



Mass Media and Public Policy: Public Perception of Street Vendors in the Media

Eka Nada Shofa Alkhajar; Agusniar Rizka Luthfia

Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

<http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v8i8.3047>

Abstract

The financial crisis in 1997 and the arrival of reform era in Indonesia has made Surakarta city a city of street vendors. The street vendors exist throughout the city and cause many problems. The first direct election for local leaders in Indonesia inspired citizens to hope that the local governments would be to overcome the problems effectively, including in Surakarta. This article aims to examine the Surakarta citizens' perceptions of the street vendors in Solopos daily, which is the main newspaper of the city. The research employed qualitative content analysis method. The data were taken through documentation. The results indicated that the public of Surakarta wanted street vendors need to be managed immediately. They wanted it to become the city's priority agenda. The public perception, then, becomes an important source as well as a good support for the local government to run actions and formulate a proper policy in the form of street vendors management.

Keywords: *Street Vendor; Public Perception; Public Policy; Media*

I. Introduction

Since 2001, Indonesia has started to enter a new era known as decentralization era. This state transforms from one of the world's most centralized nations into one of the most decentralized [1]. One of the basic reasons is to make the public services provided by the state more efficient, effective, and right on target. In addition, decentralization also authorizes the local government to be better at dealing with local public needs and problems [2][3]. Surakarta, also known as Solo, is located in the province of Central Java, Indonesia. It now becomes the center for Javanese culture, traditional crafts, and tourism. However, the presence of street vendors in 2005 has become one of crucial problems in Surakarta that needs be solved immediately. The number of street vendors in the city was rapidly flourishing after the financial crisis in 1997 and at the beginning of the reform era [4]. Their existence has caused many problems to the city.

The problem of street vendors is believed by most Surakarta citizens to be the basic reason of why the city has no longer won Adipura Award for a long time. Adipura is an annual event and Adipura Award is a prestigious award to province, regency, and city for the successful environmental cleanliness management in the region. In short, Adipura Award is identical with clean city. Therefore, it is unsurprising that many local governments constructed Adipura monuments as the symbol and the proof of its region's success in achieving the award. According to the history, the last time Surakarta won Adipura Award was in 2016 and 2017, after achieving no award for 15 years.

For that reason, after being elected as mayor and vice mayor of Surakarta in the first direct election in Surakarta and inaugurated officially on July 28, 2005, Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and F.X. Hadi Rudyatmo (Rudy) were faced directly with a big challenge to manage and solve the street vendor problems. It was also in line with the attempt of realizing one of their campaign promises. This research aims to examine the Surakarta citizens' perception appeared in Solopos Daily, specifically in Kriing Solopos column. Perception referred to here is the Surakarta citizens' perception of the existence of street vendors in Surakarta that is submitted to the city's main newspaper. The research focuses on examining public perception in the first month after Jokowi and Rudy's inauguration. It is expected that this period can shed interesting insight into public perception related to one of their campaign promises.

II. Research Method

This research is a descriptive research. Solopos Daily was chosen purposively as a case study. The research aimed at portraying the Surakarta citizens' perception of the street vendors which was submitted to the Solopos column, namely, Kriing Solopos. The data were taken through documentation from 1-31 August 2005. The period was chosen as the August was the first month after the inauguration of the new major of Surakarta. The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, which is a scientific method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative material [5]. This method consists of three phases: preparation, organization, and reporting of results [6][7]. The results of the study then are presented narratively and descriptively, corresponding to the research need [8].

III. Result and Discussion

1. Kriing Solopos as Citizens Forum

Kriing Solopos is one of the columns in Solopos Daily. Viewed from the media perspective, the column is a form of media social responsibility. The column provides a space for the citizens to submit their opinions and aspirations related to issues in the Greater Solo area. Citizens can share what they think about their city and public services quality. The column is an important space as it can become a public barometer concerning certain issues in certain period of time.

Meanwhile, the message delivered in the column should be brief, concise, not related to certain ethnic group, religion, race, and intergroup (SARA), and not disposition. It should not promote and discredit certain parties or certain products either. All messages should be delivered politely. Public can deliver the message in three ways. Firstly, the message can be delivered via phone call on 724848. Secondly, it can be delivered via short message service (SMS) to mobile phone number of 08552724846 with message format: <KR> <space> <name & address> <message content>. In order to boost and attract public participation, Solopos Daily also runs an appeal strategy [9][10]. The city's main newspaper offers lottery to the message sender who provides complete name and address according to valid identity card (e.g. National identity card). As is known, the level of public participation is an important key to good democratic life [11]. Thirdly, citizens can deliver their public perception via email to kriing@solopos.net. Public perception will be displayed in *Kriing Solopos* column everyday, except on Sunday and public holidays.

