

Digital Innovation of RRI Pekanbaru as an Effort to Sustain Digital Journalism in the Era of Media Convergence

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Abstract

Radio broadcasting institutions have been faced with digital innovation as a significant requirement in view of the continued shrinkage of radio traffic and transformation in the information-consumption behaviors of people in the period of media convergence. This paper will look at the digital innovation policies by Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) Pekanbaru in its quest to continue existing as a government-owned broadcasting station. The given study is based on descriptive qualitative approach and the collection method is in the form of in-depth interviews, observation and documentation. Data analysis was done through the application of the theory of Diffusion of Innovations developed by Everett Rogers to comprehend the process of innovation adoption that consists of characteristics of innovations, communication channels, time span and response of the audience. The findings indicate that RRI Pekanbaru introduces digital innovation in small steps based on the implementation of the RRI Digital application, creating multiplatform content, and using social media. These innovations are deemed to possess relative benefits and alignment with the needs of the audience, in such a way that they could be gradually accepted by the listeners. According to the analysis, digital innovation is not only a technological adaptation but also a communication approach that enhances the credibility and sustainability of the institution in the competition of the digital media.

Keywords: digital innovation, RRI Pekanbaru, digital journalism, media convergence, sustainability

INTRODUCTION

One of the oldest mass communication media is the radio which uses sound waves with the modulation systems and is considered as the *fifth estate* behind the executive, legislative, judicial and the press institutions. Radio can create a personal contact with listeners due to the vocal features and speaking style, the music to play (Romli, 2010). Nevertheless, the emergence of the digital world and the active expansion of information platforms has resulted in a vast change in the consumption patterns of the public media.

As shown in a survey by Ipsos and UNESCO (Annur, 2023), the largest percentage of hoaxes is spread via social media (68%), whereas radio offers only 4% in terms of the extent of hoaxes spread, the least. This state ought to be used as a chance that radio can reclaim its position as a credible and healthy source of information in the mass media. However, in the digital age, radio is being significantly threatened by the shift in the behavior of people, as more people resort to use of online media. According to the statistics provided by the Central Statistics Agency (Badan Pusat Statistik), the proportion of the population using the radio during a week is only 13.31%, which is a downward trend in terms of the interest of people in the radio usage (Kusnandar, 2019).

The fact that several large stations, including BBC Indonesia (Hakim, 2022) and the Trax FM Jakarta (PRSSNI, 2022), are not broadcasting anymore is a good indicator of the change in the broadcasting ecology that no longer suits commercial radio media. At the local level, this situation is also indicated in Pekanbaru, where the number of licensed private radio stations is still dropping (KPID Riau, 2023). Ideally, the radio must be a cultural initiator and a custodian to local wisdom. Nevertheless, the changes in the broadcasting ecosystem be it in technology, regulation, or the behavior of the audience have come to be the major determinants of the deteriorating presence of radio (Setiawan et al., 2023).

Besides the external factors, the slow transition of radio to the digital platform has contributed a significant reason to its declining relevance. Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI), in turn, began to go digital by launching the RRI PlayGo application in 2013 which today has developed into RRI Digital (Yuda, 2023). This project will become a flexible move by the national state-owned TV to address the age of media convergence.

Based on this background, this study will concentrate on the digital advances that RRI Pekanbaru has made to ensure its survival in the face of changing digital media. Another objective of this research is to analyze the technological adaptation and reaction of audiences to the process of digitalization as a sustainability factor of radio media in the new period.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Inovation

Innovation refers to a process of developing and generating new ideas that lead to a better product, service or a system than the one that has been in existence before. Nasution and Kartajaya (2018) suggest that innovation is directly connected to the needs and desires of the consumers that are the basis of the product development. In a study by Suhaeni (2018), Thornhill states that innovation is a result of a creative process whose focus is on commercialization and application of new ideas to create a major change. Roberts identifies two categories of innovation radical innovation brought

about by technology and incremental innovation whereby improvement is made to the products that are in existence.

Hittmar reiterates that innovation is an organizational strategy that helps it to adapt to changes in the environment. Visionary leadership, engagement of the human resources, and proper infrastructural support determine the success of the innovation (Zahra, 2019). Quinn also adds that innovation should be market-focused, add value, and sustainable so as to be relevant in the shifting era.

