Widow Stereotypes in the Online News Media

Dwi Ajeng Widarini

Universiti Malaysia Terengganu & Universitas Prof. Dr. Moestopo (Beragama)

A B S T R A C T

This paper will focus on news on dream.co.id and tribunnews.com, which contain the keyword "widow", for the period June 2023. This research aims to reveal the construction of reality in news stories about widows in online media. By using Sara Mills' critical analysis, which emphasizes two aspects, namely the position of the subject-object and the position of the reader, The method used in this research is qualitative, which is descriptive in nature. Women are often in the news with a gender construct. The clickbait-based news search system contributes to the perpetuation of stereotypes against widows in online media. These stereotypes portray widows as sensual, helpless objects who are in need of pity and are easily deceived by men, primarily because they are unable to engage in self-reflection.

Keywords:
Widow, Stereotype, Online Media, News

1.   INTRODUCTION

June 23 is celebrated as International Widows' Day, a commemoration initiated in 2011 to alleviate poverty and injustice faced by widows around the world. According to the United Nations, widows describe widowhoods as "Invisible Women, Invisible Problems'' because widows have historically been left unseen, unsupported, and unmeasured in our societies (Nations, n.d.). Patriarchal societies ignore widows' rights by placing restrictions on widows' rights. A widow, according to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), is a woman who is no longer married because of divorce or because her husband died and has not been a man (Kamus *Besar Bahasa Indonesia*, n.d.). The neglect of widows' rights and limited access to them are issues that should concern the government and society. We often experience stereotypes, including in the news and online media.

The role of online media as a medium of information, education, entertainment, and social control plays an important role in shaping public opinion. This is also based on data on the development of online media in Indonesia and the number of online media consumers. Since the reformation in 1998, various media outlets have emerged in Indonesia, including the growth of online media. According to data from the Press Council, there are 1,773 verified media companies as of May 2023, with 926 of them being digital media outlets (Press Council, n.d.). Based on the Digital News Report 2022, online media and social media have become one of the primary sources of information for the Indonesian public (Newman et al., 2022). The increasing internet connectivity in Indonesia and the ease of accessing information have made online media a means of fulfilling the information needs of the public. News portals are websites that feature news articles and content from various sources, which are then presented to users. If users are interested, they can be directed to the original source. Due to the increasing internet network in

Indonesia and the ease of access to information, making online media a means for fulfilling public information (Pahlevi, 2022)

As a means to reflect on events that occur in society, the media presents the realities they capture and displays them in the media. As quoted by Ekron (2011) from McQuail (2005):

As a mirror of events in society and the world, implying a faithful reflection (albeit with inversion and possible distortion of the image), although the angle and direction of the mirror are decided by others and we are less free to see what we want (Ekron, 2011).

Online media is reference material that reflects on events that occur in society. Partiality towards women, especially widows, can be carried out by editors and journalists who carry out activities to find, obtain, possess, store, process, and convey information. Many media outlets reflect the point of view of a patriarchal society, viewing women as helpless figures who cannot survive and are objectified, viewed from the point of appearance only. Indications of efforts to exploit women in the news in online media can be seen in news topics, diction, angles, sensationalism, and SEO-friendly titles or clickbait.

According to Bradshaw (2008), there are five basic principles of online journalism, abbreviated as BASIC, which stands for brevity, adaptability, scanability, interactivity, and community. Brevity emphasizes the need for concise writing, avoiding unnecessary length and verbosity. Ideally, longer texts should be condensed into shorter ones to facilitate quick reading and understanding. The common phrase used is "Keep It Short and Simple" (KISS). Adaptability requires journalists to present news using diverse methods, such as text, images, videos, or audio formats, tailored to the needs of the audience. Given that the majority of users specifically search for information and scan web pages, scanability refers to how easily users can scan journalism websites. Readers look for key information, subheadings, links, etc., to navigate the text without having to spend a long time staring at the screen. Therefore, the selection of news headlines is crucial in attracting readers' interest, especially the first two words of the title. Interactivity allows readers to provide feedback or engage in conversations on news websites. Community and conversation highlight the active engagement of online media readers, as they can communicate with media outlets or journalists by writing comments in the comment section.