The existence of the column is very helpful to citizens, particularly Surakarta citizens, to submit their ideas, thoughts, critiques, suggestions, and complaints. A citizen even asked Jokowi and Rudy to require all of their local government staffs to read *Kriing Solopos* everyday. It is intended to enable the local government to keep acquiring the latest information about public problems and public needs. The column itself can be called as citizens forum in which citizens have a sense of public duty and they voluntarily participate in the public discourse of their city and society. It is because citizens can communicate their views, expectations, and perception of their city. The forum is also useful to strengthen the citizens' sense of responsibility to their city. The presence of such citizens forum is very important as it can help local government improve its service quality as well as bring prosperity to the citizens.

2. Public Perception of Street Vendors in the Media

Totally there were 36 data found to be related to the street vendor issues. It clearly can be seen that Surakarta citizens were concerned very much with this very sensitive and hot button issue. From the public perception, it can be seen that street vendors had been mushrooming in Surakarta. They became an integral part of Surakarta's landscape. They were ubiquitous. It was a true fact and became a social reality. Such condition was daily aspect and seemed to be normal condition in the city. Citizens suggested that Surakarta had several bad images, such as dirty, messy and untidy, at that time. One of factors causing it was the existence of street vendors.

In addition, citizens highly expected the newly-inaugurated mayor and vice mayor to change Surakarta into a better city. Citizens wanted their city to become clean, healthy, tidy, beautiful, and free from corruption (*Berseri Tanpa Korupsi*). They wanted the slogan to be realized and not merely a slogan. Citizens waited for real moves from their new leaders to change the city's bad images. At least in their 100 first days of administration, citizens asked Jokowi and Rudi not to disappoint the citizens who have trusted them as the leaders of the city.

According to the data, in the first month after the inauguration of the new major and vice major of Surakarta, citizens began to question the realization of government's plan to manage all street vendors. Particularly, citizens demanded one of Jokowi and Rudy's promises, which was to remove illegal street vendors. They wanted their new local leaders to manage the street vendors as quickly as possible. Overall, citizens viewed the problem of street vendors as an urgent one to be solved. Therefore, citizens asked the local government to focus on the attempt of managing the street vendors.

To citizens, street vendor management was very desirable because the presence of street vendors in the city had been uncontrolled and worrying. They worried that when this problem was not managed well immediately, Surakarta would be like Jakarta where street vendors have been very difficult to be managed. Citizens viewed that recalcitrant street vendors should be treated firmly and processed legally because they had damaged the city's beauty. These street vendors occupied places they should not occupy, for example, city parks. Their activities have made the city parks damaged and made it "lost spaces." Meanwhile, city parks have important function as public space [12][13].

Citizens thought that when street vendors could be managed well, the main function of city parks could be restored. As mentioned earlier, the street vendors also often seized the rights of vehicle drivers and pedestrians because they used sidewalks and roads haphazardly. It made the pedestrians uncomfortable. In addition, their activities also led to traffic jam and endangered the vehicle drivers as it could cause accidents.

The street vendors even established illegal building as their residence and to support their trading activities. Many of the buildings were even permanent brick buildings. These conditions made many citizens angry. Even a citizen appealed all Surakarta citizens to boycott street vendors because they were very difficult to organize. Meanwhile, there was an assumption that the problem of street vendors was not caused by a single factor. For example, a factor causing street vendors to occupy the green spaces permanently was other citizens' uncaring attitudes about the existence of street vendors so that they still became the street vendors' consumers. Therefore, a citizen told the authorities to take firm action against the customers, for example, by imposing traffic ticket.

In August 2005, government began to manage the street vendors in several areas in the city. The citizens, of course, appreciated this move. However, they expected that these governmental measures would not end in the middle of the process. They wanted the organizing attempt to be taken comprehensively, continuously, and completely. Citizens also asked the local government to register all street vendors in the city. It was intended to find out the exact total number of street vendors. Its main objective was to find out whether the street vendors were the residents of Surakarta or rural-urban migrants. It was because citizens predicted that many street vendors came from outside Surakarta. Overall, citizens wanted their city to be free of illegal street vendors who had been very disturbing. They

expected that when their city had been restored into clean, healthy, tidy, and beautiful city, Surakarta would have an opportunity of winning Adipura Award again.

Nevertheless, there was one datum with different tone as it defended the existence of street vendors. The citizen wanted people of Surakarta to not discredit the street vendors because they were also part of Jokowi and Rudy's supporters in the direct election for local leader in Surakarta. He then asked the local government to protect the street vendors and to have them having legal consciousness and paying retribution fee and thereby, increasing local revenue. In addition, from the existing data, citizens were also concerned with and paid serious attention to the existence of illegal street vendors in Banjarsari Park. They questioned the government's seriousness in relocating the illegal street vendors from the location.

