

Representations of Stunting in Indonesian National Newspaper: Positioning a Culture-Oriented Approach

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Abstract: *The problem of stunting has become a global and national issue, including in Indonesia. Unfortunately, studies regarding media coverage of stunting are still very rarely conducted by media and communication scholars. Using the Social Positioning Theory framework initiated by Har-ré and Langenhove (1999) and developed by Ibrahim (2020), this article analyzes the positioning of stunting issues in the national media Kompas in relation to the perspectives they have developed in their news representations. The news stories selected were news published between 1 October 2022 and 31 March 2023 (6 months), 3 months before and after the kick-off of the 2023 Stunting Case Audit by the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN) on 18 January 2023. Multi-perspective approach is used to analyze data by combining quantitative and qualitative data analysis within a social positioning framework. This article can contribute to studies that consider it important to provide cultural spaces and make diverse voices heard in handling stunting and conclude that the media needs to increase the quantity and quality of reporting about stunting, as well as develop representations and reporting approaches that are culturally oriented and sensitive to values and culture which directly or indirectly influence people's behavior and health.*

Keywords: *culture, representations, social positioning theory, stunting*

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INTRODUCTION

One in four children under the age of five in developing countries has experienced stunting or chronic malnutrition, including in Indonesia. In early 2023, President Joko Widodo emphasized that stunting is still a very big homework. At the opening of the National Work Meeting on the Family Development Program, Population, and Family Planning (Banggakencana) and Stunting Reduction in Jakarta (25/1/2023), Widodo emphasized that stunting in Indonesia is still a huge homework assignment that must be resolved immediately (Tanudjojo, 2023).

In 2014, Indonesia's stunting prevalence rate was 37 percent. In fact, the World Health Organization (WHO) states that health problems in a social group are categorized as chronic if the prevalence of

stunting is more than 20 percent. In 2022, the prevalence of stunting in Indonesia has indeed decreased to 21.16 percent. However, it is still relatively high when referring to WHO standards (De Onis & Branca, 2016). Indonesia is racing to target the prevalence of stunting to be 14 percent by 2024 (National Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction, 2017).

The attention of stakeholders in efforts to reduce stunting rates was constrained when the Covid-19 pandemic hit globally. When the pandemic is gradually decreasing, efforts to deal with stunting are again a crucial issue that is interesting to observe. The impact of stunting is not only a matter of a child's height. However, the most dangerous thing is that it has a negative impact on the child's low potential and ability

to learn and the emergence of chronic diseases which affect the child's physical and psychological health. This should be the concern of all parties because it has become a critical issue for the nation. Therefore, the involvement of stakeholders is urgently needed, including media coverage of the stunting problems (Rosidi, 2022).

Even though the issue of stunting has become a global problem and a national concern, studies on media reporting of stunting are still very rarely conducted by media and communication scholars in Indonesia and even internationally. Some studies report that media is one of the important platforms in national communication campaigns to reduce child stunting in Tanzania (Moffat *et al.*, 2022), or in behavior change interventions to reduce child stunting in Ethiopia (Kim *et al.*, 2019), and national media campaigns increase the prevalence of adequate complementary feeding in Vietnam (Rawat *et al.*, 2017). However, there is no single study that has provided how stunting is represented in the media.

The latest research projects and studies on stunting are still dominant in relation to the health sectors and poverty issues. In fact, based on reading and searching on the Google search engine with the keywords "stunting" and "media reporting," which we conducted on 3 April 2023, we found only less than ten articles in scientific journals, some of which did not discuss stunting in relation to news representations.

Some of the literature that has been published regarding the study of media representations of marginalized groups, which is more recent, shows that the attention of media and communication researchers and academics has been focused on the depictions or representations of reporting on the poor (Ibrahim, 2020) and the representations of disabilities in the media (Johanssen

& Garrisi, 2020). Then, some studies describe how disability and autism groups are represented in mainstream media, visual media, and social media (Ellcessor & Kirkpatrick), as well as the stigma and identity attached to them (Worrell, 2018).