2. METHOD

The ability to create news with titles that can attract the attention of readers has long been a skill that must be possessed by journalists with technological developments; this is called clickbait. With an interesting title, readers will be interested in clicking on the news. One of them is the use of the keyword widow in the headlines of news on dream.co.id and Tribun.com in June 2023. This research will focus on the construction of reality discourse about widows in the news in online media. This paper uses descriptive qualitative methodology using Sara Mills' discourse analysis, which focuses on the subject-object position and the position of the writer and reader. Data in the form of news containing the word "widow" in Dream.co.id and Tribun.com headlines in June 2023.

Sara Mills focuses her attention on the discourse on feminism: how women are presented in text, whether in novels, drawings, photographs, or the news. The point of concern from the perspective of feminist discourse is to show how texts are biased in presenting women (Eriyanto, 2009).

Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis looks more at how actors' positions are displayed in the text. Mills emphasizes how the positions of the various social actors, ideas, or events are placed in the text. Every actor essentially has the same opportunity to portray himself, his actions, and how he perceives or judges the world. He has the possibility of being a subject of himself, telling himself, and having the possibility of portraying the world according to his perceptions and opinions.

However, some are merely objects; not only can they not present themselves in news texts, but their presence and representation are also presented and displayed by other actors. 1) Subject-object position emphasizes how the positions of various social actors, ideas, or events are placed in the text. These positions ultimately determine the form of the text presented in front of the audience. He has the possibility of being a subject of himself, telling himself, and having the possibility of portraying the world according to his perceptions and opinions. Position means who is the actor, who is the subject, who defines and performs the storytelling, and who is shown as an object, the party who is defined and describes the presence of others. An analysis of how these positions are widely presented will reveal how dominant ideological and belief positions are in the text. The position as a subject or object in this representation contains a certain ideology. 2) In the writer-reader position, Mills considers text to be the result of negotiation between writer and reader. Therefore, the reader here is not considered merely the party who only receives the text but also participates in the transaction, as will be seen in the text.

According to Sunarsih (2020), there are six most common framings of widow news in Indonesia: first, widows are actors of immoral acts; second, widows always need men; third, widow statistics are positioned significantly; fourth, widows become actors who are favored; fifth, a widow becomes an empowered actor; and sixth, a widow is the character's wife. In conducting this analysis, the writer will use this framing to see the stereotypes that exist in the news.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Dream.co.id, a Muslim lifestyle site that has been operating since April 2014, has a media positioning that presents inspirational stories for Muslim women as its target readers. Dream.co.id is owned by the Kapanlagi Youniverse media networks. Meanwhile, according to the Digital News Report, Tribunews.com is the online media that has the slogan "Indonesian latest news". Tribunnews.com, which is owned by the Kompas Gramedia Media networks, occupies the top ranking consumed by the Indonesian people. In this paper, there are five news articles containing the keyword "janda" (widow) in the news articles on Dream.co.id and twelve news articles on Tribunnews.com.

The Indonesian press is closely linked to a media oligarchy, in addition to an authoritarian press system. According to Winters (2013), Indonesia's media is currently free from state intimidation. Furthermore, these entities are corporate in nature and controlled by powerful oligarchs. The media oligopoly in Indonesia affects the presentation of news in the mainstream media, including the portrayal of gender equality. The media, as a societal reflection, ideally empowers the public. However, the media's political economy prioritizes profit generation for capital owners.

This leads to the marginalization of gender equality issues. The media industry, which involves significant labor and capital investments in content production and distribution, prioritizes economic value. Vincent Mosco's concepts of commodification, spatialization, and structuration are integral to the sale of news as a product. Commodification encompasses three categories: the commodification of media content disseminated to audiences, the commodification of audiences through ratings for advertising acquisition, and the commodification of workers employed by media owners. Spatialization employs information technology to distribute media products to audiences without temporal constraints. Structuring

emphasizes social structuration, particularly in establishing links between political economy and social categories such as social class, gender, and race (as cited by Subandi & Sadono, 2018).