Media organizations are also dependent on the aspect of innovation in order to remain competitive. The media organizations would be left irrelevant and without trust among people without innovation. According to Nallalingham (2023), Apple serves as an example of the type of company that managed to continue its operations by constant innovations, focus on design, creative thinking, and consumer demands. During RRI, innovation acts as a basic point of technological and broadcast material refresh in the quest to be relevant in the fast changing digital media.

Digitalization

Digitalization is the conversion of the old systems to digital systems to improve their efficiency and accessibility. Suparyanto and Rosad (2020) argue that the application of information technology to transform human activities into digital forms is an important step that involves the process of digitalization. The word *digital* comes out of a Greek word *digitus*, which translates to finger, and is today applied to refer to the binary number system of 0 and 1 that is the building block of modern technology.

The concept of the digital economy as discussed by Tapscott (1995) in the book *The Digital Economy* reveals that digital economy is defined in four key aspects of digitalization, networking, innovation, and globalization. Digitalization provides a faster, interactive, and cross-border information distribution process and stimulates the appearance of new models of communication in the media environment. Musnaini et al. (2020) state that the process of building the digital economy has changed the patterns of work in organizations fundamentally because technology has become the core of production and communication processes.

Digitalization in broadcasting is a great opportunity to the media channels like radio to reach a wider audience. There are however challenges that also accompany this change especially the requirement of technologically literate human resource that is flexible to change. Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) is among the institutions that have made tangible efforts to go digital by introducing RRI PlayGo application in 2013, which was subsequently developed into RRI Digital. This is an attempt to show that RRI is trying to adjust to a new media ecosystem that is becoming progressively interconnected due to the use of technology.

Existence

The term *existence* originates from the Latin word *existere*, meaning “to emerge” or “to stand out,” which is an actual and accepted presence (Afkhai, 2018). Existence in the social context entails a being that possesses worth and power in the society. According to Kierkegaard as cited in Afkhai (2018), existence is the state of human cognition of being, and it is a continuous process of self-actualization. Life is not a constant position but a dynamic state which may either develop or decline as an entity adapts to its surrounding.

Life is not physical existence but a social existence and acknowledgment of the existence of something and its benefits. In terms of the media, existence is an issue surrounding how well an institution is able to maintain its role, influence as well as relevance in the face of technological change. Afkhai (2018) highlights that social recognition is an important factor that determines the presence of an institution or a person.

In the case of a broadcasting organization like RRI, existence means its capacity to be recognized as a reputable and influential public media organization despite the changes in audience behavior and changes in technology. To sustain this life, RRI has to keep on advancing with innovations in its broadcasting structures, content creation and adapting to digital technology to ensure that it does not miss out of the modern society.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory

The Diffusion of Innovation Theory suggested by Everett M. Rogers is the mechanism according to which the ideas, products, or technologies are spread across the communication channels with time among the members of a social system (Singer, 2016). According to Rogers as cited in Syasdawati and Bachtiar (2022), brand diffusion refers to a communication process whereby an innovation transits through various stages before it is either adopted or rejected by the society. This step involves five steps, namely, knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation.

Rogers (2003) also puts people into five classes of innovation adopters which include innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards. Moreover, innovation has five main attributes, which can affect the adoption rates, including relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. Through this theory, it is clear that the diffusion of innovation is not only a technical process but also a social process because it mainly depends on cultural setting and social willingness to adopt change in order to achieve success.

This theory is applied to the process of introducing and implementing digital innovations in the internal environment of RRI and potential audiences in the context of media organizations. The implementation of the RRI Digital application can be perceived as an application of the theory of diffusion of innovation, when the effectiveness of technological transfer is related to

communication policies, the utilization of social media, and the credibility of the audience in the television and radio companies. Thus, the dynamics of how people accept the new technologies during the digital era can be analyzed using the diffusion of innovation theory.

METHODOLOGY

The kind of qualitative research method used in this study is descriptive. This study will be conducted to gain insights into the digital innovation practices in Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) Pekanbaru to stay afloat in the digital age. As stated by Moleong (2019), descriptive qualitative research aims to capture the stock of social phenomena in comprehensive and holistic form in the form of words, actions, and observed documents, but not through statistical analysis and numerical data.