Among the limited writings that show the attention of communication and media researchers to stunting issues, there is a new attempt to examine the challenges of a national communication campaign to reduce stunting in Indonesia (Hall *et al.*, 2018) and Tanzania (Moffat *et al.*, 2022), exposure to media information in relation to behavior change (Kim *et al.*, 2019), reducing the prevalence of stunting in a rural area in Indonesia (Wijayanti & Ayu, 2021), narratives in health communication regarding stunting (Turnip, 2018), and a review of the factors causing stunting in Indonesia (Beal *et al.*, 2016).

According to Mulyana, the world of health is a culture in itself and is influenced by the values and culture of its people, including views about health and illness, which have different meanings among different cultures (Mulyana, 2013; Mulyana, *et al.*, 2020). Health communication and media coverage of health is also influenced by culture, including the knowledge and beliefs of communication participants in a society, especially in a multicultural society (Mulyana, 2008; Kar, Alcalay, & Alex, 2001; MacLachlan, 1997). Culture includes worldviews, beliefs, values, norms and rules, history, mythology, language, art, social institutions, status authority, and artifacts (Ibrahim & Akhmad, 2021). Based on their cultural background and experiences, health care providers and the public actively interact and communicate with their environment to structure their behavior.

The concept of culture is emerging as a topic of key interest in health communication research (Dutta, 2008). The importance of cultural sensitivity

in health communication among diverse populations and culture-based approaches to health communication attract the attention of communication scholars to construct and interpret meaning from within and to hear the voices of the community (Dutta, Anaele, & Jones, 2013; Dutta, 2007; Dutta-Bergman, 2004). Dutta shows the importance of a culture-centered approach to communicating health and the importance of locally situated meanings as a basis for theorizing communication for social change (Dutta, 2022). According to Dutta, to communicate about culture and health, it is important to understand and use a culture-oriented approach, or what he calls a culture-centered approach and a cultural sensitivity approach (Dutta, 2007).

Indeed, there is no doubt about the power of the media in communicating health messages (Ibrahim, 2018; Marinescu & Mitu, 2016; King & Watson (eds.), 2005). However, studies on cultural factors in the representations of health issues are still relatively rare. This study wants to expand the application of a culture-oriented approach to the representations of media reports regarding stunting in Indonesia. This article considers that patterns of media representations in a society depict and help define its culture reinforce dominant cultural values but can also express and stimulate cultural change. Therefore, the media needs to develop culturally sensitive reporting representations to help position the roots of the problem and find solutions to the problem of stunting among the community. The aim is to encourage increased quantity and quality of stunting reporting, and it is hoped that this can serve as a guide for journalists covering health issues so that they are always sensitive to the values and culture that may influence public behavior about health.

For this reason, this article will use the framework of Social Positioning Theory, to explore how the national media *Kompas* positions stunting issues on its news pages in relation to the culture of the community? To what extent does *Kompas* represent stunting in its reporting? What is the perspective of *Kompas*' reporting on stunting issues in Indonesia?

Considering the limitations of studies using a culture-oriented approach in media reporting on health issues, this article has urgency in filling the gaps in research and studies regarding the representations of media reporting in relation to stunting issues, especially encouraging a media reporting culture that supports solving the stunting problems in Indonesia.

METHOD

In order to explore the expected data, this research will follow a multi-perspective research procedure which, according to one of its proponents is useful for interpreting discourse within the framework of Social Positioning Theory (Skillington, 2006: 136). First, a quantitative data analysis procedure is used to calculate the frequency of stunting news. Here, quantitative research methods are, however, not intended to test theories or prove hypotheses. Second, based on data findings, qualitative research procedures were carried out to formulate certain patterns in cultural life (Ibrahim & Akhmad, 2021), including media news representations about stunting that are culturally sensitive (Dutta, 2007).

We read carefully and selected *Kompas* news documents about stunting, specifically in print editions as the research population. In an era of technological disruption when most newspapers and magazines have collapsed or migrated to digital, the print daily *Kompas* has survived with its current format (Siregar, 2023). The limited pages of *Kompas*

daily can be seen as a way of the extent to which this media covers stunting when looking at its commitment to voicing the interests of the public and marginalized groups. This can also be seen in the extent of the consistency of *Kompas*' reporting as a national newspaper in voicing community problems and the position of the mainstream media, which is considered the main reference and most trusted by the public (Ibrahim, 2020).