The media industry in Indonesia is driven by political economic interests in media ownership, which serves as a capital machine that confers economic benefits and power to the media oligarchy. During political seasons, the media serves as a battleground between media authorities who aim to maintain the economic and political status quo and the press's idealism in prioritizing the public interest. Media ownership has become increasingly concentrated among a small number of conglomerates. These conglomerates hold significant ownership, control, or interest in both media and non-media entities. This text discusses several issues related to media, including the impact of concentration and conglomeration on public space and information control, the effects of news and journalism on entertainment and populism, and the shift from audiences as citizens to audiences as consumers. Issues of unequal access to media content and technology, as well as the political and economic power of those who control media empires, are significant concerns.

3.1 Subject-Object Position

The analysis, using Sara Mills' discourse analysis, emphasizes how the actor's position is displayed in the text. Who will be the subject who tells the story, and who will be the object that is told? Second, how the reader is positioned in the text is based on the author's storytelling style.

Five news stories were recorded from Dream.co.id and twelve from Tribun.com, which has a media network in almost all provinces in Indonesia. Of the seventeen news stories, the most dominant subject was women, but journalists' observations in narrating events experienced by women and forming reality constructions based on stereotypes that exist in patriarchal cultures related to widows that can attract younger men, such as in the news story **"26-Year-Old Young Man Thrives with a 52-Year-Old Widow, Giving Her an Allowance of 316 Million Rupiah, as Long as She's by His Side"** and **"Wenny Ariani Turns Out to Be a Former Wealthy Widow, Her Early Relationship with Rezky Aditya When Buying a House"** and **"Ayu Ting Ting Still Content Being Alone and Isn't Rushing to Shed Her Widow Status, Despite Being Asked to Marry Again"**. In these three stories, widows become labels pinned on female figures to be objectified and focus on how they relate to men, even though the woman is an empowered figure.

In the news, "widow" becomes an objectification that perpetuates the stereotype of female sensuality, which assesses only the female body and sensuality as commodities that have attractiveness to be worth selling, as in the headline of **"Village Widow with Capital City's Celebrity Beauty, Sexy Body, and Curled Eyelashes, Turns Out to Be Married Three Times"**, **"Celine Evangelista Caught Sleeping During Makeup Session, Stefan William's Widow Captured Doing This"**, and **"Beautiful Widow Becomes an Ojol Driver Due to Husband's Imprisonment: Dedi Mulyadi Calls Her House Dirty"**. This shows that sexuality is a best-selling commodity, in line with Baudrillard's assertion that the entire female anatomy is controlled by male lust (Lahdji, 2015). Women's bodies are objectified and controlled to attract readers to click on the story.

"Beautiful Widow Becomes an Ojol Driver Due to Husband's Imprisonment: Dedi Mulyadi Calls Her House Dirty". In this news, the journalist depicts the widow's inability to manage her domestic affairs by quoting a public figure who visited her house, saying, "Why is your house so dirty and messy, Mom?" The focus of the news shifts from highlighting the widow's efforts to support her family to her domestic skills.

Additionally, the article compares her to other women by including a quote from a male actor who says, "No, I met someone who is also an online driver in West Bandung, and her house is very tidy." Women in a patriarchal society are expected to be skilled in domestic matters, even if they succeed in public affairs. However, this does not serve as an indicator of being a "perfect" woman in the patriarchal societal construct. This news becomes a platform for competition among women in managing the kitchen, bed, and well. The journalist described the widow's inability to take care of her domestic sphere, giving a quote from a public figure who visited her home "Why you are so slovenly, your house is a mess?"

The focus of the news shifted from how the business done by the widow to support her family became unskilled in the domestic sphere. In addition, the object in this news is also compared with other women by including quotes from male actors "Oh no, I met a person who became *ojek* driver in West Bandung and her house was really neat even though they were both working." Women in the patriarchal realm are expected to be skilled in the domestic sphere even though they succeed in the public sphere but it is not an indicator of being a "perfect" woman in the construction of a patriarchal society.

The subjects in the news articles related to widows are mostly men, as seen in the article **"Seeking Love on Tantan App, Love-Struck Widow from Cibinong Gets Deceived by a Man in Bekasi, Losing Her Phone**." In this news, women become objects narrated by journalists as "love-struck" or blindly in love, resulting in them being deceived by men. Meanwhile, the eyewitnesses become the sources in this news, depicting widows as individuals lacking common sense and power. The women in these news articles, with the label "widow" in the titles, are not portrayed as subjects capable of representing themselves but are represented by third parties in the news narrative. This perpetuates the stereotype that widowed women are culturally and socially constructed as individuals who cannot speak up or express themselves.

