



Media Agenda Setting in Shaping Public Opinion (Case Study of Fajar Media and Ujungpandang Ekspres)

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Abstract

This study examines the strategic role of mass media in shaping public opinion through editorial management mechanisms. The focus of the research is to analyze how Harian Fajar and Ujungpandang Ekspres implement the agenda-Setting theory in influencing public perception and government policy in Pangkep Regency. Amid information disruption, mass media are required to perform an optimal watchdog function in accordance with Law Number 40 of 1999 on the Press. This study employs a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. Data collection was conducted through the observation of news coverage in print media and online portals, as well as in-depth interviews with editors-in-chief, editors, and journalists from both media outlets. Data analysis was carried out holistically to map patterns of gatekeeping and issue prioritization. The results of the study show that Harian Fajar and Ujungpandang Ekspres have successfully carried out salience transfer (the transfer of issue importance) from the newsroom to the public sphere. Harian Fajar demonstrates strong dominance in influencing policy, as evidenced by the quick responses of the Regional House of Representatives and the Regional Government to several issues in Pangkep Regency. Both print media outlets function as primary instruments in constructing the hierarchy of public importance through strict news selection or gatekeeping. This process confirms the assumption of Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw that mass media have the power to direct public attention toward what is considered important for discussion in social spaces. Public opinion formed through such news creates symbolic pressure that compels legislative institutions to take immediate legitimate actions. The formation of public opinion occurs because the media successfully construct strong narratives. Both Fajar and Ujungpandang Ekspres continue to actively optimize the use of their online media portals. This utilization is not merely complementary, but rather a primary strategy in maintaining relevance amid information competition. Thus, it can be concluded that public opinion in Pangkep is formed through the accumulation of consistent information presented by these two media outlets.

Introduction

The rapid circulation of information in contemporary society has strengthened the strategic role of mass media in shaping public understanding of social and political realities. Information disseminated through newspapers, television, radio, and digital platforms continuously influences how individuals and communities perceive public issues and evaluate governmental

performance. The media no longer function merely as channels of communication but also as institutions capable of constructing social meaning and directing public attention toward particular issues considered important within society (Alomari et al., 2023; Yar'Adua et al., 2023; Tombu, 2024). Through the processes of selecting, emphasizing, and repeatedly presenting information, the media significantly influence public awareness and patterns of social discussion.

Mass media possess a stronger influence compared with informal communication channels because professional journalism operates through structured editorial processes and legal regulations (Mesquita, 2022; Palla & Kostarella, 2025; Toth et al., 2025; Caferra et al., 2025). In Indonesia, journalistic activities are protected by Law Number 40 of 1999 concerning the Press, which guarantees press freedom while emphasizing journalistic responsibility and ethical standards. News disseminated by mass media therefore differs substantially from information circulating through social media because it undergoes processes of verification, editing, and editorial evaluation before publication (Sohn, 2022; Mukerjee et al., 2023; Pratama et al., 2024). Consequently, newspapers continue to maintain public credibility as sources of information regarding political, social, and governmental issues.

The relationship between media coverage and public perception is commonly associated with the agenda-setting effect, which explains how media emphasis on certain issues influences public judgments regarding issue importance (Buturoiu et al., 2023; Geiß, 2022; Zahariadis, 2025). Through repeated coverage, strategic headline placement, and issue prominence, the media transfer issue salience from the media agenda to the public agenda. Issues receiving intensive media attention gradually become dominant topics within public conversation, while issues receiving limited exposure often remain outside broader public awareness. In this context, the media not only provide information but also shape patterns of collective attention and social priorities.

The strategic role of mass media becomes increasingly important within democratic societies because media institutions also function as instruments of public control and political communication. The media monitor governmental activities, communicate public concerns, and facilitate interactions between citizens and policymakers (Grossman, 2022; Fissi et al., 2022; Asimakopoulos et al., 2025). Through news reporting, media institutions may influence policy discussions, encourage governmental responsiveness, and stimulate public participation regarding issues affecting society (Okechukwu, 2023; Muhdiarta, 2025; Asimakopoulos et al., 2025). Media reporting therefore possesses the capacity to transform ordinary local events into issues of broader public concern capable of generating institutional responses and social mobilization.

This influence becomes especially visible within local political communication contexts. Compared with national media, local newspapers maintain greater proximity to regional communities and local governmental structures. Such proximity allows regional media to intensively report issues directly connected to local experiences, including environmental problems, public services, educational policies, regional budgeting, and infrastructure development (Mota, 2023; Freeman & Hutchins, 2023; Al-Ghazzi, 2023). Consequently, local newspapers frequently become important actors in shaping regional public opinion and influencing policy agendas within local governance systems.

In Indonesia, local newspapers continue to play a significant role despite the rapid development of digital communication platforms. Regional media remain important references for local governments, legislative institutions, and community organizations because they provide intensive coverage of local issues often overlooked by national media outlets (Biswas & Rahman, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024; Bonfert, 2024). Through continuous reporting and editorial emphasis, local newspapers contribute to the formation of public awareness regarding regional

governance and social problems. The influence of local media is therefore not limited to information dissemination but extends to the construction of social legitimacy and institutional accountability. Pangkep Regency in South Sulawesi provides a relevant context for examining the role of local mass media in shaping public opinion. The regency experiences dynamic interactions between industrial development, environmental challenges, local governance, and community interests (Taufiq et al., 2022; Harsanto & Wahyuningrat, 2024). Public discourse within Pangkep is strongly influenced by local media coverage concerning governmental policy, infrastructure projects, environmental degradation, and economic development. Within this context, newspapers such as Fajar and Ujungpandang Ekspres possess substantial influence because of their strong readership and long-standing presence within South Sulawesi's media landscape.

