenda building and reflexive gatekeeping

models. The analysis focused not only on describing patterns in newsroom behavior but also on constructing explanatory narratives that connect editorial responses with institutional routines, digital pressures, and normative values. This approach allowed the study to develop theory-informed interpretations while grounding them in empirical observations.

For instance, codes such as “influencer-driven topics,” “headline hedging,” and “legal threshold filtering” emerged during the analysis, revealing how editors construct layered responses to viral content based on framing, risk assessment, and journalistic value.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, this study applied multiple strategies. Data triangulation was performed across interviews, documents, and observations to validate consistency. Member checking was conducted with two informants to verify interpretations and reduce researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thick description was used to support contextual understanding,

and an audit trail of decisions and coding memos was maintained to support dependability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These methodological strategies align with current best practices in qualitative communication research and ensure the transparency, validity, and ethical soundness of the study.

The researchers engaged in ongoing reflexivity, acknowledging how subjective assumptions and personal engagement with newsroom routines could influence interpretation. Reflexive journal entries were maintained throughout data collection and analysis, documenting evolving impressions and methodological decisions, as recommended in recent qualitative research (Dodgson, 2019; Finlay, 2022).

This practice helped to surface potential biases and to improve interpretive rigor. Moreover, ethical considerations guided the handling of internal editorial documents; sensitive materials were anonymized and used only to triangulate findings rather than as direct quotations, aligning with standards for

responsible use of informant-generated content (Mirza et al., 2023). This layered reflexivity and ethical oversight enhance the study’s trustworthiness and contribute to methodological transparency, especially valuable in media studies where researcher proximity to the field may shape outcomes.

This study, while rich in depth, acknowledges several limitations. The research focuses on a single digital newsroom and does not aim to generalize across Indonesia’s broader media landscape. Access was limited to selected editorial sessions and informants, meaning certain strategic decisions outside formal routines may not have been captured. Moreover, due to the sensitive nature of internal documents, some materials could not be cited directly but were instead used to support triangulation discreetly. Future research may expand by incorporating comparative cases or extending the observation period across breaking news cycles.

D. RESULTS

This study aims to explore how CNNIndonesia.com constructs its editorial agenda in response to viral content on social media. The findings were derived from in-depth interviews with three newsroom actors occupying strategic positions in content selection and framing. Their insights offer a rich view into how professional routines interact with the dynamics of digital virality. Table 1 below describes informants’ profile and their respective editorial roles.

Tabel 1. Profile of Key Informants

Informant	Position	Role
Informant 1	Editorial Decision-Maker	Oversees content direction and resolves editorial controversies
Informant 2	Social Media Monitoring Officer	Selects social media content and recommends topics
Informant 3	Senior Journalist	Determines framing and source

credibility for
political news

Source: Researchers' Data

Social Media as a Rapid Signal

Informants acknowledged that social media plays a vital role in providing quick issue signals to the newsroom. However, they also stressed its limitations in producing reliable journalistic material.

Informant 1, the editorial decision-maker, stated:

"Social media has a very fast character. It can provide quick information, but it cannot do what the media does." (Informant 1)

Observational Informant 2, who monitors viral content across platforms, also emphasized that viral status alone does not guarantee editorial worth:

"Sometimes we don't check it first—because it's already viral. So, we put disclaimers... we try to get around it with the headlines. Indeed, what we give is viral, video, whatever, blah blah blah. (Informant 2)"

These statements indicate that while social media offers speed, its

informational integrity remains questionable. Therefore, editors treat social media not as a source, but as an input channel that requires further verification and framing.

In practice, this positioning of social media as an early warning system rather than a definitive news source allows CNNIndonesia.com to maintain editorial control while remaining responsive to public discourse. Informants' consistent emphasis on "checking later" or "adding disclaimers" indicates a deliberate editorial reflex rather than a reactive stance. This reinforces the newsroom's role as an interpreter of social signals, not merely a translator. In doing so, CNNIndonesia.com avoids amplifying incomplete or manipulated narratives, a risk increasingly documented in scholarship on misinformation in Southeast Asian media (Lim, 2020).