In the article **"Village Widow with Capital City's Celebrity Beauty, Sexy Body, and Curled Eyelashes, Turns Out to Be Married Three Times**," written by a female journalist, women are still treated as objects in the news, worthy of being sold with a sensual appearance. In the supporting narrative of the photo, the journalist writes:

> The emergence of a beautiful woman has once again stirred up the online world. This Sundanese woman's beauty surpasses even that of capital city celebrities. Her name is Nelis. Nelis is very popular in the village. Her beautiful face, clear skin, attractive body, and curly eyelashes make many men idolize her. She appears to be a girl with a captivating figure. But little did people know, Nelis is a widow. Nevertheless, her appearance has the ability to mesmerize the men who see her.

Based on an analysis of the seventeen news articles, widowed still remain objects in the news articles. In the framing of news articles in June on Dream.co.id and Tribun.com, widow-related news is dominated by themes such as widows always needing men, involvement in scandalous acts, being crime victims, or being in need of assistance. Only one news article highlights the limited access for widows to public services regarding their land disputes. The article titled **"Pity for the Widow who Teaches Quran but Still Struggles with Land Documents in Deli Serdang"** narrates the events experienced by the widow through the voices of journalists and government officials, while the victim, is placed at the end of the news article expressing her powerlessness. In the news, the term "widow" is used as a pronoun instead of mentioning the person's name. Male journalists tend to prefer using the term "widow" rather than writing the person's name.

Gender equality can be promoted by presenting unbiased news that avoids discrimination, sexism, and marginalisation of women. The media's portrayal of gender roles can shape societal norms and create gender imbalances. Media can promote gender equality through policies and

human resources in the editorial department (Sofyan et al., 2017). The media shapes societal perceptions of gender roles by providing a platform for socialization (Gadzekpo, 2016).

Newsrooms and journalists can promote women's advocacy and empowerment by engaging in information-related activities, including searching, acquiring, possessing, storing, processing, and delivering information. Journalists with expertise in information processing can act as change agents by providing gender-inclusive information. Gender equality in media can be attained by enabling women to participate in news coverage across various domains such as politics, law, economy, socio-cultural issues, health, education, and defense and security not just for commodification for upselling the media outlets.

3.2 Position of the Reader

According to Hall, there are three forms of relationships between the writer and the reader: dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. In this news article, the position of the reader is dominant. Readers are only provided with data based on the journalist's observations of the events that occurred. Some articles, such as **"Village Widow with Capital City's Celebrity Beauty, Sexy Body, and Curled Eyelashes, Turns Out to Be Married Three Times,"** are interpretations by journalists based on photos posted on social media without going through a data verification process. This dominance occurs because, based on the social reality in society, women's voices and ideas are limited. Readers are led to agree that women's voices can be represented by others. In this discourse, there are several cultural codes used by readers in interpreting texts in online media. The figure of the widow becomes a commodity because her sensuality, voicelessness, double burden, and vulnerability to crime are considered the consensus between writers and readers in seeing the figure of the widows in the news media.

Discussion

Media is a changing and growing industry that creates jobs, goods, and services, as well as animating other related industries. On the one hand, media is a separate industry that has rules and norms for society and other industries. On the other hand, media institutions are governed by the public. Mass media is a source of strength, control, management, and innovation in society that is used as a substitute for natural forces and other resources. Media often serves as a vehicle for cultural development, not only in the sense of the development of art forms and symbols but also in the sense of the development of ordinances, fashion, lifestyle, and norms. Media has become the dominant source, not only for individuals, to acquire a picture and image of social reality, but also for families and society collectively. The media presents normative values and judgments blended with news and entertainment.

People can use it as access to self-development and culture. The concept of gender awareness is an innovation that can be used as a news story and channeled through the mass media. Gender is a construction that can be changed and shaped through news. Gender equality can be promoted by presenting unbiased news that avoids discrimination, sexism, and marginalization of women. The media's portrayal of gender roles can shape societal norms and create gender imbalances.