Fajar Daily, founded in 1981 by PT Media Fajar Indonesia, has developed into one of the largest newspapers in Eastern Indonesia with extensive circulation throughout South Sulawesi. Through its Metro Sulsel column and online platform, Fajar consistently reports local governmental issues, environmental concerns, and public policy developments in Pangkep Regency. Similarly, Ujungpandang Ekspres, established in 2000, has positioned itself as a leading regional newspaper with a strong focus on economic and development reporting. The newspaper's specialization in economic journalism distinguishes it from other regional newspapers and strengthens its influence among policymakers, business actors, and local communities. Despite increasing competition from digital media, both newspapers have adapted through digital platforms and continue to maintain substantial readership influence within regional society.

Several phenomena in Pangkep Regency demonstrate the influence of local media reporting on public opinion and institutional responses. News coverage regarding the implementation of student study tour policies published by Fajar on May 14, 2024, later became the primary issue discussed during a public hearing conducted by Commission I of the Pangkep Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD). Likewise, reporting concerning the clearing of six hectares of trees in October 2025 generated public reactions and demonstrations organized by the Pangkep Youth and Student Association at the South Sulawesi Regional Police Headquarters. These cases indicate that local newspapers do not merely report events but actively contribute to constructing public discourse and stimulating collective responses.

The influence of media coverage on public reaction is closely related to editorial processes occurring within media institutions. Editors and journalists continuously perform selection and filtering processes to determine which issues deserve publication and greater prominence (Mont'Alverne & Marques, 2022; Kahungu, 2022; Møller, 2024). Decisions regarding headlines, issue repetition, framing, and source selection significantly affect how audiences interpret events and evaluate public issues. Through these gatekeeping mechanisms, the media actively construct social reality rather than simply reflecting objective events. emphasized, communication represents a symbolic process through which reality is produced, maintained, and transformed within society.

The continued relevance of local newspapers in shaping public discourse is also influenced by their integration with digital media platforms. Newspapers such as Fajar and Ujungpandang Ekspres have expanded their reach through websites and social media platforms including Instagram and TikTok. This digital transformation enables local issues to spread more rapidly among wider audiences, including younger generations who increasingly consume information through digital platforms (Debbarma & Sharma, 2023; Okonkwo et al., 2022). Nevertheless, despite technological transformation, the editorial authority and institutional legitimacy of newspapers remain significant factors influencing public trust and public opinion formation.

Previous studies examining the role of media in shaping public opinion have generally focused on national political communication or digital communication environments. Swastiningsih et al. (2024) found that social media and online news portals significantly influence public opinion regarding political and policy issues. Similarly, Jhunjhunwala & Verma (2024) emphasized the role of mass media in influencing political perceptions and public attitudes. However, these studies remain limited in explaining how agenda-setting practices operate within local media environments, particularly at the regency level. Existing research also tends to prioritize quantitative approaches without deeply exploring the communicative and editorial processes through which local newspapers construct issue salience and shape public responses.

The limited scholarly attention devoted to local newspaper practices creates an important academic gap. Regional communication environments possess unique social, cultural, and political dynamics that differ substantially from national media systems (Klinger et al., 2023; Mazya et al., 2024). Interactions between journalists, policymakers, community organizations, and audiences within local contexts may produce distinctive forms of agenda-setting influence and public opinion formation. Therefore, examining the role of *Fajar* and *Ujungpandang Ekspres* in shaping public opinion in Pangkep Regency is academically important because it contributes to understanding how local media construct public discourse and influence governance within regional democratic environments.

Understanding the role of local newspapers in shaping public opinion remains crucial in the contemporary media era because local media continue to function as strategic actors connecting public interests, governmental policies, and regional social realities. The interaction between media agendas, public responses, and institutional reactions within Pangkep Regency demonstrates that local newspapers remain influential instruments in directing public attention, constructing social meaning, and influencing democratic communication processes at the regional level.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a case study design to examine the role of mass media communication in shaping public opinion in Pangkep Regency through news coverage published by *Fajar* and *Ujungpandang Ekspres*. A qualitative approach was selected because the research aimed to understand social phenomena comprehensively by exploring meanings, interpretations, interactions, and communication processes occurring within natural social settings. Qualitative research allows researchers to investigate how media institutions construct agendas, package information, and influence public responses through communicative practices that cannot be adequately explained through quantitative measurement alone.

The case study approach was considered appropriate because this research focused intensively on two regional media institutions within a specific social and political context. Case studies enable researchers to conduct an in-depth exploration of contemporary phenomena occurring within real-life situations while considering the interaction between various social, institutional, and communicative factors. Through this approach, the study examined how editorial agendas were formed, how gatekeeping processes operated, and how media coverage influenced public opinion and policy responses in Pangkep Regency.

The qualitative case study design also enabled flexibility throughout the research process. Rather than relying on rigid procedural structures, the research design evolved dynamically based on findings emerging from the field. This approach allowed the researcher to capture contextual realities related to communication practices, editorial decision-making, and

audience responses within the local media environment. The research therefore emphasized interpretative understanding rather than statistical generalization.