The team members of this research will consist of the employees of RRI Pekanbaru that are directly engaged into the digital transformation process, such as the Station Head, the Programming Division, the Technical Division, and the Digital Media Team. In this research, purposive sampling is the sampling method that is utilized, which is a sampling technique that is considered on some considerations depending on the objectives of the research. Purposive sampling is a non-randomised sampling method, which is not supported by geographical locations, stratification, or randomness of populations but on certain considerations in line with specific objectives that the researcher has (Lenaini, 2021).

The methodological approaches that will be used in collecting data in this study are non-participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and documents. The observation will be implemented to personally study operational activities and digital innovation practice in the RRI Pekanbaru setting. The semi-structured interviews are conducted to receive in-depth information about the process of digital transformation implementation, whereas documentation is implemented to receive the supporting data in the form of institutional archives, internal reports, and other publications on the topic.

This study will analyze data using the model developed by Miles and Huberman (2014) and has three primary steps, including the reduction stage, display stage, and drawing the conclusion stage. Data reduction entails the selection of data and simplification of data that is pertinent to research subject. The data is displayed in narrative form whereby it is described in a form of narrative to aid comprehension and conclusions are made based on the outcome of the interviews, observations and documentation. The researcher uses the source and method triangulation to ensure the validity of the data the source of the information is compared to the field observations and documentation to ascertain the validity of the findings.

Table 1. Research Subjects

No.	Informant Name	Position
1	Mintarsih, AMD	Associate Expert Broadcasting Officer
2	Sukirno, SE	Associate Expert Broadcasting Technician
3	Deswati, SE	Junior Expert Public Relations Officer
4	Ir. Pitrayani	Associate Expert Broadcasting Officer

Source: Researcher's Data, 2023

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the outcome of the interviews and observations carried out, the research findings and discussion also refer to resolution of the research problems that are linked to the data presentation, implications discussion, interpretation and emerging findings.

The research was carried out among four informants who have specialized and build experience relating to radio broadcasting, specifically, Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI). The questions asked by the researcher were based on the indicators of the Diffusion of Innovation Theory by Everett Rogers and it was anticipated that the questions would give a comprehensive explanation of the digital innovation process adopted by RRI.

INNOVATION

The Emergence of RRI's Digital Innovation

The first stage of the digital innovation of RRI arose due to the realization that radio media should adjust to the altered consumption behavior patterns of people in the media, which are more and more inclined to the digital sphere. According to an interview with the Head of RRI Pekanbaru Station the concept of digitalization started being developed in 2013, when RRI introduced the RRI PlayGo application as one of the initial steps to the transformation to the use of the internet as the source of broadcasting. The app offered the streaming broadcasts and recorded material that could be viewed by the audiences at any time.

As technology advanced and the demand of the audience toward speed and flexibility of accessing the information grew, RRI already improved the platform to RRI Digital in 2023. This did not only come in the form of

technological upgrade but also in the form of enhanced broadcasting systems, content management and the audience interaction models. An informant working in the Programming Division says that the digital change was introduced in order to make sure that RRI would have been a relevant and competitive public media organization even in the era of dominance of online platforms like YouTube, Spotify, and other streaming media.

Training of human resources, acquisition of digital broadcasting equipment and creation of an exclusive media team to produce internet-based content also helped in the innovation process. One of the informants in the technical division described that RRI innovation was not only in the application itself but also in the transmission systems and more efficient integration of broadcast data. In this way, the digital initiative of RRI can be interpreted as the strategic adjustment, which could guarantee the survival of an institution of public broadcasting in the times of the accelerated information technology advances.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Forms of Innovation Utilized by RRI

In maintaining its existence, RRI Pekanbaru makes use of different integrated digital communication mediums. The communication innovation forms are application-based broadcasting via RRI Digital, reinforcing social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Tik Tok as well as the use of official site as a news publication platform and audio archives. As per the data provided by the digital media team, the channels are used to play a different role and complement each other to increase the reach to the audience and increase the two-way communication with the population.

The example of YouTube is a channel through which programs of a visual character are aired, and younger audiences that are more used to audiovisual stimuli are reached. In the meantime, Instagram and Tik Tok are used to create emotional proximity using light and entertaining content like broadcast highlights, activities of broadcasters, and informative messages. During interviews, one of the broadcasters said that RRI does so by approaching people personally, using social media to retain listeners, as well as attracting new ones.