Newsrooms and journalists can promote women's advocacy and empowerment by engaging in information-related activities, including searching, acquiring, possessing, storing, processing, and delivering information. Journalists with expertise in information processing can act as change agents by providing gender-inclusive information. Gender equality in media can be attained by enabling women to participate in news coverage across various sectors such as politics, law, economy, socio-cultural issues, health, education, and defense and security. The term "Widows" in online news can be presented by prioritizing the principle of gender equality, not discriminating, and emphasizing their rights as citizens which must be protected in every aspect.

4. CONCLUSION

The term "widow" becomes an attraction for online media to create SEO-friendly and clickbait titles. In the digital era, catchy titles are a strategy to present news content to the public, turning the word "widow" in news titles into a commodity. The term "widow" embedded in news titles reinforces gender bias and perpetuates stereotypes of widowed women as sensual, powerless, and ***easily deceived by men, primarily because they are unable to engage in self-reflection.***

The news is provided with the journalists' perspective on gender equality in mind, which is important knowledge to have when creating news that supports gender equality. The journalistic process of observing, seeking, writing, verifying, and disseminating information at the individual level is significant. The media's decisions regarding sources, issues, and news framing strengthen their ability to package information. Newsrooms with knowledge of gender-sensitive journalism practices can be one solution for writing news articles and titles that do not create stigma in society. Their knowledge about gender sensitivity is a basic knowledge of their journalism skills. Media organizations also should strive to promote gender equality by giving a sensitive gender journalism workshop for their journalists to increase gender equality in their mass media and becoming agents of change to empower women especially a widow and other marginal persons.

5. REFERENCES

Books

Eriyanto. (2009). *Analisis Wacana: Pengantar Analisis Teks Media* (pp. 200). PT. Lkis Printing Cemerlang.

Sofyan, Q. A., Mahmud, F., Mau, M., & Arsyad, N. (2017). *Panduan Jurnalis Berperspektif Perempuan dan Anak* (R. Hardiansya, L. Palulungan, & G. H. K. K, Eds.). Yayasan Bakti

Articles in Internet Journals and other periodicals

Bradshaw, P. (2008). *Writing /producing for the web: BASIC principles of online journalism*. https://onlinejournalismblog.com/tag/basic-principles/

Dewan Pers. *Data Perusahaan Pers.* https://dewanpers.or.id/data/perusahaanpers. (accessed July.08, 2023)

Gadzekpo, A. (2016). Media and Gender Socialization. In *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies* (pp. 1–5). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118663219.wbegss213

Janet Steele.(2023) *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023*. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2023/dnr-executive-summary . Retrieved July. 8, 2023

Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia. https://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id/entri/JANDA . Retrieved July.07, 2023.

Nic Newman, Fletcher R.(2022). "Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022" pp.136.*2022*

Winters, J. A. (2013). Oligarchy and Democracy in Indonesia. *Indonesia*, *96*, 11. https://doi.org/10.5728/indonesia.96.0099

Reza Pahlevi.(2023) *"Ini Media Online Paling Banyak-dikonsumsi Warga Indonesia"*. Databoks. https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2022/06/16/ini-media-online-paling-banyak-dikonsumsi-warga-indonesia#:~:text=Detikcom%20menjadi%20media%20daring%20dengan,CNN%20Indonesia%20dengan%20persentase%2035%25. 2022. (accessed July. 08, 2023).

Sunarsih. Stigma Janda Dalam Berita Media Daring di Masa Pandemi Covid-19. *Sintesis*, *14*(2).pp. 131-137. 2020

Rima Firdaus Lhadji.(2015). Objektifikasi Perempuan dan Tubuh: Wacana Tubuh Perempuan dalam Lirik Lagu Dangdut Populer Tahun 2000-2012. *Lakon*, *4*(1), 103–130. 2015 DOI:10.20473/lakon.v4i1.1938

Subandi, Z. E. S., & Sadono, T. P. (2018). Komodifikasi, Spasialisasi, Dan Strukturasi Dalam Media Baru di Indonesia. *National Conference of Creative Industry: Sustainable Tourism Industry for Economic Development*, 821–842.

United Nations. *"Invisible Women, Invisible Problems"*. https://www.un.org/en/observances/widows-day (accessed July. 07, 2023).

Zigi Ekron.(2011). A critical and functional analysis of the mirror metaphor with reference to the media's responsibility towards society. *Global Media Journal African Edition*, *2*(1). https://doi.org/10.5789/2-1-36