Research Location and Timeline

This research was conducted in Pangkep Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, with the primary focus directed toward news coverage published in *Fajar* and *Ujungpandang Ekspres*. Pangkep Regency was selected because the region demonstrates dynamic interactions between local media reporting, public discourse, governmental policies, and community responses. Several issues reported by the local media during the research period generated significant public reactions and institutional responses, making the region relevant for examining agenda-setting practices and public opinion formation within a local political communication context.

The study specifically examined news coverage published between November 2025 and March 2026. This period was selected because both newspapers intensively covered strategic local issues related to governance, environmental concerns, public services, educational policies, and regional development. The five-month period enabled the researcher to observe continuity, repetition, and changes in media agendas over time, while also allowing comparisons between media coverage patterns and subsequent public or governmental responses. Conducting the research over several months strengthened the depth of analysis regarding the consistency and development of media narratives within the local context.

Data Sources

This study utilized both primary and secondary data sources to ensure comprehensive understanding and analytical depth. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with selected informants directly involved in media production processes, public communication, and policy responses related to issues reported by the media. In qualitative research, primary data consist primarily of words, statements, actions, and experiences conveyed by informants who possess relevant knowledge regarding the phenomenon being studied.

The primary informants in this study consisted of media executives, editors, journalists, legislative actors, and representatives of community organizations. Informants from *Fajar* included Amrullah B. Gani as Director and Editor-in-Chief, Ridwan Marzuki as Editor, and Nurlina Arsyad as Editor. Informants from *Ujungpandang Ekspres* included Ibrahim as Circulation Manager and Sukawaty as Editor. These informants were selected purposively because they possessed strategic roles in editorial decision-making, issue selection, news framing, and audience distribution processes. Their involvement provided important insights into how media agendas were constructed and communicated to the public.

To examine the relationship between media coverage and public response, the study also involved the Central Executive Board of the Pangkep Youth and Student Association (IPPM Pangkep) as representatives of public opinion and community mobilization. Student organizations were selected because they represented educated social groups responsive to media discourse and public issues. In addition, the research involved the Chairman of Commission II of the Pangkep Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), Lutfi Hanafi, to understand institutional and policy responses resulting from media coverage. The inclusion of legislative actors enabled the research to explore how media agendas influenced policy discussions and governmental actions within the regional political environment.

Secondary data consisted of newspaper articles, online news reports, editorial archives, institutional documents, social media publications, and related policy documents. News coverage published by *Fajar* and *Ujungpandang Ekspres* served as the primary documentary

data analyzed in the study. These documents were used to identify issue salience, patterns of coverage, framing strategies, and continuity of reporting related to public issues in Pangkep Regency.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection in this study was conducted through three primary techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The combination of these techniques enabled triangulation and strengthened the validity of the research findings.

Observation was conducted systematically by examining patterns of news reporting published in both print and digital versions of *Fajar* and *Ujungpandang Ekspres*. The researcher observed issue placement, headline construction, frequency of publication, framing patterns, and the continuity of news coverage regarding strategic issues in Pangkep Regency. Observation also focused on identifying relationships between media reporting and subsequent public or institutional reactions. Through observation, the researcher was able to understand how local media constructed issue salience and influenced public discourse over time.

In-depth interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview techniques. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they provided flexibility for informants to explain their experiences and perspectives while ensuring that discussions remained aligned with the research objectives. Prior to the interviews, the researcher prepared interview guidelines containing key themes and questions related to editorial management, agenda-setting practices, gatekeeping processes, news selection criteria, media influence, and public responses. However, the interviews remained open enough to allow the emergence of additional insights and contextual information from informants.

The interview process emphasized the establishment of effective communication and trust between the researcher and informants to encourage openness and accurate information sharing. Interviews were conducted directly with informants and recorded with their consent to ensure the accuracy of the data obtained. Field notes were also used to document contextual observations and important information emerging during the interviews.

Documentation techniques were employed to collect written materials relevant to the study. These documents included newspaper archives, online publications, screenshots of news coverage, policy documents, meeting records, public statements, and social media posts related to issues discussed in the research. Documentation served as an important supporting source for tracing the continuity of media agendas and verifying information obtained from interviews and observations.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis process in this study followed the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data analysis was conducted continuously throughout the research process, beginning during data collection and continuing until the final interpretation stage.

The first stage, data reduction, involved selecting, organizing, simplifying, and categorizing data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. Interview transcripts, field notes, and news documents were carefully reviewed and coded according to emerging themes relevant to the research focus. Coding was conducted manually to identify patterns related to agenda-setting practices, gatekeeping mechanisms, media framing, public responses, and policy impacts. This process enabled the researcher to focus on information directly relevant to understanding the role of local media in shaping public opinion.

The second stage involved data display, where organized information was systematically presented in the form of narrative descriptions, thematic categorizations, and analytical matrices. Presenting data in an organized manner enabled the researcher to compare perspectives among informants, identify relationships between variables, and examine the interaction between media agendas, public opinion, and institutional responses. Data display also facilitated deeper interpretation and analytical reflection regarding the communication processes observed in the study.