Editorial Selectivity and Verification Practices

Editors often withhold content unless it meets internal standards of source credibility and legal consequence. Informant 1 explained

how the team responds to controversial viral topics:

"Even if it's viral. We only move when the issue enters the legal domain." (Informant 1)

This approach shows that virality alone is insufficient. The newsroom applies gatekeeping layers based on legal relevance, source traceability, and societal consequence. Observation notes from editorial meetings confirm this pattern, particularly when teams defer publication until more institutional sources are available.

These practices of selective engagement are not only a response to legal risk but also a way to preserve credibility in a media environment where public trust is fragile. Informants demonstrated a consistent threshold for action: if an issue lacks verification, it is not considered editorially safe, regardless of public pressure. This demonstrates that CNNIndonesia.com anchors its agenda-setting practices in institutional accountability rather than populist appeal, which is crucial

in sustaining long-term reputational legitimacy.

Algorithmic Pressure versus Journalistic Autonomy

Despite awareness of engagement metrics, editors retain discretionary power in choosing topics. Informant 3, responsible for political news, emphasized the need to filter political voices carefully:

"If it's parliament, we choose figures who officially represent their institutions, not just those who are popular." (Informant 3)

He also explained the team's critical stance toward political statements that are sensational but lack substance:

"We understand that political parties sometimes push figures to make random attention-seeking statements... We try our best to avoid people like this." (Informant 3)

These accounts highlight the newsroom's effort to assert editorial integrity, even when facing external pressures from virality or public sentiment. Content is not only

evaluated based on popularity but also on its contribution to public understanding and alignment with professional values.

Despite operating within a platform-driven ecosystem, the newsroom demonstrates a firm stance on maintaining institutional legitimacy over platform popularity. The refusal to quote political sources who engage in *"asal jeplak"* (unverified populist statements) reflects an editorial norm that privileges procedural authority and factual coherence. Rather than bending to virality, editors appear to insulate their work from algorithmic amplification by reinforcing news values rooted in verification, proportionality, and social responsibility. This finding affirms that editorial autonomy is possible—even in digital ecosystems saturated by engagement metrics—when professional routines are clearly institutionalized.

Negotiating Headlines and Viral Frames

Another significant strategy used by CNNIndonesia.com in handling

social media content is headline negotiation. Rather than rejecting viral content entirely, the editorial team often reframes the issue at the headline level to maintain engagement while distancing the outlet from unverifiable claims. Informant 2 described this practice as a form of editorial adaptation, noting that although some stories lacked confirmation, they were still considered *"angkat langsung"* (publish directly) if the framing could be adjusted to include disclaimers or hedging language.

This approach reflects a compromise between audience interest and professional standards. For instance, viral issues from platforms such as TikTok or X might be framed with speculative headlines, allowing the newsroom to capture public attention while signaling editorial caution. Such headlines often include phrases like *"ramai di media sosial"* or *"viral warganet pertanyakan..."*, positioning the newsroom not as the originator of the claim but as a contextual observer.

The use of headlines as a discursive shield enables CNNIndonesia.com to engage with real-time public conversations without compromising its editorial credibility. By acknowledging the viral nature of an issue while reframing its substance, editors retain control over the meaning and tone of coverage. This strategy aligns with studies in digital journalism that highlight the increasing role of headlines as both a gatekeeping tool and a negotiation space in platform-driven media systems (Vu & Saldaña, 2021; Tandoc, 2014).

Furthermore, headline negotiation serves as a pragmatic editorial tactic in environments with tight turnaround times and high audience expectations. While the newsroom often rejects stories with unverifiable sources, the use of strategic language at the headline level allows them to participate in the digital conversation without fully endorsing the claims embedded in viral discourse. This reinforces the notion that agenda building in digital journalism is not a binary process of inclusion or exclusion, but a layered

negotiation of how and to what extent an issue is represented.

By using hedging phrases and indirect attribution, the newsroom not only protects its credibility but also educates its audience about the provisional nature of certain narratives. This discursive practice represents a middle ground between total dismissal and blind reproduction of viral content. It also allows the editorial team to participate in the public conversation without validating unverified claims. In doing so, CNNIndonesia.com exercises agenda-building not only in story selection but in the framing and calibration of its public voice.