The research samples were selected from stunting news that was published after the pandemic, between 1 October 2022 - 31 March 2023 (6 months), namely 3 months before and after the kick off of the 2023 Stunting Case Audit by the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN) on 18 January, 2023.

The analytical framework of Social Positioning Theory will be applied to examine how discourse actors or media journalists position stunting issues in the text of media news stories on their media pages. According to Davies and Harré, "Positioning... is a discursive process by which selves are placed in conversation as subjectively coherent and observable participants in co-produced storylines (Davies & Harré, 1990: 48).

Studies using the theoretical framework of social positioning have tended to pay attention to the positioning of agents or subjects in face-to-face communication and the context of identity construction of self and others in discourse acts (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003), in interpersonal conflict analysis (Harré & Moghaddam, 2008), or even in global conflict (Harré & Lee, 2008), or recently on positioning in classroom discourse (Kayi-Aydar & Miller, 2018). This study expands the use of Social Positioning Theory in line with what Schudson (1989) calls a "cultorological approach" to news, which sees news as a cultural form. Media news representation is positioned as an institution that operates

within the cultural realm, or a symbolic system, that applies to shape the news and in relation to the journalists who exercise their rights and duties.

In writing news stories about stunting issues or sufferers, a journalist never conveys a single meaning about stunting but rather many meanings (multiple meanings). For media culture researchers, this is because "News is a network of symbolic systems in which social subjects are positioned by discourse actors (in this case journalists)." (Morley, 1992: 286)

Using the lens of Social Positioning Theory, it can be seen how, as a "discourse actor" or "speaker" in cultural representations, it turns out that there are many possibilities for media news representations by journalists to bring multiple voices to the public debate (Holsanova, 2006). News stories can be placed and represented in different discourses and images. Journalists can also change the language and terminology, the issues or topics raised, the points of view emphasized, or even the moral stance taken (Ibrahim, 2020).

By modifying the theoretical framework pioneered by Harré and Langenhove (1991 & 1999) and developed by Ibrahim (2020), the social positioning carried out by journalists as discourse actors in the representations of stunting news will be analyzed based on first, news positions; analyze news positioning on media pages. The position of a news item on a media page determines the importance of the news to the media. Second, the orientations of the news perspective; analyze social positioning in stunting news, whether the news positioning is related to culture or non-culture.

Based on reading all the news published over a period of 6 months in *Kompas*, news stories about stunting were selected by focusing on stunting

news on page 1 of *Kompas* and the news perspective developed by *Kompas* in positioning stunting issues.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Underrepresentation of Stunting News

Media is not just about news, media is also about meaning. Media builds meaning of events that occur and of existing realities. Media communicate explicit and implicit meanings about health, illness, health care providers, and health systems through news, language, images, the tone used, the way a story is framed, and the news story is positioned, all of which may influence public understanding.

Entering the 21st century, media commercialization has entered a phase of establishment or even hyper-commercialism, including *Kompas*, which has been substantively increasingly influenced by market development factors. The opportunities that open up in the era of digitalization actually enable the conglomeration of media with other online businesses, which sees a concentration of capital and business around the digital economy (Jurriëns & Tapsell, 2017; Tapsell, 2017). In a context like this, news is both a cultural commodity and economic goods. Like any other economic entity, news is a product for profit.

The culture of journalistic professionalism has been greatly damaged by the pressure of commercialism in newsrooms. It may also have been weakened by the decline in the prestige

of political life and the crisis of public trust in the tradition of journalism in the conventional sense (Ibrahim, 2011). A key element of that culture is the idea that journalists should make independent judgments about what citizens need to know about public affairs. A journalist's job is to provide any content that can interest media consumers.

In this context, the news agenda has shifted from the representations of public affairs in the traditional sense towards humanitarian interests and "service" journalism that is useful for ordinary people in everyday life, including health reporting (Hallin, 2000).