The final stage involved drawing conclusions and verification. At this stage, the researcher interpreted the findings by connecting empirical evidence with broader communication phenomena related to media influence and public opinion formation. Verification was conducted continuously to ensure consistency, credibility, and validity of the interpretations produced. The researcher also applied an emic perspective by prioritizing the viewpoints and experiences of informants rather than imposing purely subjective interpretations.

Result and Discussion

The results demonstrate how *Harian Fajar* and *Ujungpandang Ekspres* construct issue salience, perform gatekeeping functions, and influence public discourse in Pangkep Regency. By examining specific cases of media coverage and their subsequent public and institutional responses, this section highlights the mechanisms through which local newspapers shape public opinion and contribute to regional policy discussions.

The Role of Agenda Setting in Shaping Public Opinion in Pangkep Regency

The agenda-setting role played by *Fajar Daily* and *Ujungpandang Ekspres* in Pangkep Regency manifests itself through the process of issue salience transfer from the editorial realm to the public's cognitive realm. This research found that media reporting patterns serve not merely as channels for transmitting information but have transformed into instruments of discursive power capable of massively constructing public opinion. Structured media narratives have proven effective in penetrating collective consciousness, enabling issues that initially remained editorial discourse to evolve into dominant public discourse. This process confirms the media's authority in establishing the hierarchy of public interests through sustained issue emphasis.

These two print media outlets serve as primary instruments in establishing the hierarchy of public interests through rigorous news selection, or gatekeeping (Olsen et al., 2022; Kahungu, 2022). When crucial issues such as the dynamics of the cement industry, the preservation of island ecosystems, or local government policies are consistently placed in headlines, the media automatically legitimizes these issues as priority agendas for Pangkep residents. This process validates McCombs and Shaw's assumption that the mass media has the power to direct public attention to what is deemed important for discussion in social spaces. The research findings indicate that the formation of public opinion in Pangkep Regency is heavily influenced by agenda-setting mechanisms employed by local print media, particularly the *Fajar Daily* and *Ujungpandang Ekspres*. The case study researchers uncovered of these two media outlets can be explained through the agenda-setting process that shapes public opinion through reporting in the *Fajar Daily* and *Ujungpandang Ekspres* in Pangkep Regency, as follows: a). Issue Transfer (Salience Transfer): Both media outlets successfully transferred salience from the editorial room to the public sphere. What the media deemed important gradually began to be perceived as important by the Pangkep community. b). Gatekeeping Mechanism: The media function as "gatekeepers" that strictly select the flow of information.

Through this curation process, the media establish a hierarchy of public interest, determining which issues deserve attention and which should be ignored. c). Legitimizing Issues through Headlines: The consistent placement of crucial issues such as cement industry dynamics, island

ecosystem preservation, and local government policies as headlines serves as a means of legitimacy. This intensity of coverage forces audiences to view these issues as priority agenda items that determine the direction of regional development. An analysis of these two phenomena that emerged in the background of this research demonstrates Fajar's powerful role in constructing social reality and driving change in Pangkep Regency. Using Agenda Setting theory, the researcher observes that the media is not merely a message transmitter, but a catalyst that transforms "paper issues" into "real action" in the realm of policy and social resistance.

This research focuses on the reporting patterns of two leading print media outlets: the daily Fajar and the Ujungpandang Ekspres. These two subjects were selected based on their existence as pillars of information with significant influence in their respective regions (Qazi & Al-Mhdawi, 2024). The researchers sought to map how the narrative of an issue is managed through their platforms to examine the consistency and editorial strategies employed. The research sample collected was not limited to conventional formats but included reporting in both print media and online news portals from each media outlet. This step was taken to accommodate the characteristics of issue dissemination in the digital realm, which has different dynamics than print media. The integration of print and digital platforms is an important observation to determine the extent to which traditional media have adapted to the increasingly rapid flow of information.

The research found that both Fajar and Ujungpandang Ekspres continue to actively optimize the use of their online media portals. This utilization is not merely complementary, but rather a primary strategy for maintaining relevance amidst the competition for information. Online portals allow both media outlets to update issue developments in real time without having to wait for the next daily print cycle. The speed of information distribution in the digital realm is the primary reason the researchers' included samples from online platforms. Through these news portals, the issues raised can reach a broader and more diverse audience with a much shorter response time. This demonstrates that accelerating information through online media has become a crucial tool in strengthening news penetration in modern society. Thus, this study provides a comprehensive overview of the transformation of news strategies in responding to the demands of information speed in the digital era.

News Analysis Applying Agenda Setting Theory

Through the Agenda Setting mechanism, the mass media has the authority to determine the significance of an issue through consistent intensity and duration of coverage. Theoretically, the basic assumption put forward by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw asserts that the media not only successfully informs audiences about what to think, but also more deeply guides audiences about what is important to think about. This process operates through salience transfer, where the media agenda (the list of issues expressed in the news) gradually transforms into a public agenda that dominates social discourse in Pangkep Regency. In mass communication, the media's ability to construct the urgency of an issue does not stop at shaping public perception but continues through to the Policy Agenda stage. This process reflects the media's power in salience transfer, where the intensive emphasis on the study tour issue by Harian Fajar on May 14, 2024, successfully transformed a social issue that had become a source of concern into an urgent policy.