E. DISCUSSION

Editorial Autonomy in a Platform-Driven Environment

This study demonstrates how the editorial team at CNNIndonesia.com practices agenda building in a digital context shaped by social media virality. The findings confirm that viral content is not automatically translated into news, but instead enters a complex filtering system where editorial routines, legal

considerations, and institutional norms play central roles. These practices affirm the continued relevance of agenda building theory, which explains how issue salience in media is constructed through institutional negotiation rather than passive adoption of external pressures (Cobb & Elder, 1971; Lang & Lang, 1991).

Editorial actors treat social media trends as early alerts but not as determinants of newsworthiness. In daily practice, viral content is evaluated based on its source credibility, public significance, and legal status. In many cases, the newsroom tends to delay coverage of viral topics until some form of institutional confirmation is available—such as a formal statement from authorities or the emergence of legal proceedings. This tendency reflects a precautionary editorial stance that prioritizes verification and accountability over immediacy. This approach reflects the logic of reflexive gatekeeping, wherein editors maintain critical distance from digital popularity and apply layered professional judgments to decide

whether and how a story should be published (Van Dalen et al., 2012).

The results also show that editors are cautious in framing social media-based stories. Rather than echoing online discourse, they reinterpret or delay coverage to avoid sensationalism and preserve institutional voice. This behavior illustrates the application of Shoemaker and Reese's hierarchy of influences (2014), particularly the influence of organizational routines and ethical standards in shaping news content. By internalizing normative boundaries, the newsroom defends its credibility even while engaging with platform-driven rhythms.

Professional Judgment, Legal Thresholds, and Virality

Within the political desk, content derived from social media is filtered even more rigorously. Editorial actors prefer sources with formal institutional roles over those who are merely trending or provocative. This editorial selectivity resists the populist logic often embedded in digital spaces and supports Chadwick's theory of hybrid media systems (2017), in which traditional journalistic

values continue to operate alongside algorithmic and participatory dynamics.

In the Indonesian context, the editorial discretion practiced by CNNIndonesia.com gains additional relevance. The country's fragmented and polarized information environment, especially in political years, intensifies the risk of viral content being weaponized to shape public sentiment. In such situations, the newsroom's practice of delaying coverage until legal or institutional verification is available reflects not only editorial caution but a strategic commitment to avoid amplifying politically motivated disinformation. This is especially pertinent given Indonesia's recurring exposure to online hoaxes, political trolling, and identity-based narratives, which often thrive on platform virality without verification. By refusing to act on "noise" from partisan accounts or anonymous sources, the newsroom maintains its role as a stabilizing actor in the digital public sphere.

Moreover, CNNIndonesia.com's negotiation of viral content through strategic headline framing reveals

how media institutions adapt to algorithmic environments while preserving editorial authority. The practice of acknowledging a topic's popularity—without adopting its framing—demonstrates a form of symbolic distancing that protects journalistic legitimacy. This approach aligns with broader concerns in journalism studies about the erosion of editorial gatekeeping in the platform era (Carlson, 2020).

Yet, this case illustrates that gatekeeping is not obsolete; it has evolved into a subtler form of meaning management, where editors choose not only what to publish, but how to signal their stance on contested narratives. This editorial reflexivity deserves greater attention in policy discourse, particularly in discussions around platform regulation, media ethics, and journalistic training in the digital age.

These findings also provide a practical contribution to contemporary journalism. In an age where metrics such as clicks and shares can obscure editorial judgment, CNNIndonesia.com illustrates a model of news

production that is data-aware but not data-led. Editorial decisions remain embedded in professional ethics, collective deliberation, and reflexive filtering.

This practice ensures that journalism continues to act as a mediator of public meaning, not simply a mirror of public sentiment.