These online sources of communication also play a critical role in enhancing the image of RRI as a progressive and innovative public broadcasting organization. The multiplatform strategy will enable the audience to not just get information but also join the digital community of RRI. The first one is the direct contact between a broadcaster and a listener in comment boxes or live broadcasts which indicate that RRI has already managed to locate itself in the more interactive and dynamic communication environment than the traditional models of broadcasting.

TIME FRAME

Decision-Making Process Since the Initial Release of RRI's Innovation

The digital transformation of RRI has been carried out rather gradually and over a long period of time. According to interviews with the management, the innovation process started in the early 2010s with the creation of the network infrastructure and human resource training, the RRI PlayGo application was developed in 2013, and it was rebranded as RRI Digital in 2023.

During this time, RRI had constantly been carrying out assessments and technological modernizations. One of the informants in the technical department described that every upgrade in the systems had been done with a consideration of network preparedness, server longevity, and audience demands. These transformations did not only happen on a technical level, but also on managerial and operational fronts, such as the work patterns which became even more focused on the digital content creation and online communication.

The period of innovation implementation is an indicator of how RRI is loyal towards sustainable adaptation as opposed to just being the follower of short-lived trends. According to the Head of RRI Pekanbaru Station, every step of the digitalization process was marked with the decision-making process, where intensive communication between the central and regional offices was maintained to make sure that the innovations implemented corresponded with the circumstances in the country. This proves that the digital transformation of RRI is a long-term continuity process that is geared towards effectiveness.

SOCIAL SYSTEM

Audience Response to RRI's Innovation

The reaction of the audience to the digital innovations that were introduced by RRI Pekanbaru reveals different experiences that are not universal. According to the outcomes of the interviews and social media documentation, the majority of the listeners believe that the existence of the RRI Digital platform ensures the accessibility of the information and broadcasts anytime and everywhere. Such interactive possibilities as the live broadcast, the comment section and the two-way communication using social media are also thought to be capable of enhancing the intimacy between audiences and presenters.

But there are also several limitations and challenges with these digital innovations regarding the adoption process. There are still members of the audience (mainly representing older age groups) who find it hard to listen to the radio using digital applications because of low rates or technological illiteracy, access to the devices, and traditional habits. According to the informants in the Public Service Division, this population is more likely to use

the traditional radio broadcast and their process of adaptation should be more gradual.

To respond to these conditions, RRI Pekanbaru engaged in limited outreach and assistance work by using listener communities to assist audiences to adjust to digital technology. When applied to the social systems, RRI digital innovations have created patterns of interaction that are participatory and which vary with the audience groups. On the one hand, this innovation can draw younger listeners and motivate new interaction, and on the other hand, it still has to work on a continual basis to stay inclusive to the traditional listeners. Therefore, digital innovation is both a chance and a threat to the sustainability of the existence of RRI in the context of media convergence and alteration of communication behavior of people.

CONCLUSION

According to the findings of the research, one can assume that the digital innovations introduced by Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) Pekanbaru are an institutional approach to the alteration in the media environment and dwindling popularity of traditional radio. More than just concentrating on the utilization of digital technology, these innovations are indicators of the organization trying to change with the aims of ensuring the role and existence of RRI in the media convergence age.

On the platform of the Innovation Diffusion Theory created by Everett Rogers, the research results reveal that the digital innovation adoption process at RRI Pekanbaru was gradual and progressive and depended on the nature of the innovation, as well as the social situation of the audience. This is a confirming factor that the degree of acceptance to innovation did not exist even to all listeners groups, but was rather subjected to social factors, habits, and digital literacy levels. These results support the applicability of innovation diffusion theory in describing the process of transformation of the traditional broadcasting media to the digital platforms.

From an evaluative perspective, the digital innovations at RRI Pekanbaru have been effective in reaching more people through broadcasts, improved interactivity and attracting the young people. Nevertheless, several restrictions are also recognized in this study, especially connected with the digital literacy gap and the reluctance of some audience to change something to technology. These circumstances suggest that mentoring strategies and a more inclusive approach are required in such a way that the digital innovation would not marginalize the loyal listeners of traditional radio.

The study has a broader implication in that it does not only mean sustainability of digital journalism in public broadcasting institutions depends on the implementation of digital technology, but it is also determined by how

the institution can manage the innovation diffusion process in an adaptive and sustainable way. Such findings can be used conceptually by other broadcasting institutions in developing digital innovation strategies that address the aspect of technological, social and participation of the audience in the dynamics of media convergence.

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