The following are several case studies related to news coverage published by Fajar and the Ujungpandang Ekspres daily: The media is a key source of public aspirations for voicing opinions. It plays a crucial role in the transformation of a country or region, including in Pangkep Regency. (Nurul Fajriah: 2020). Fajar Daily's February 19, 2026, coverage of abrasion in Pangkep Regency served as a crucial channel for public aspirations. In this case, the media acted as a bridge between island residents, such as those on Kalukuang Island and Sapuka

Island, and policymakers. The residents' aspirations for the construction of seawalls and breakwaters were constructed by the media into a message of national urgency. The prominence of quotes from residents like Wana (37) and Ramlan (34) demonstrated the media's efforts to give a human face (human interest) to environmental issues, transforming the technical problem of abrasion into a pressing humanitarian issue.

Researchers then, through their agenda-setting function, identified that the media engaged in gatekeeping and emphasized certain aspects of social reality. When Fajar News chose a title and headline positioning such as "Abrasion Threatens Island Residents' Settlements," the media was clearly establishing the interests of the wider community and the local government. By linking this case study to threats to life, the media was not simply reporting an incident but rather setting priority parameters for the government's policy agenda.

The involvement of the Head of the Regional Disaster Management Agency (BPBD), Akbar Yunus, in the news report indicates that Agenda Media has successfully triggered a response from the relevant authorities. This demonstrates that the intense coverage of the extreme geographic conditions in Pangkep compels the public and stakeholders to prioritize disaster mitigation in their collective memory and regional development plans. Thus, the mass media not only portrays reality but also actively shapes public opinion, pressuring the government to take immediate preventative action. This analysis demonstrates the powerful role of the media in transforming the complaints of residents on remote islands into a public interest that must be addressed immediately. The editorial decision to place the issue of abrasion in Pangkep Regency as the headline on the Metro Sulsel page demonstrates the application of sound news values.

"We chose this abrasion story as the headline on the Metro Sulsel page because it has very high news value. This issue arises from an island region that has long been marginalized. It is important for us to highlight it to gain public attention, especially from government policymakers, so that immediate concrete action can be taken for the residents there." Nurlina Arsyad, Fajar Editor (Interview, Sunday, April 19, 2026).

Researchers identified that the news coverage demonstrated a salience transfer mechanism, where agenda setting transfers salience from the media agenda to the public agenda. By selecting the abrasion news as a headline, Fajar's editors were consciously engaging in a salience transfer. Placing it in the main position indicates a transfer of information, conveying to readers that the abrasion issue in Pangkep is not just a local event, but a crucial issue that tops the list of issues to consider. Meanwhile, regarding the media's gatekeeping process, researchers observed that the editors in this case played an active role as gatekeepers. Nurlina Arsyad's decision to highlight the island issue demonstrates the media's power to sift through dozens of events and select one deemed highly newsworthy to be placed in the main page. 2. Mass Mobilization through Agenda Setting in a News Case Study Titled "Bandai Pohon Enam Hektare" The second case study, concerning the issue of tree felling that sparked a demonstration by the Pangkep Youth and Student Association (IPPM Pangkep) in October 2025, illustrates the power of the media in shaping public opinion in a conative (behavioral) manner.

In an interview with Ahmad Habibi B, the Chairman of the Organizational Advisory Council (MPO) of the Pangkep Youth and Student Association (IPPM), he stated:

"The demonstration was carried out after a prior review within the organization regarding the news that appeared in several editions of Fajar regarding the clearing of six hectares of land. Therefore, further investigation is needed to identify the

masterminds, which has not yet been revealed in the media," (interview, January 15, 2026).

Fajar's agenda setting in this case not only informs the public about what happened, but through the title "Bandai Pohon Enam Hektare" (Bandai Pohon Enam Hektare), the media presents the events involved. The use of the term "babat" (traditional term) carries a strong emotional charge, as follows: Fajar Regional Editor, Ridwan Marzuki, stated:

"Issues are selected based on coordination between all reporters via WhatsApp groups and private chats. These issues are then processed into news stories and sent out, with the strongest ones selected" (interview, February 10, 2026).

The resulting public opinion is not merely passive but organized. The demonstration at the South Sulawesi Regional Police Headquarters (Polda Selatan) is a manifestation of the media's success in building collective urgency. The media created a common information platform for student activists to mobilize.

Fajar Editor-in-Chief, Amrullah B Gani:

"The news flow proceeds in stages, from reporters to editors, then to the editorial desk to determine what will be published." (interview, February 10, 2026).

The theoretical relationship emerging from this phenomenon aligns with Walter Lippmann's concept of "The Pictures in Our Heads." The IPPM Pangkep students may not have been always present at the logging site, but the narrative Fajar constructed within the news was strong enough to convince them that a violation had occurred that required legal action at the South Sulawesi Regional Police Headquarters.

"The news reports clearly show the location, and the photos in the news also make it clear that it happened," (interview, January 15, 2026).

Theoretically, these two cases demonstrate that Fajar possesses Agenda Authority in Pangkep Regency. This influence operates through two main channels: Institutional Channel: Mobilizing state institutions (the Regional People's Representative Council) to conduct policy evaluations. The study tour issue demonstrates that the media is both a partner and a check on power. Grassroots Channel: Mobilizing youth organizations (IPPM Pangkep) to exert social pressure. Environmental issues demonstrate that the media is a primary source of legitimacy for social movements. Public opinion formation occurs because the media successfully creates a powerful narrative. Without consistent and bold reporting, issues such as school policies or environmental damage in Pangkep might remain silent complaints within the community. Print media, in this context, functions as a loudspeaker, compelling the public and those in power to pay attention, reflect, and ultimately act.