What also emerges from this study is the newsroom's ability to internalize platform logic while resisting its determinism. CNNIndonesia.com demonstrates that algorithmic awareness does not necessarily erode editorial values; rather, it can be incorporated into a reflective newsroom culture that exercises judgment over metrics. This suggests that digital journalism in Indonesia is entering a new phase—not of imitation, but of adaptation—where platform metrics become one of many considerations, not the ultimate driver. In this regard, the case provides evidence that editorial autonomy is not a static principle but a relational capacity that must be constantly negotiated across technological, institutional, and cultural dimensions. As such, the

findings affirm recent scholarship on algorithmic resistance in journalism (Bucher, 2021; Poell et al., 2022), which calls for greater recognition of journalistic agency in managing digital influence.

However, it is important to question the extent to which this adaptive model can be replicated across the media industry. CNNIndonesia.com enjoys structural advantages—including brand authority, skilled editorial staff, and institutional support—that may not be available to smaller or independent newsrooms. Further research should explore whether similar practices are viable in less-resourced environments, or whether editorial resilience in the platform era remains a privilege of elite media institutions.

Therefore, this study adopts a contextual redefinition of agenda building theory. Instead of assuming a collaborative process among all actors—including journalists, elites, interest groups, and digital publics—this study emphasizes the newsroom's capacity to resist and reframe external agenda pressures. The findings suggest that in highly

saturated digital environments, agenda building may operate as a process of selective filtration and strategic negation, where editorial teams actively disengage from popular discourse that lacks verification or institutional relevance. This reinterpretation highlights that in certain media systems, particularly in the Global South, editorial autonomy is not only preserved through participation in agenda networks but also through intentional withdrawal from algorithmically amplified signals.

Theoretically, the study affirms that agenda building in the platform era must be understood as a dynamic, multi-level process involving not only the interaction of media and elites but also the negotiation between professional routines and digital signals. Editorial actors actively interpret viral cues, evaluate risks, and construct narratives that align with their institutional mandates. In doing so, they enact a communicative function that is both responsive and responsible—anchored in the belief that journalism must remain a space

for verified, contextualized, and ethically sound information.

F. CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how CNNIndonesia.com constructs its editorial agenda in response to social media dynamics. The research focused on how viral content is identified, evaluated, and either integrated or rejected within the editorial workflow of a leading digital newsroom. Drawing on agenda building theory and supported by concepts such as reflexive gatekeeping and hierarchy of influences, the findings confirm that CNNIndonesia.com exercises deliberate editorial judgment rather than passively adopting algorithmic or public pressure. Social media content serves as an initial input, but professional routines and institutional standards shape the final editorial outcome. This confirms that agenda setting in the digital era remains a negotiated and communicative process.

The study contributes a novel empirical insight by demonstrating how an Indonesian digital newsroom

operationalizes agenda building in a hybrid media system. While prior studies often rely on content analysis or external observation, this research integrates internal newsroom perspectives—through interviews, observations, and document analysis—showing how decisions unfold in real time. By revealing how editorial actors maintain ethical boundaries, filter populist sources, and delay publication until formal verification is achieved, the study reframes agenda building not only as a process of selection but as an exercise of institutional reflexivity.

Future research should expand this inquiry by comparing newsrooms with different organizational structures, ownership models, or commercial pressures. Studies could also explore agenda building in time-sensitive contexts such as breaking news or political crises, where editorial judgment is compressed by urgency.

Additionally, further investigation is needed on how non-human agents—such as recommendation algorithms, content dashboards, and metric feedback loops—affect

editorial routines from within. These directions may help clarify how editorial autonomy can be preserved, redefined, or contested in increasingly automated and participatory information environments.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, this study also carries practical implications for digital newsroom management. As newsrooms increasingly navigate platform-driven information flows, editorial protocols that prioritize reflexivity, source legitimacy, and institutional verification become critical. Training programs for journalists should incorporate cases like CNNIndonesia.com to demonstrate how editorial values can be upheld amidst viral pressure. Moreover, media policymakers and platform regulators in Indonesia may benefit from supporting institutional mechanisms—such as editorial charters and transparent decision logs—that enable newsrooms to resist disinformation without sacrificing responsiveness to public discourse.

What distinguishes this study is its access to internal newsroom

processes in an Indonesian context—an approach rarely documented in existing agenda building literature. By capturing the interplay between social media signals and newsroom

judgment from within the editorial space, this study offers a novel lens on how editorial authority is asserted and sustained in non-Western digital media environments.

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