Advances in information and communication technologies have also encouraged the emergence of a kind of viral-driven journalism practice (Ibrahim, 2023), which makes issues that are not considered "sexy" marginalized in media representations. Issues such as stunting cannot compete with entertainment and sensational news as well as political news that appears in the "political year" leading up to the 2024 election (*Kompas*, 3/12/2022).

Table 1 shows that in a period of 6 months, *Kompas* presented 66 news reports about stunting. On average, in 1 month, this daily represents 11 stunting news stories. This shows that stunting issues do not appear every day on the pages of *Kompas*. This means that in the period of one month (30 days), there were 19 days (19 editions) that did not contain news related to stunting.

This data illustrates the

TABLE 1. Number of Stunting News Coverage in *Kompas* Daily (October 2022-March 2023)

	October 2022	November 2022	Desember 2022	January 2023	February 2023	March 2023
Number of Coverage	5	4	14	15	17	11

Total of Coverage: 66 News Items

underrepresentation of stunting news in the media space. The limited media space available to represent health issues such as stunting may influence the positioning of stunting news on media pages. This study shows that crucial news regarding the fate of human life does not always get a special place on media pages unless there are accompanying factors that make the news receive special attention from the media. Government programs are not always in line with the media representation agenda.

Various factors clearly influence news positioning. In a market-driven media reporting culture and amidst intense competition for the readership market, crucial public issues including health problems such as stunting are proven to have to compete for important positions on media pages. In a viral-driven media landscape, alternative voices are often marginalized by news stories that create controversies and tensions.

News Representations of Stunting on Page 1: Data Journalism

The representations of stunting in the daily Kompas can also be seen from the frequency of positioning of poverty news texts on pages or media spaces. Placement on a particular page and a particular section on a page indicates the position and importance of the news amidst other news on the day when the news was published. A story will be placed on page 1 because it is considered interesting or important by the media rather than placed on the inside page. News that is placed at the top of a page is also based on the same considerations.

The position of news on a page is not only determined by its competing position with various other events that will be placed as news on the page in question. However, it is also determined by advertisements that may have been prepared to occupy a special position on that page.

This study shows that the representations of stunting news that is positioned on page 1 or as headline news in the daily Kompas is 12 news stories or only 18% of the total 66 news stories about stunting. Meanwhile, 82% or 54 stunting news stories were positioned on pages other than page 1 as shown in Table 2.

If we look at how the media positions the stunting news texts on the media page, there are 9 news stories related to stunting which are positioned in a special position at the top of page 1. This means that the news is the “headline news” of the news that day, which shows the importance of the news for media and with the aim of influencing readers’ understanding of the problem being reported and the remaining 3 stories are presented in feature news style, positioned at the bottom and middle of page 1. This means that the news is considered as a complement to the headline news on page 1, because it must be based on the editorial consideration that there is other news that the media considers more appropriate to be placed as a “headline news”.

The representations of stunting news on page 1 as headline news also illustrates how Kompas positions itself to hold to what they claim is the application of “data journalism,” where in the 9 special coverage related to stunting on page 1, this

TABLE 2. Position of Stunting News on Page 1 of *Kompas* (October 2022-March 2023)

Position	Number & Percentage
page 1	12 (18 %)
not page 1	54 (82 %)
Total	66



FIGURE 1. Kompas Headline about Stunting with Graphic Illustrations

newspaper uses various data to support news arguments related to stunting, equipped with graphic illustrations as a way to build reader attraction in the era of the digital generation by playing with visualizations that are characteristic of contemporary journalism (Figure 1).

Then, in terms of presentation genres, 9 news stories are the result of special coverage about the complexity of the stunting issues, such as the importance of strengthening collaboration to overcome stunting (Kompas, 26/1/2023), the need for specific handling of stunting (Kompas, 28/1/2023) by highlighting the educational aspect, economic inequality (Kompas, 20/3/2023), and nutritional inequality (Kompas, 9/12/22) as well as inequality in food prices which are positioned as conditions that exacerbate the risk of children stunting or tengkes (Kompas, 10/12/2023).