3. The Relocation of Street Vendors at Banjarsari Park

As mentioned earlier, citizens also provided their public perception of street vendors at Banjarsari Park. There were seven data discussing the existence of street vendors at Banjarsari Park. Citizens said that the existence of street vendors at the 45 Struggle Monument in Banjarsari Park had destroyed the monument's beauty. Whereas, the monument is very meaningful as the commemoration site of the Indonesian Revolution or the 1945-1949 independence struggle. The citizens suggested that many illegal lands were taken by street vendors for their business purpose. It made Banjarsari Park dirty, messy, unpleasant, and crime-prone. It also led to traffic jam. They asked Jokowi and local government to relocate the street vendors as quickly as possible. They were eager to wait for the new mayor's moves and would support the relocation to be conducted immediately.

Furthermore, there were four data using question approach in their messages to Jokowi as the new mayor. They asked directly whether Jokowi could relocate Banjarsari vendors bravely or not. "Do you have any courage to relocate vendors at Banjarsari?" they asked. Regarding this question, we know that a year later, or on July 23, 2006, the relocation of street vendors at Banjarsari Park was actually conducted. It can be done although the relocation policy was a hot button issue in Surakarta. The relocation was then known as peaceful relocation [14]. Relocation of street vendors at Banjarsari is one of phenomenal relocations as it became the biggest relocation in Indonesia at that time. Even the relocation process itself was marked by an attractive and festive cultural parade. It led the city to obtain an award from the Indonesia World Records Museum (MURI). Additionally, from the data existing, citizens also expected that Banjarsari Park can be restored as a public space and the lung of the city.

Conclusion

The results of the research showed that most public perceptions of the street vendors were unfavorable (negative). They viewed the presence of the street vendors in the city as a crucial and serious problem to solve. The citizens urged the new major and local government of Surakarta to take all necessary actions on street vendors in order to make Surakarta a better city. All public perceptions submitted by Surakarta citizens in *Kriing Solopos* column were very interesting as it can provide opinions on the street vendors in the city. It can serve as a means of monitoring for the local government as it provides information on what people think and what people want related to the existence of street vendors in the city. The information is important sources and materials for the local government to run and formulate the proper public policy, particularly, to overcome the street vendor issues. The research has affirmed that public perception in the media can convince the local government to take specific actions and make policies in order to address local public needs and problems [15][16][17]. To summarize, public perception is one of important supports for the Surakarta local government to implement the street vendor management policy, including the relocation of the street vendors from Banjarsari Park, in the near future.

References

- [1] Pisani, E. (2014). Indonesia in Pieces: The Downside of Decentralization. *Foreign Affairs*, 93(4), 42-152.
- [2] Migdal, J. S. (1988). *Strong Societies and Weak States*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- [3] Osborne, D., & Gaebler, T. (1992). *Reinventing Government*. Reading: Addison Wesley.
- [4] Eklöf, S. (1999). *Indonesian Politics in Crisis: The Long Fall of Suharto 1996-1998*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.
- [5] Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice*. London: Sage Publications.
- [6] Elo, S., Kääriäinen, M., Kanste, O., Pölkki, T., Utriainen, K., & Kyngäs, H. (2014). Qualitative Content Analysis: A Focus on Trustworthiness. *SAGE Open*, 4, 1-10.
- [7] Bernard, H. R., & Ryan, G. W. (2010). *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- [8] Luthfia, A. R., Sudarwanto, A. S., & Alkhajar, E. N. S. (2020). The Dynamic of the Incineration Waste-to-Energy Power Plant Policy in Indonesia. *AIP Conference Proceedings*, 2217, 030172.
- [9] Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1986). *Communication and Persuasion Central and Peripheral Routes to Attitude Change*. New York: Springer.
- [10] Perloff, R. M. (2003). *The Dynamics of Persuasion: Communication and Attitudes in the 21st Century*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- [11] Pateman, C. (1970). *Participation and Democratic Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [12] Alkhajar, E. N. S. (2014). *Media, Masyarakat dan Realitas Sosial*. Surakarta: Sebelas Maret University Press.
- [13] Trancik, R. (1986). *Finding Lost Space*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- [14] Majeed, R. (2012). *Defusing Volatile City, Igniting Reforms: Joko Widodo and Surakarta, Indonesia, 2005-2011. Innovations for Successful Societies*, Princeton University.
- [15] Jann, W., & Wegrich, K. (2007). Theories of Policy Cycle. In F. Fischer, G. J. Miller & M. S. Sidney (Eds.), *Handbook of Public Policy Analysis: Theory, Politics and Methods* (pp. 43-62). London: CRC Press.
- [16] May, J. V., & Wildavsky, A. (1978). *The Policy Cycle*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- [17] Brown, R. (2010). The Media and the Policy Process: A Policy Centric Approach. In S. K.-Baumgarten & K. Voltmer (Eds.), *Public Policy and the Mass Media* (pp. 127-142). London: Routledge.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).