The Effectiveness of Agenda Setting Through the Media's Oversight Function

The series of Fajar media reports on the controversy surrounding civil servant (ASN) alms cuts in Pangkep Regency demonstrates the application of agenda-setting theory to construct social reality. Through three crucial stages, the media successfully transformed an administrative issue into a pressing public discourse. Fajar Media repeatedly emphasized this through a series of news articles entitled "Teacher Certification Cut for Alms" (February 27), then subsequent news articles entitled "DPRD: Alms Values Must Not Be Regulated" (March 3), and "Bank Sulselbar Stops Deductions for ASN Alms" (March 10). This continuity of coverage effectively transfers the issue's importance from the editorial desk to the public sphere. Through a process of salience transfer, the issue is repeatedly processed into news stories, transforming it and becoming a top concern for the Pangkep Regency public because the media consistently positions it as a worthy issue.

Researchers found that gatekeeping mechanisms and conflicts of interest are present. As gatekeepers, the media conducts rigorous selection, emphasizing transparency and legal basis. By highlighting critical quotes from the Chairmen of Commissions I and II of the Pangkep Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), which question the legal basis (Regional Regulation), the media establishes a hierarchy of pressing public interests. The media not only reports facts but also curates the concerns of thousands of civil servants, such as teacher complaints and the reluctance to accept monthly salary cuts, forcing this issue out of the private sphere of government and into broader public scrutiny.

Fajar also highlighted this issue not only repeatedly but also selected it for headlines. This legitimacy through headlines strategically provides legitimacy to the perception of serious problems in the governance of social funds in Pangkep. This intensity of reporting has proven to be a catalyst for real change. This was evident in the headline story, where the bank finally halted the automatic deductions after public pressure and extensive media coverage. The media successfully transformed the issue of the regent's circular into a decision to halt salary deductions by Bank Sulselbar, theoretically demonstrating the media's success in influencing the policy agenda.

These three stories demonstrate that Fajar media outlets are not merely a reflection of reality but act as a driving force, exerting pressure on institutions, including Baznas (National Alms Agency) and the Regional Government, triggering concrete actions, and effectively influencing public opinion through the repetition of issues and strategic placement of news on the Metro Sulsel website. This effectively prompted policymakers to respond to the demands for transparency voiced through the media.

The intensive coverage of the Baznas controversy in Fajar media demonstrates the success of the salience transfer mechanism, where the media consciously elevates hidden issues to the public's attention. Fajar Editor Nurlina Arsyad emphasized that the decision to repeatedly raise this issue was based on findings of maladministration in the form of civil servant salary deductions without authorization, which have been ongoing since 2022.

"This issue represents the pent-up concerns of thousands of civil servants. Therefore, we present balanced reporting that meets the standards of covering both sides to promote transparency for policymakers, and to ensure the story becomes a headline and receives repeated coverage," said Nurlina (Interview, April 19, 2026).

The media's agenda-setting strategy is inseparable from the editor's role as the determinant of editorial policy. Based on interviews, the intense coverage of the Baznas controversy represents a conscious effort to highlight a reality that has been overlooked. This was emphasized by Nurlina Arsyad, Fajar Editor, who explained the background to the findings in the field.

"Our decision to repeatedly highlight the Baznas controversy on the Metro Sulsel website was based on findings indicating maladministration that have been ongoing since 2022. We discovered that cuts in teachers' salaries and certification allowances were made without valid authorization, triggering collective unrest among civil servants. This issue is crucial because it has a widespread impact on the public, yet employees have tended to be afraid to speak out openly about these cuts." (Interview, April 19, 2026).

According to Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, audiences will perceive an issue as important if the media consistently emphasizes it. Repeated coverage (such as the Baznas case, which was covered from February to March) aims to garner public attention. A single report might be considered merely passing information, but repeated coverage forces the public to pause and recognize that a systemic problem is occurring. This is the process by which the

media transfers its priority list to the public's mind. Continuous repetition of news ensures that the issue is not lost in the rapid flow of other information, as one of the primary goals of advanced agenda setting is to influence policymakers.

Medium for Determining the Editorial Agenda

Meanwhile, the news agenda-setting process at the Ujungpandang Ekspres Daily demonstrates a shift in editorial work mechanisms from conventional patterns to more dynamic digital ones. According to M. Syahrir, a reporter for the Ujungpandang Ekspres Daily, the gatekeeping process, or information filtering, is carried out through intensive coordination between reporters and editors via the WhatsApp instant messaging app.

"The process of determining news is based on coordination with editors through WhatsApp groups or privately," (interview, January 20).

Theoretically, this phenomenon illustrates the initial stage of agenda building, where an issue is tested for newsworthiness before being decided on as a media agenda. The use of WhatsApp facilitates real-time data exchange, allowing editors to quickly formulate news direction, particularly in strategic sectors such as the economy, development, and government. From an agenda-setting perspective, this digital coordination is a determining instrument in the salience transfer process, or the transfer of issue importance. Through these virtual discussions, editors and reporters synchronize on which attributes to highlight in a development issue or government policy.