Apart from the 9 news stories in the special coverage genres, which are packaged in a more in-depth and complex representation of stunting news, there are 3 news stories in the feature stories or human-interest presentation genre which are packaged in style to attract readers by giving a human touch to the news stories about stunting and malnutrition.

The orientation of stunting news representations in the feature genre shows how the media tries to make stunting news touch readers' emotions and feelings by emphasizing aspects that may have previously been seen as simple things, especially in the eyes of urban middle-class readers who are the main target of Kompas readership. Here, Kompas positions distant events and sufferings to be close to the hearts of its loyal readers. At the same time, Kompas subtly shows them the contradictions of life itself.

For example, when the Marind-Anim community in Zanergi Village, Animha District, Merauke, South Papua, faced a food crisis after the forest that was their source of life disappeared, Kompas published a feature story on page 1 regarding "Community Nutrition: Skin and Bones for Children," which illustrates the irony that even the village head's children are malnourished (Kompas, 12/13/2022).

Likewise, when children under five in Jakarta who were active and cheerful turned out to be still suffering from stunting or tengkes, Kompas published a feature story on page 1 entitled "Children's Health: Spreading Love for Jakarta to Overcome Tengkes,"

describing the contradictions of life in the metropolitan area (Kompas, 2/2/2023).

The Kompas feature news story illustrates the importance of a humanist approach involving parents, which is based on appropriate data and programs from the government. Here, media criticism is packaged subtly as a characteristic of media that avoids confrontation with power. Kompas positions the solution to the stunting problem in the capital and the other parts of the region as an important part of saving the nation's future generations.

Culture-Oriented Representations Among Nuances of Perspectives

Kompas' coverage positions stunting issues from multiple perspectives in its news stories. News about stunting has multiple voices, including the official voices of the government, the voices of health service providers, the voices of the community and the voices of the media itself. Official government voices are represented by officials such as the governor, regent, subdistrict head, village head, BKKBN officers, the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), or heads of related agencies. The voices of health service providers are represented by hospital officials, doctors, nurses, Posyandu staff, or health extension workers. Community voices are represented by parents with stunting children, opinion leaders (academics,

scholars, religious leaders, cultural activists), NGOs, or child activists. Finally, the voices of the media are represented by journalists who cover and write health news related to the issue of stunting.

Because the media cannot possibly display social realities as it really is, representations always require a process of selection and positioning in the act of communication. Media representations is the act of communicating, the act of representing facts or events that have been selected and positioned in a certain way and perspective through text or news stories on media pages.

Journalistic texts and languages are not neutral. Kompas news stories around stunting are shaped by the interplay between journalists' values, newsroom culture, cultural context, the political economy even the ideology in which the media and journalists work.

Therefore, the news culture and representations of stunting news in Kompas are determined by the mutual influence of the forces behind the media whether it is ideological or political-economic forces that directly or indirectly shape the culture of the newsroom and its news products. Kompas news about stunting is also a product of media representations that form certain meanings and understandings about stunting. Kompas news stories regarding stunting issues use a special language

TABLE 3. Kompas News Perspectives on Stunting

Perspectives	Number & Percentage
Health Perspective	26 (39,4 %)
Economic Perspective	20 (30,3 %)
Cultural Perspective	10 (15,1 %)
Educational Perspective	4 (6,1 %)
Access Perspective	4 (6,1 %)
Legal and Human Rights Perspective	2 (3 %)
Total	66

known as a journalistic language with an emphasis on certain themes, topics, and perspectives. Based on the analytical framework of Social Positioning Theory, several dominant representation patterns were found. The representation patterns were based on the perspective taken by journalists in writing news stories about stunting. From careful reading and social positioning analysis of 66 Kompas news stories related to stunting, several trends stand out (Table 3).

First, the dominance of the health perspective and the economic perspective in positioning the problems underlying stunting, namely 26 (39.4%) news stories and 20 (30.3%) news stories, respectively. From a health perspective, Kompas news represents news related to medical problems and illnesses that require medical solutions and aspects of community nutritional balance. Then, from an economic perspective, Kompas news positions the complexity of the stunting problem as related to economic disparities and the inability of lower levels of society to meet their basic needs.