Decisions made in this digital space directly influence how the media structure the hierarchy of importance of the news they present to the public. Thus, WhatsApp serves not only as a technical communication tool but also as an intellectual negotiation space that determines the "framing" of information. This ensures that economic and government issues reaching readers have undergone a thorough collective curation process, which in turn guides public opinion in Pangkep Regency.

"The most frequent issue is the economy" (interview: February 20, 2026)

This reliance on digital coordination also strengthens the media's authority in overseeing sustainable development issues. The integration of rapid field reports from journalists and strategic direction from editors through digital platforms creates consistency in the media agenda. This consistency, according to Agenda Setting theory, is key to shaping audience perceptions. The stronger the internal coordination in setting issues, the stronger the media's influence in informing the public which issues should be considered top priorities in the dynamics of regional government. The following is published:

This study examines the reporting patterns of the Ujungpandang Ekspres daily newspaper, which consistently prioritizes economic issues on its agenda. Based on a sample of news coverage regarding the signing of an MoU between PT Semen Tonasa and the Pangkep Regency Government regarding infrastructure development, editorial efforts to highlight the significance of the industrial sector in the region are clear. In accordance with Agenda Setting Theory, the media can influence public perception regarding what is considered important through repeated emphasis on issues or through strategic news placement.

M Syahrir, a reporter for the Ujungpandang Ekspres daily newspaper, stated:

"In this case, the editor's decision to make the corporate collaboration a headline indicates that economic issues in Pangkep Regency are a top priority and are sought to be highlighted to the public, as economic issues are also frequently discussed in Pangkep," (interview, February 20, 2026).

Through news narratives emphasizing road infrastructure development in the mining area and the company's operational commitment to regional development, the media emphasizes that Pangkep's economic stability is highly dependent on synergy between the private sector and the government.

Ujungpandang Ekspres Daily reporter M Syahrir stated:

"The news was categorized as an economic issue, so it was consciously chosen by the editors to fill the headlines," (interview, February 20, 2026).

This agenda-setting process also involved a strict gatekeeping mechanism, where editors sifted through various daily events and determined that economic news had higher news value than other issues at the time. The selection of industrial infrastructure development as the focus reflected its proximity and significant impact on the people of South Sulawesi. By placing this issue as the main feature, Ujungpandang Ekspres not only provided information but also shaped public opinion that economic and industrial progress in Pangkep was a crucial topic that deserved widespread attention.

The integration of print media and online news portals on Ujungpandang Ekspres further strengthened the spread of this economic agenda in the digital realm. The characteristics of online media, which can disseminate issues more quickly, enabled the narrative about development in Pangkep to reach a wider audience in a shorter time. Thus, the use of online portals is not merely a technological adaptation, but rather a strategy to ensure that economic issues that are the focus of the media can be distributed massively and remain relevant amidst the increasingly rapid dynamics of information, as published in the online media of the Ujungpandang Ekspres Daily. The media's role as an instrument for shaping the policy agenda is clear through its reporting patterns, which prioritize synergy between government regulations and the economic interests of the people.

As reflected in the Ujungpandang Ekspres daily's December 24, 2025, report on the regulation of street vendors (PKL) in Pangkep Regency, the media functioned as a salience transfer mechanism, emphasizing the urgency of organizing public spaces with a humanistic approach. Theoretically, the narrative constructed not only focused on administrative order but also strategically highlighted the potential for economic growth through the optimization of local culinary destinations. By framing relocation policies and regulated operating hours as accommodating solutions, the media acted as a catalyst, transforming domestic issues into priority regional development agendas. Furthermore, through its surveillance function, the media consistently ensured that the impact of these policies did not eliminate the economic rights of vendors, but rather created harmony between urban aesthetics and the sustainability of the informal sector. This phenomenon demonstrates the effectiveness of agenda-building by local media in fostering responsive crisis management while strengthening the legitimacy of public policy in the eyes of the public. Overall, this reporting strategy demonstrates a structured media convergence in support of the regional economic agenda.

Ujungpandang Ekspres has successfully positioned itself as a media outlet focused on covering strategic issues in the industrial area, reinforcing Pangkep's identity as a cement-based economic hub. Through consistency between its print editorial policy and the acceleration of information dissemination on online platforms, this media outlet effectively fulfills its agenda-setting function in directing public attention to the narrative of economic growth and infrastructure development in South Sulawesi. Meanwhile, the Ujungpandang Ekspres daily also clearly includes numbers in its headlines, as follows: From a mass communications perspective, Upeks' economic focus consistently builds its agenda on productive sectors.

Unlike mainstream media, which might prioritize political or criminal issues, Upeks prioritizes economic indicators such as the determination of the Pangkep minimum wage, regional inflation rates, and MSME empowerment. This gives the media authority in determining what is important for financial stability in South Sulawesi. The news coverage of the approval of the 2026 Pangkep Regional Budget of Rp 1.2 trillion is a concrete example of Salience Transfer. By placing this staggering budget figure as the main news item, the Ujungpandang Ekspres editorial team shifted the importance of budget transparency from the newsroom to the public sphere. The Pangkep community was led to view the budget approval as a crucial moment that would determine the direction of regional development, thus making this issue a major topic of discussion among the public.

"In the Gatekeeping Mechanism, the media played its role as gatekeepers by strictly curating the details of the plenary meeting. The focus of the information was directed at the regional revenue structure of Rp 1.24 trillion, given that our media also focuses on economic news. Therefore, this news item was chosen for the headline, especially since the figure relates to basic services there," said Sukawati, Editor of Ujungpandang Ekspres. (Interview, Monday, April 20, 2026)

The selection process for this news automatically shapes the public interest agenda within the newsroom, where the media decides whether the news is worthy of consideration based on the direction of the media, its vision and mission.

"Strategic collaboration or partnerships are crucial factors in the sustainability of a news report. This is because the reader segment is clearly defined, namely those who consistently subscribe. In this ecosystem, a news story has a loyal mass base, so even if it isn't featured in the headlines or main news, its influence and resonance remain strong because it directly reaches the relevant target audience."

Sukawati, Editor of Ujungpandang Ekspres. (Interview, Monday, April 20, 2026) This news story demonstrates that the role of Ujungpandang Ekspres media in Pangkep Regency is not merely as a message deliverer, but as a catalyst, leveraging reader loyalty and strategic partnerships to drive the development agenda. The symbiotic relationship between the media, partners (Semen Tonasa), and readers creates an effective agenda-setting cycle in constructing social reality. This news story demonstrates the media shifting its focus from corporate issues to community empowerment. By bringing the topic of Occupational Safety and Health (K3), typically relevant only to large industries, to the MSME sector, the media is informing the public in Pangkep and South Sulawesi that safety standards are crucial for local economic competitiveness. Issues deemed important by the editorial team and partner (PT Semen Tonasa) linearly become issues deemed important by the audience.

The Role of Agenda Setting in Shaping Public Opinion in Pangkep Regency

Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw's Agenda Setting Theory demonstrates that the mass media can transfer issue importance from the media agenda to the public agenda (salience transfer). Research findings indicate that this role manifests itself in three stages of news reporting in Pangkep Regency: Researchers found that the Fajar and Upeks newspapers not only reported events but also established a hierarchy of public interest. Issues such as abrasion in the islands, the felling of six hectares of trees, and the controversy surrounding civil servant (ASN) allowance cuts were singled out and emphasized, resulting in repeated coverage (Broad & Cavanagh, 2023).

Researchers assessed a strong relevance, as the media successfully informed the Pangkep community about "what to think about." When the abrasion issue made the headlines on Metro Sulse, people who initially considered it a local issue for islanders shifted their perception to

a pressing humanitarian issue affecting the entire region and attracting the attention of many parties, especially policymakers. Research results demonstrate the role of editors (such as Nurlina Arsyad at *Harian Fajar* and Sukawati at *Ujungpandang Ekspres*) as gatekeepers. Editors filter information from reporters and select issues with high news value for headlines.

Researchers believe that consistent and repeated placement of issues (such as the Baznas case from February to March) provides legitimacy. This repetition forces the public and policymakers to recognize the existence of systemic problems, resulting in a massive and strong public opinion. Data shows that media coverage in Pangkep has successfully catalyzed real change. One example is the issue of the cuts in civil servant alms, which forced Bank Sulselbar to halt automatic deductions. Here, the media agenda successfully influenced the local government's policy agenda. By bypassing public opinion, it successfully changed policy. The media has transformed from a mere channel of information into an instrument of discursive power capable of influencing public opinion and motivating real action.

This study identified several key factors that strengthen the effectiveness of media agenda setting in Pangkep Regency: Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) and the 2025 Community Literacy Development Index (CLDI), Pangkep has the highest literacy rate in South Sulawesi (55.41%). High literacy creates a critical audience capable of cognitively digesting salience transfer. Pangkep residents who enjoy reading are more easily influenced by the framing of news stories created by print media. Unlike media outlets that do not have representatives, *Fajar Daily* and *Upeks* have permanent correspondents in Pangkep. Regional journalists act as the sole face of the media. Their physical presence creates an emotional connection with sources (the Regent, the Regional People's Representative Council, the Police Chief).

This ensures more in-depth data collection, making the media's narratives feel more credible and relevant to residents. Although print media remains the primary source of information in government offices (the Regent's Office and the Regional People's Representative Council), integration with online news portals (fajar.co.id and upeks.co.id) accelerates the dissemination of issues. The digital portals enable real-time updates on issues, which are then reinforced with in-depth coverage in print media the following day. This combination ensures that issues remain top of mind for the Pangkep community.

Conclusion

The agenda-setting practices of the *Fajar* and *Ujungpandang Ekspres* dailies play a role in constructing social reality through the mechanism of salience transfer (transfer of issue prominence). Both media outlets perform a strict gatekeeping function by selecting and positioning strategic issues. The agenda-setting practices employed by *Fajar* and *Ujungpandang Ekspres* dailies have proven to be a key instrument in constructing social reality and shaping public opinion. The media successfully transform issues into pressing public interests. Second, through the gatekeeping mechanism, related to the editor's role as information gatekeeper, strategic issues are strictly selected for headlines. Consequently, the resulting public opinion is massive and capable of influencing society. The effectiveness of agenda setting by these two media outlets in Pangkep Regency is supported by several factors: high public literacy rates; Pangkep's position as the regency with the highest literacy index in South Sulawesi (55.4100), which creates a critical and responsive audience to media messages; and the placement of permanent correspondents in the Pangkep area builds trust and emotional closeness with sources. This makes news narratives more in-depth, credible, and relevant to the lives of local residents. Furthermore, the integration between conventional print media and digital portals accelerates real-time information penetration.

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