Second, the cultural perspective in reporting stunting positions the stunting problem as related to the values, habits, behavior, lifestyle, and culture of society which are important factors in alleviating stunting. Here, we can see that Kompas presented 10 (15.1%) news stories with a culturally oriented perspective in positioning stunting issues.

Representing news stories that connects the importance of behavior change and looking at the human dimension of disease and health problems provides a deep meaning to the importance of cultural change in solving the problem of stunting in a diverse society like Indonesia.

Third, the emergence of an education and access perspective in positioning stunting news as can be seen from the arguments in 4 (6.1%) Kompas

news stories, which consecutively see the stunting problem as a lack of education among citizens regarding healthy lifestyles and a lack of education causes a vicious circle of poverty which has implications on meeting the needs of a healthy life. Meanwhile, the access perspective appeared in 4 (6.1%) news stories which positioned stunting news by highlighting the lack and limited access to health services and the need for balanced nutrition as the root of the stunting problem.

Fourth, the emergence of a legal and human rights perspective, even though it only appears in 2 news stories, is part of the background to the formation of offspring suffering from stunting, such as the practice of young marriage or early marriage, which is seen from the practice of gender relations which increasingly marginalizes women. Intervention for young women is seen as an important factor in dealing with the problem of stunting. So far, this study shows that the positioning of stunting news from a cultural perspective has begun to gain a place in the context of understanding the health crisis regarding stunting in the Indonesian national daily, Kompas.

A culture-oriented approach positions news representation of stunting in relation to culture as factors that directly or indirectly influence the health of individuals and populations, including their views on health and illness. Here, the socio-cultural dimension is positioned as an important determinant among other determinants such as economics, politics, policy, and the national health system.

This study found that 10 Kompas news stories, or around 15.1% of the total 66 news stories about stunting that appeared in the period of 6 months, positioning that cultural factors that directly or indirectly play a role both as factors causing stunting and as factors for changing healthy living for get out of the

shackles of stunting.

This really strengthens the ideas of Dutta and Basu, scholars who emphasize, “The culture-centred approach suggests participatory strategies and dialogic processes as tools for engaging with cultural voices and foregrounding cultural meanings with the ultimate goal of transforming the structures of inequity that constitute health experiences.” (Dutta & Basu, 2011: 322).

Finally, Kompas news coverage that links the role of values and culture in health reporting settings shows important developments in social positioning where journalists as discourse actors who work and position discourse in the media sphere cannot be separated from the context of the society in which they live. Within it flows culture that shapes behavior, understanding, and awareness of the meaning of what it means to be healthy or sick.

CONCLUSION

The representations of stunting in Indonesian national newspapers, in this case, the daily Kompas, indicate the role that the media plays in communicating health issues with rich and nuanced representation patterns. The findings of this study explain the underrepresentation of stunting in the national media coverage. The low frequency of stunting news requires the media to raise more stunting issues.

Although the dominant representation patterns in the daily Kompas tends to position the stunting problems from health and economic perspectives, however, the cultural perspective has a place in the representations of stunting news. The media not only serves informational and instrumental functions, in the sense of providing information about health and illness as well as practical guidance for the community to build a healthy lifestyle to overcome

stunting. Media also serves a cultural function in the sense of opening access to cultural sphere to build awareness and behavior in a health culture that is citizen- and human-centered.

This study expands the role of journalists as discourse actors who are actively involved in culturally oriented representations of stunting news. By encouraging cultural awareness for journalists as professionals, they not only act as discourse actors but also as cultural agents of social change in the health communication sector.

Using a dynamic Social Positioning framework, this study shows how journalists can contribute so that the voices of lower or marginalized communities can be heard in decision-making in the national health system. So that citizens can participate in health communication from below through culturally oriented news representations.

However, this research still has limitations because it only focuses on one medium and within a limited time frame. Therefore, a broader study is needed, for example, comparative studies of representations between different media or between mainstream media and social media, to enrich the findings. Then further studies are needed to creatively apply the Social Positioning framework, such as in the context of visual representation studies, especially in the field of health communication.

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